

MASTERING THE ART OF HAPPINESS:

A Textual Analysis of the Film *Julie & Julia*

by

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(Under the Direction of Elli Roushanzamir)

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the representations of women's happiness, well-being or life satisfaction in the Hollywood film *Julie & Julia*. It utilizes the method of textual analysis to explore common messages and themes within the text that express dominant cultural ideologies. It also examines historical and or social issues in an attempt to better understand the "why" behind the "how" of the representations of women's well-being. A goal of this thesis is to provide evidence that supports the perspective that popular films are cultural artifacts that help generate meaning and shape societal norms specific to women's happiness and well-being. Findings indicate women's happiness and well-being is relatively stable and reflects the extent to which a woman experiences positive affect and has favorable views of her personal, professional, financial and social welfare.

INDEX WORDS: representation; textual analysis; popular culture; feminist media study; film; Hollywood

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INTRODUCTION

Happiness is commonly understood as how much one likes the life one lives, or more formally, the degree to which one evaluates one's life-as-a-whole positively (Veenhoven, 2006). In today's society, happiness is a highly valued state of well-being most often characterized by contentment, love, satisfaction, pleasure, or joy. While direct measurement of happiness presents challenges, researchers have identified a number of attributes that correlate with happiness, including relationships and social interaction, extraversion, marital status, employment, health, democratic freedom, optimism, endorphins released through physical exercise, religious involvement, income and proximity to other happy people. Yet, despite the complexity of finding the perfect balance or a precise prescription for obtaining happiness, people continually strive to achieve it. The perpetual search to find happiness is magnified in today's media, especially when discussing representations of women's happiness, well-being, or life satisfaction.

The media plays such a prominent role in today's society, helping to shape public opinion, so it is little wonder that the media has become a resource for how people attempt to make sense of themselves and the world around them. It is commonplace to view television shows, books, magazines and feature films showcasing a woman's search of her best life. However, interpreting media representations of women and well-being as an accurate reflection of reality may have serious implications for women's perceptions of the world and themselves. If women are indeed looking to the media's portrayals to

gain insight into what to expect in their own lives, research must determine what specifically they are being exposed to.

This study will analyze the phenomena of women's wellness and self-actualization media as it is exemplified in the film *Julie & Julia* written and directed by Nora Ephron. The film, based on two true stories, alternates between the life of Julie Powell, a would-be writer working at a thankless office job in twenty-first century New York and culinary legendary Julia Child, more than a half-century earlier adjusting to life in post World War II France. Although marriage is certainly the context of both storylines, the film emphasizes other parallels as the audience watches just how the life and cookbook of Julia Child inspires Powell to blog her way through the 524 recipes within *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* in 365 days and ultimately take back control her life and well-being.

This film was chosen primarily because of its unique approach to exploring women's happiness and life satisfaction. While other films about women's happiness focus on men and motherhood, *Julie & Julia* acknowledges that women have other hopes, dreams, desires and interests. It not only explores passion for love and food, but also finding the balance of life that leads to achieving true happiness from within.

The film *Julie & Julia* was released on August 7, 2009 and brought in a little over \$20 million on 2,300 screens on its opening weekend, ranking it second in the box office. According to *Variety* the film's audience skewed older and female, with 64% of the audience over the age of thirty-five and 67% female (2009). The Columbia Pictures film received generally favorable reviews from both critics and viewers alike and won ten awards including a Critics Choice Award for Best Actress (Meryl Streep) and a Golden Globe for Best Performance by an Actress in a Motion Picture (Meryl Streep). It was

also nominated for thirteen other awards, including an Oscar for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role (Meryl Streep). The film cost approximately \$38 million to make and grossed a total of \$118,552,598 worldwide.

The study will focus primarily on representation, the practice of constructing meaning through the use of visual signs, language and myths, to explain the social foundations on which public rhetoric about women's happiness, well-being and life satisfaction are based in the film. The secondary aim is to identify common messages that the audience is exposed to by documenting reoccurring wellness themes featured in the film. The goal of the study is not to prescribe a theory for attaining happiness, but to explore the representations of women's happiness and well-being and the cultural experience and construction of happiness within the film.

Throughout the study, the terms happiness, subjective well-being, life satisfaction, utility, well-being, wellness and welfare will be used interchangeably. It should be noted that the measurement and analysis of these various notions of subjective well-being are indicators of quality of life and have more than a half century history in the social sciences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Paradox: Women's Rights to Happiness

By many objective measures, since the 1930s the lives of women have improved with enormous gains in the labor force, education and reproductive rights. Yet, despite breaking down many barriers and expanding opportunities for women, a study published by Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, based on data from the U.S. General Social Survey, found a decline in Western women's happiness over the last four decades (2009). Given the shifts "of rights and bargaining power from men to women in the past 35 years, holding all else equal, [one] might expect to see a concurrent shift in happiness towards women and away from men" (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009). However, studies show that men have benefited disproportionately from social and legal changes that have occurred since the 1930s. This paradox has sparked much debate and has been a reoccurring topic of controversial articles and public debate.

Each year since 1972, the U.S. General Social Survey has asked men and women: "How happy are you, on a scale of 1 to 3, with 3 being very happy, and 1 being not too happy?" And since 1972, women's overall level of happiness has dropped, both relative to where they were forty years ago, and relative to men. The decline in women's happiness is seen regardless of whether they have kids, how much money they make, how healthy they are, what job they hold, whether they are married, single or divorced, how old they are, or what race they are.

Although the U.S. General Social Survey study is most widely cited, the data trends are not unique to this one study. According to Buckingham, the results from six

major studies of happiness, totaling more than 1.3 million men and women surveyed, have found that greater educational, political and employment opportunities have corresponded to decreases in life satisfaction for women, as compared to men (What's Happening to Women's Happiness, 2009). The size and implications of the facts have not only resurrected the debate over the effects of the Women's Movement, but also beg the question of whether the Women's Movement was of help or hindrance to the overall welfare of women of the twenty-first century.

On one side of the debate, there are self-proclaimed feminists who continue to fight for equal rights and opportunities for all women in their economic activities, personal lives and politics. The first-wave of feminism in the 19th and early 20th centuries focused primarily on women's legal rights, such as the right to vote. While the second-wave of feminism, commonly referred to as the Women's Movement and what most people think of in terms of feminism, peaked in the 1960s and 1970s and touched on every area of women's experience—including family, workplace, reproduction and education rights. The exact boundaries of the third-wave are subject to debate; however, it was sparked as a response to the perceived failures of the second-wave. The third-wave is often marked as beginning in the 1980s and continuing to the present and embraces contradictions and conflicts of the earlier movements and attempts to accommodate complex issues, such as diversity.

Leading figure of the Women's Movement, Betty Friedan, who is best known for her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*, depicted the roles of women in industrial societies, in particular the average suburban homemaker. Friedan wrote about the restrictions of the 1950s and the unspoken discontent of housewives who felt forced and imprisoned by their role as homemaker. She referred to this sentiment as “the problem

that has no name” (Friedan, 1963). *The Feminine Mystique* became a bestseller and many historians consider it the impetus for the second-wave of the Women's Movement.

On the other hand, antifeminists believed that feminist social change was all together contrary to traditional and religious beliefs. The majority believe that it ignores the true cultural and biological needs of women and ultimately binds women to a life unfulfilled by market work, and unhappy. Well-known antifeminist Phyllis Schlafly, who debated Friedan on several occasions, publicly endorsed domestic life as the greatest achievement a woman could aspire. She also rejected feminist ideology, stating that it is an “absurd notion that the home is a comfortable concentration camp and that the suburban housewife is oppressed by her husband and by society” (Bellefonte, 2006).

Feminist adversaries argued that while Schlafly and others like her campaigned against the Women’s Movement, they too aspired to be so much more than housewives, and benefited from many of the movement’s accomplishments. By many measures women like Schlafly were considered hypocrites. However, Schlafly contended that she never thought that women shouldn’t or couldn’t work. Like most Western women, she believed that women should support themselves and had the right to pursue anything that they wanted. The only exception was that she “simply didn't believe [America] needed a constitutional amendment to protect women's rights” (Bellefonte, 2006).

Likewise, other antifeminists also opposed women’s equality or alternately feminism in some or all of its forms and maintained that the Women’s Movement would create fundamental loses for women, having the opposite effect of what the movement was intended. For example, Sociologists Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung argued in *The Second Shift* (1989) that women’s movement into the paid labor force was not accompanied by a shift away from household production; thus, women essentially were

working a second shift. In fact, taking on paid employment did not change widely accepted gender ideologies or a woman's innate emotional responsibility for family and therefore resulted in meager change to the woman's domestic responsibilities to maintain the household (Hochschild & Machung, 1989).

Hochschild and Machung further researched the number of hours worked by women on general housework and discovered that it accounted for approximately an extra month of work each year, in relation to men (1989). In addition to physical hours of work, it should be noted that the calculations of Hochschild et al. also account for the emotional labor and burden of homemaking thought to be inherent to women. Accordingly, Hochschild et al. alleged that taking on market work not only increased the actual workload of women, but also arguably had a negative effect on women's overall well-being or life satisfaction.

Other statistics show, that in 1940 only 15% of married women worked for pay, but by 1960, that figure had more than doubled, and, by 1975, 44% of married women were in the work force (Berscheid & Paplau, 1983). When comparing total hours worked for both men and women, researchers found relatively equal declines since 1965 for both genders, with the increase in hours of market work by women offset by large declines in their non-market work (Aguiar & Hurst, 2007). Similarly, men were found to work fewer hours in market work and more in non-market or domestic work. As of 2009, the percentage of married women in the work force had grown to just over 60% (US Dept. of Labor).

Other examples of consequences contributed to the Women's Movement include, increases in the number of children born out of wedlock, surges in the divorce rate, and a rise in the number of single-parent households (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009). These

trends are attributed, in part, to the growing acceptance of women's autonomy over family planning. It is also suggested that greater equality among men and women has led to more women who now include men in their reference group – the group by which one compares outcomes and expectations. If happiness is assessed relative to outcomes for one's reference group, and women are comparing themselves against the outcomes and expectations of male counterparts, they may find their relative position lower than when their reference group only included women. It has also been argued that women's lives have become more complex and their well-being now likely reflects their satisfaction with more facets of life compared with previous generations of women (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009).

Despite any number of changes that have taken place since the 1930s, it is evident that the shift towards a new mix of daily activities, household responsibilities and individual freedoms has not necessarily produced happier women. And although the rhetoric of the second-wave of feminism resonated strongly and helped to open the eyes of many women who did indeed feel trapped within a social or domestic situation, there were still others who remained skeptical that the gains made as a result of the Women's Movement would lead to increased happiness and well-being for women. It should be noted, however, that there are many different movements of feminist ideology with movements sharing some perspectives, while disagreeing on others. So, while some felt that lobbying against oppressive laws and fighting for equality was a solution to women's oppression, others believed feminism merely "offered a new way to understand the world, a lens on injustice and a tool to use in the pursuit of happiness." (Ellen Goodman, 2009)

The Variables of Happiness

In sociological and psychological research there exists a tradition of studying self-reported subjective well-being and life satisfaction. Much of this research, dating back to the 1930s, has been concerned with the impact of age, income and relationships on happiness. Below, the historical findings in each area of research are reviewed.

Age

Early studies on the relation of age and happiness, dating back to at least the mid 1940s, reported a negative association. Studies documented, "happiness, as one major dimension of life satisfaction, tends to decline by age categories" (Riley & Foner, 1968). Data also showed that when restraining for female happiness, although not uniformly, happiness declined with increases in age.

During the 1970s, as researchers began to employ control variables, studies showed a different picture of the age-happiness relation. Report findings began to indicate a positive age-happiness association, now suggesting that as people grow older happiness increases rather than decreases, as was thought previously. However, in 1974 Spreitzer and Snyder's analysis of the 1972 and 1973 U.S. General Social Science surveys again found no clear linear relationship for age and life satisfaction for either male or females, even after extensive controls. Yet, other researchers explained that with age comes positive psychosocial traits, such as self-integration and self-esteem. Such signs of maturity contribute to a better sense of overall well-being and balance, and less negative emotion (Yang, 2008). In part, this is because older people have learned to lower their expectations and accept their achievements (Associated Press, 2008). They

are also better able to recognize what will bother them and how they can best negotiate their environment (Landau, 2009).

Other studies have found that older adults report fewer negative emotional experiences and greater emotional control than young adults (Landau, 2009). It is less clear, however, whether positive emotions such as contentment, enthusiasm and pride are also directly related to age. When controlling for gender, women report similar levels of happiness and well-being as men and tend to feel better overall about their lives, despite having higher levels of stress, worry and sadness. In general, reports suggest that the odds of being happy increase 5 percent with every 10 years of age (Yang, 2008).

A recent article published in *The Economist* shows the age-happiness correlation as having a “U-bend” effect (2010). The U-bend theory posits that happiness declines from youth to middle age until reaching what is commonly known as a mid-life crisis. Then, although a person will continue to age and may lose things such as vitality, mental sharpness and looks, he/she will gain happiness (2010). According to the popular theory, people reach a trough on their happiness scale in their 40s and early 50s, forming the arc of the U-bend.

Income

Another factor studied in an attempt to predict happiness is income. On average, economic circumstances improve up to retirement age and one might expect to see a concurrent increase in happiness. Yet, according to the Easterlin Paradox, higher income is not systematically accompanied by greater happiness (Easterlin, 1974). Although income per person rose steadily in the United States between 1946 and 1970, average reported happiness showed no long-term trend and declined between 1960 and 1970.

Contrary to the Easterlin Paradox, Ruut Veenhoven and Michael Hagerty published a new income-happiness analysis, concluding that the income-happiness paradox does not exist (2003). The results showed that people with increasing income did indeed grow happier. In 2008, Stevenson and Wolfers also reassessed the Easterlin Paradox, this time using time-series data. Similar to the study conducted by Veenhoven et al., Stevenson and Wolfers found increases in absolute income were linked to increased self-reported happiness. The data also indicated that above a certain point, happiness increased more slowly than income, however, no saturation point was ever reached (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2008).

Access to suitable employment and financial stability are important predictors of well-being. For example, Ross and Mirowsky's (1992) definitive study found higher income improved both men's and women's sense of control. Other authors also found that income is negatively related to perceptions of stress and positively linked to perceptions of well-being (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998).

As subjective well-being varies directly with income, it also varies inversely with material aspirations. Income growth does not cause happiness to rise, either for higher or lower income persons, because it generates equivalent growth in material aspirations. Therefore, as income rises and the ability to obtain a greater quantity of goods increases, the experienced utility shifts inversely. Although material aspirations and expectations rise in tandem with income, ultimately there is no permanent gain in happiness.

Another point, often debated, is whether happiness is determined by relative or absolute income. Some economists subscribe to the hedonic treadmill theory, which says that people tend to return to a relatively stable level of happiness despite major positive or negative life changes that occur. Individuals assess their material well-being, not in

terms of the absolute amount of goods they have, but relative to a social norm of what goods they ought to have (Easterlin, 1974). According to this notion, relative income is the sole basis of happiness and is determined by whether people are keeping up with the “Joneses”. Still other researchers contend that happiness is most likely determined by a mix of relative and absolute income (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2008).

Relationship Status

A dialogue about the sources of happiness would be incomplete without discussing the impact of interpersonal relationships. In fact, most people believe that their personal happiness is inextricably bound to the state of their relationships. Researchers similarly indicate that for almost everyone a necessary ingredient of happiness is some kind of satisfying, intimate relationship. Various types of relationships have been found to boost well-being.

The study of romantic relationships, which range from casual dating to marriage, is important because such relationships have the potential to affect people's mental health, physical health, sexuality and financial status (Dush, 2005). In general, people appear to feel better about themselves and their lives, as a whole, as they move across the relationship continuum into a more committed relationship. Relationship-happiness studies have also found that the stronger the relationship's commitment, the greater the happiness and sense of well-being of each partner. So it should come as no surprise that married couples consistently report higher self-esteem, greater life satisfaction, greater happiness and less distress, even when controlling for relationship happiness. Next, are partners who cohabit, followed by those in steady relationships and then those in casual

relationships. Single, uncommitted people report the lowest levels of happiness or well-being (Lang, 2005).

However, romantic relationships are not the only types that affect overall life satisfaction. Relationships between family members, close friends and social groups are central to human existence, health and happiness, as well. Each of these different relationships has a special function and many offer an individual stability, allegiance and/or social status. For example, family is a child's first and most important group affiliation. The primary relationships formed during childhood with parents, siblings or other caregivers form the basis for emotional, social and cognitive experiences, as well as set the tone for how future relationships will develop. Additionally, the relationship with the best same-sex friend, particularly among women, often constitutes an important personal relationship characterized by voluntary interdependence, intimacy, common interests and trust, all important facets of well-being (Hays, 1988). Likewise, membership in various social, cultural and community groups play a large role in shaping an individual. The support and influence of each of these groups contribute greatly to a person's perception of happiness and life satisfaction.

Largely, there is no simple recipe for producing happiness, well-being or life satisfaction. Relationships between variables may change over time and these changes may lead to varying conclusions and mixed results. For example, significant changes in one's circumstances – life cycle events such as marriage, unemployment, child birth, retirement, and the death of a loved one – all affect subjective well-being. As such, study trends suggest that it is best to take a multi-dimensional approach to understanding how happiness is constructed.

The Cultural Experience of Happiness: A Look at What the Critics Had to Say

The film *Julie & Julia* “alternates between Julia Child’s story as a restless American in Paris in the 1950s, longing to write a cookbook, and the adventures of Julie Powell in Queens, in 2002, as a confused young American wife who sets out to replicate Child’s recipes.” (Denby, 2009) Most strikingly, it is a Hollywood movie about women that is not about the desperate pursuit of men (Scott, 2009). In an interview with Charlie Rose, director Nora Ephron shares that among the many overlapping themes of the movie, the film is really about love and marriage (2009). She explains further that it is rare to produce this kind of movie depicting a good marriage because it requires the absence of plot, whereas the typical movie about a marriage shows someone walking out the door in the second act, only to reappear for a dramatic climax (Rose, 2009).

While the majority of film critics took the time to note the rarity of representing the unfailing loyalty and encouragement of the film’s supporting male characters, some critics drew a very literal interpretation from the film. O.A. Scott of *The New York Times* felt only that both characters were in “pursuit of a latent but powerful ambition, the joy of cooking” (2009). While Kenneth Turan of *The Los Angeles Times* describes Julie Powell and Julia Child as two women searching for something worth their involvement and both finding that cooking completed them and made them feel alive in ways wonderful and unforeseen” (2009).

Other critics decoded the act of cooking and interpreted it as a symbol of something more profound. Dana Stevens of *Slate Magazine* posited that the characters’ common passion for cooking was more about a drive to reinvent themselves. Stevens wrote, “*Julie & Julia* makes deboning a duck a feminist act and cooking a great meal a creative triumph” (2009). Carrie Rickey of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* compared the

characters' motivation as cooks stating, "Julia cooks because she is a sensualist and food gives her pleasure, second only to that of sex. Julie cooks because cooking gives her a measure of control over her disordered and disappointing life" (2009).

Though *Julie & Julia* on the surface is a film about a genuine enjoyment of cooking and food, it is especially animated by love and accomplishment. The film's underlying theme is less food as something to cook than food as the binding and unifying element (Denby, 2009). The relationship at the heart of the movie—between a female mentor and pupil who never meet, but who share a joy of cooking—is one of common need to reinvent themselves. Through its dual fable of passion and driving ambition, Ephron's *Julie & Julia* suggests that in achieving true happiness one must balance personal discipline, authentic love and professional accomplishment.

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

As previously stated, this thesis examines representations of women's happiness in film. It seeks to uncover the dominant cultural ideology, which is heavily influenced by mass media, and examines the role of popular films in the construction of societal norms. As an academic area of study, popular culture has diverse roots and draws from the perspectives of multidisciplinary theories, including anthropological, sociological and psychoanalytic. Therefore, this cultural study of representation also utilizes a multidisciplinary theoretical approach.

Sociological Theories

A central element of sociological theory defining happiness or well-being is the subjective evaluation or liking of life, also referred to as satisfaction with life. Comparison theory posits that evaluation is a continuous judgment process involving the comparison of perceptions of life as it is with notions of how life should be. This theory holds that individuals have standards of a good life and that he/she constantly weighs the reality of life against these standards. Each person's standards are variable and differences tend to follow the individual's perceptions of possibilities.

Comparison theory also begs the question of where perceived standards come from. The notion of a good life is a social construct drawn heavily from the adoption of culturally variable concepts. Thus, the standards used in comparing one's life are outcomes of socialization. In addition, comparison theory asserts that individuals also

compare themselves against the assumed standards of others. In other words, when assessing how happy a person is, he or she also estimates how happy other people think they are (Veenhoven, 2006).

Similar to comparison theory, affect theory asserts that happiness is a continuous mental process. It takes comparison theory a step further and distinguishes happiness as an appraisal of how well one feels generally. Individuals “do not ‘calculate’ happiness, but rather ‘infer’ it” (Veenhoven, 2006). When a person’s affective balance is moved in one direction or another, his or her emotions will denote a reaction, causing a mood change.

Another attribute of affect theory is the link between happiness and gratification of human needs. According to Abraham Maslow, there are two groups of needs: deficiency and growth (1954). Deficiency needs include food, safety, acceptance from others and achievement, and are essential to basic survival. Only when an individual’s deficiency needs are met, may he or she begin to act upon growth needs (cognitive understanding, aesthetic order, self-actualization and self-transcendence). Positive mood signals indicate when an individual’s growth needs are sufficiently met for the moment (Veenhoven, 2006). Therefore, mood signals were a key component to analyzing the visual text of the film.

Media/Representation Theories

Generally, media research focuses on media effects and is carried out within the framework of one of two major theories, that of either cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994) or social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1994). However,

this study is not concerned with media effects, but the representation of women's well-being and the ways in which people make sense of and generate meaning around happiness.

Hall (1997) describes three approaches – reflective, intentional and constructionist – to explain how the “true” meaning of a word is generated. The reflective approach contends that meaning lies “in the object, person, idea or event in the real world, and language functions like a mirror” (Hall, 1997). The intentional approach states the opposite case arguing, “it is the speaker, the author, who imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language” (Hall, 1997). However, the constructionist approach recognizes the social character of language and “acknowledges that neither things in the themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language” (Hall, 1997). This thesis observes the constructionist approach to meaning in language.

The analysis of a film as a text relies on a number of concepts and operations derived from the study of semiotics, one of two major theories of the constructionist approach applied in cultural studies. Semiotics is the “study or ‘science of signs’ and their general role as vehicles of meaning in culture” and focuses on “the how of representation, with how language produces meaning” (Hall, 1997). “Its basic principle is that where there is signification and a text, there must be a knowable underlying system giving rise to meaning” (Easthope and McGowan, 1992). However, semiotics does not have prescribed steps that must be adhered to sequentially to determine meaning. Instead, it provides a framework for interpretive analysis and the researcher must define the most appropriate method to carry out his or her study.

Semiotics proposes that the meaning of signs is based on a relationship between a sign and a concept (Hall, 1997). Saussure explained that a sign is broken down into two elements. The first element, which is the actual word, image, photo, etc., is considered the signifier. The corresponding concept triggered in one's head as a result of the signifier is the second element or the signified. Every time one hears, reads or see the signifier it will correlate with the signified. Both are required to produce meaning, but it is the relation between them that sustains representation (Hall, 1997).

Saussure also explains that there are two types of relationships relative to signs – syntagmatic and paradigmatic (Stam et al., 1992). Syntagmatic relationships involve the sequence of characteristics in a text and how it generates meaning (Stam et al., 1992). On the other hand, paradigmatic relationships focus on how hidden oppositions in a text generate meaning (Berger, 2000). For this reason it can be argued that every text generates meaning, first, by the syntagmatic structure, then by the paradigmatic structure (Berger, 2000). Thus, semiotics analyzes patterns in these relationships and imparts a particular meaning to certain signs.

Furthermore, “signs are not autonomous and self-sufficient, but are always determined within ideology and in relation to subjectivity” (Easthope and McGowan, 1992). Roland Barthes explains that the second level of signification is when the completed message, resulting from the signifier and signified, links to a broader ideology – general beliefs, conceptual frameworks and value systems of society – to yield a ideologically framed message or meaning (Hall, 1997). The process of combining the culture, knowledge and history of the signified to communicate an ideological meaning is called mythology. This thesis, therefore, proposes the use of both semiology and mythology to uncover structures of meaning within the text.

Throughout the film, the characters Powell and Child serve as social actors utilizing a system of signs that present a narrative of how two women give meaning to and communicate about their individual journeys to find purpose and happiness. The language used – any sound, word, image or object expressing meaning – does not reflect an intrinsic meaning nor is it fixed. Rather, the social actors and events construct, produce and change meaning over time using representational systems – concepts and signs (Hall, 1997). The intentional language of the film says “something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people” (Hall, 1997) and exposes implicit or explicit values and cultural meanings. Thus, the film serves as a cultural communicator helping to construct meaning and values across a society. Various concepts and signs used within the film illustrate dominant ideologies and portray the cultural experience of happiness, well-being, or life satisfaction.

Methodology

Choosing the Text: Julie & Julia

The film sub-genre of “chick-flicks” has seen growing popularity since the mid-1980s. Films in this sub-genre include romantic comedies and dramas, generally told from the female point-of-view and starring a female protagonist. Increasingly, films in this genre have begun focusing on representations of women’s happiness and self-actualization. Although the inspiration for this thesis began with the film *Eat.Pray.Love*, I chose the film *Julie & Julia* for two reasons.

First, *Julie & Julia* takes a non-traditional approach to exploring women’s happiness and well-being in film. Unlike many popular Hollywood films, such as

Eat.Pray.Love, Sex and the City, Bridget Jones' Diary, Leap Year and Pretty Woman, the female leads in the film are not searching for happiness through the pursuit of men, materialism, or narcissistic beauty. Instead, the film acknowledges that women have other hopes, dreams, desires and interests and depicts the highs and lows that accompany life's transitional phases. I argue that the pursuit of happiness through love, passion and purpose is more closely tied to the real-life cultural experience of achieving life satisfaction than what other similar films generally portray.

Second, the film presents an interesting contrast between two very different women, hailing from different eras, but whose lives ultimately follow a very similar path as they each reach a personal crossroad. Because the Julia Child portrayed in the film is more of the ideal Julia Child through Powell's eyes, the film offers insight into how modern women view the lifestyle and subsequent happiness of a 1950s woman. Moreover, Powell's vision of Julia Child represents how modern women conceptualize happiness and life satisfaction in relation to their predecessors and may help explain recorded declines in women's overall happiness.

Method of Procedure

Textual analysis is a qualitative method of study used to uncover social meanings embedded in layers of contexts and negotiated interpretations. A film can be treated as a text: visual, verbal and musical constructs, employing symbolic means, shaped by rules, conventions and traditions intrinsic to the use of language (Hall, 1975). Therefore, textual analysis enables the researcher to get behind a film's content to the latent, implicit patterns, emphasis and structures of meanings on which public rhetoric is based.

Unlike content analysis which proceeds in terms of what-is-said, textual analysis is by contrast more useful in penetrating the underlying meanings and preserving the complexity of the language, which is sacrificed in content analysis in order to achieve high validation (Hall, 1975). Textual analysis also employs strategies for noting and taking account of emphasis. A significant item may not be the one that recurs continuously, but the one that stands out as an exception from the general pattern and carries the greatest weight (Hall, 1975). Therefore, textual analysis was chosen as the method of study in preference to more objective approaches because the purpose of this study is to uncover the unnoticed, and perhaps unconscious, social foundations of women's happiness, well-being and life satisfaction rather than take inventory of overt appeals, opinions and biases.

Prior to analyzing the film, a "preliminary soak" – an initial immersion of the text that allows the researcher to familiarize oneself with the content and explore emerging themes within the text (Hall, 1975) – was conducted. Next, the film was watched according to its DVD chapters, observing and recording significant elements of the storyline and the characterization of well-being. This step required meticulous note taking. Scenes were often paused or rewound to record direct quotes, sounds, visual symbols, and reoccurring themes. After viewing the film in its entirety a first time, it was viewed a second time, in case any incidents were missed. With each subsequent viewing of the film, I further explored the representation of happiness among the main characters. I also began to group scenes showing similar occurrences between the two main characters. Next, I sketched a list of grouped scenes that provided the most significant insights relative to the cultural construction of well-being.

After reviewing the meticulous notes detailing the signs and themes present within the text of the film, I choose to focus my analysis on six groupings of scenes. The scenes chosen displayed key relationships, elements of well-being, symbolic practices and signs specific to the purpose of the overall study. The six scenes chosen were:

1. The Ritual Cobb Salad Lunch (Chapter 3)
2. The Julie/Julia Project (Chapters 4, 5 and 6)
3. Eggs Two Ways (Chapters 7, 8 and 9)
4. Lobster Thermidor (Chapters 10, 11, 12 and 13)
5. Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? (Chapters 18, 19, 20 and 21)
6. What's for Dinner? (Chapters 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28)

In order to examine the film, I reviewed each set of scenes one-by-one. First, I recorded a narrative summary detailing the highlights of the scenes. Next, I explained the significance behind why the set of scenes was chosen. Then, I provided a thorough evaluation dissecting important visual and verbal elements, signs and themes present in the scenes. Last, I noted any omissions from the scenes.

Based on the overall purpose of the study, examination of the film and recorded signs and themes, I utilized textual analysis to decode and reconstruct the text to define dominant cultural codes and existing assumptions within the film's language system. I also explored future implications of the dominant ideology.

Research Questions

The following research questions will serve to guide the focus of this thesis:

RQ1: What are the common sense messages (i.e. socially constructed) about happiness or well-being in the film?

RQ2: Which aspects of the characters' lives, in relation to happiness or well-being, are emphasized and which omitted?

RQ3: What, if any, traces of well-being are found in the film and how do they correlate with current research findings on happiness and well-being?

RQ4: How does the meaning of happiness or well-being evolve between the two storylines?

ANALYSIS

The following textual analysis centers on the representations of women's well-being and seeks to uncover patterns within the text that express dominant cultural ideologies. It also examines historical and or social issues in an attempt to better understand the "why" behind the "how" of the representations of women's well-being. First, an overview of the film including a synopsis of the main characters and accompanying storylines is presented. Second, a detailed analysis of significant scenes is laid out chronologically. Last, an overall analysis of the film is conducted.

Overview of the Film

The film *Julie & Julia* is a true story of how culinary legend Julia Child inspires Julie Powell, a frustrated office worker and fledgling writer, to transform her life. The screenplay was adapted from two books: *My Life in France*, Child's autobiography, and Powell's best-selling book (based on her Salon blog), *Julie and Julia: 365 Days, 524 Recipes, 1 Tiny Apartment Kitchen*. Both books were written and published between 2004 and 2006. Once released in 2009, the film became the first major motion picture based on a blog.

Remaining true to the two narratives for which the film is based, the storyline alternates between Julie Powell's life living in Queens in the early 2000s and Julia Child's time spent in Paris throughout the 1950s. Although Powell and Child are very different, their lives seem to follow a fascinatingly similar pattern.

Powell, played by Amy Adams, is a married, late-twenties writer working a series of disastrous temp jobs to make ends meet. The film opens with her working at the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation's call center. By day she answers telephone calls from victims of the September 11 attacks and members of the general public complaining about controversial plans to rebuild the World Trade Center. By night she escapes her troubles through her passion for cooking. She whips her frustration into delicious meals for which she and her husband share.

Fed up with how her life is unfolding, Powell decides to take back control by challenging herself "to live bravely and actively" (*Julie & Julia* Special Features trailer, 2009). Unable to change her immediate circumstances, she commits herself to cooking her way through the 524 recipes in Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* in 365 days. Along this transformational journey, she blogs daily about the trials and triumphs of the challenge. What starts off as an experiment, turns into a life changing experience. Powell's blog is featured in *The New York Times* and receives attention from journalists, literary agents and publishers.

Child, played by Meryl Streep, has just moved to Paris with her husband, a government worker on assignment. Not one to sit at home, she begins to search for something that will give her life meaning. After some bit of trial and error, in her late thirties she decides to attend Le Cordon Bleu culinary school to learn French cooking. Julia's infectious tenacity not only helps her to overcome barriers and stereotypes prevalent in the 1950s, but also wins the respect of her male classmates and pushes her to the top of her class. Out of Julia's passion for French cooking grows an opportunity to collaborate on a book about French cooking for American housewives.

The interlocking storylines expose unexpected similarities and clever juxtapositions between the two plots. Separated in age by approximately a decade, both Powell and Child have each reached a crossroads. Through the remarkable support and unfailing love of their husbands, both women strike out in search of purpose, fulfillment and a need to find happiness within themselves. Unmistakably the story shows the joy of cooking and the relationships that develop as a result of sharing and connecting over food. Less obvious, Ephron declares that the film at its core is really about two women doing the things they love and finding happiness and appreciation for life through them (*Julie & Julia* Special Features trailer, 2009).

Scene: Ritual Cobb Salad Lunch (Chapter 3)

Narrative

Scene three opens with Powell, sulking down a New York street after leaving work. As she comes across a storefront featuring a chocolate fountain she suddenly stops and an inner light appears as she chooses to make chocolate cream pie for dessert that night. Later, standing in front of her tiny apartment stove, Julie appears content as she whips up the chocolate filling and pours it into a homemade crust. She explains to her husband “you know what I love about cooking? I love that after a day when nothing is sure, and when I say nothing I mean nothing. You can come home and absolutely know that if you add egg yolks to chocolate and sugar and milk it will get thick. It’s such a comfort.” Her smile is then suddenly replaced with a look of trepidation as she reminds herself “Ritual Cobb Salad Lunch tomorrow...dreading, dreading, dreading.”

The next day Julie is seen rushing into a crowded restaurant towards a table of women who have already been seated. After greeting everyone Julie takes her seat and each woman quickly, as if by routine, orders a variation of the Cobb salad. After ordering, the conversation turns to talk of unreliable assistants and lucrative business dealings. Friend 1 picks up her phone every few minutes to receive updates from her assistant on a business deal she is trying to close, while Friend 2 shares news of her recent promotion with the table. For much of the conversation, Julie looks on eagerly, but has very little to add. Realizing that Julie has not said much, Friend 1 politely asks Julie for an update on her work with the Lower Manhattan Development Corp. However, just as Julie is about to answer, two of the women excuse themselves to answer incoming telephone calls. With the other women preoccupied with their telephone conversations, Annabelle (Friend 3) mentions to Julie that she would like to interview her for an article that she is working on. Honored, Julie agrees and asks what the article will be about.

Annabelle quickly states that it will be about their generation turning 30, while searching her electronic calendar for an opening in her packed schedule for which to fit Julie in.

Subsequently, a week or more later, photos of Julie and three others are featured on a bus shelter advertisement for Annabelle's article entitled "Portrait of a Lost Generation". Nearby, Julie discusses the article with her friend Sarah as they sift through clearance racks at an outdoor book sale. Furious, Julie recites quotes from the article:

Julie Powell, once the editor of the Amherst literary magazine. The one we all knew would be 'The One,' temped for eight years before giving up on her novel, and now works in a cubicle as a mid-level bureaucrat attempting to deal with the aftereffects of 9/11.

Unsurprised by Annabelle's actions, yet shocked that Julie has memorized the article text, Sarah attempts to lighten the mood. She sarcastically compliments Julie on her photograph for the article, to which Julie responds, "I looked fat."

Analysis

This scene is of particular interest to this study because it is the first scene that explores the same-sex friendships present in Julie Powell's life. Throughout the scene various visual and verbal cues illustrate underlying ideologies relative to women's social and professional well-being. The scene also exemplifies how Powell utilizes comparison theory to evaluate her success and happiness against that of her friends.

The first, most telling signifier is in the prelude to the lunch when Powell declares to her husband, "Ritual Cobb Salad Lunch tomorrow...dreading, dreading, dreading". In both title and tone, Julie makes it apparent that this is not an engagement that she looks forward to. The use of the word "ritual" implies a repetitive behavior and it is inferred that Julie feels obligated to endure this ceremonial act. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Julie would arrive late to the lunch.

After greeting her friends at lunch, Julie takes her seat and each of the women order a variation of the Cobb salad. The ease to which each of the women calls out identical orders without looking at the menu also alludes to the routine nature of the lunch. What's more interesting than the identical salad orders is that Julie specifically

orders the Cobb salad without eggs, a core ingredient. Julie later reveals that she has never eaten an egg, which begs the question as to why she would order an entrée with eggs as a main ingredient. This act alludes to Julie's desire for approval, an important element of social well-being.

Julie takes a passive role during much of the lunch conversation. Physically, she appears uncomfortable and slightly insecure about her appearance, often fidgeting with her napkin, struggling to sit up straight and taking nervous sips of water. The awkward physical and verbal interactions during lunch also indicate her inability to relate to and engage in conversation with the other women. As Julie sits listening to the other women discuss their accomplishments it is likely that she is comparing her own achievements against those of her friends. This act of comparison causes her to experience a sense of lowered self-esteem and added discomfort.

Later, as the women make an effort to ask Julie about her job, it is evident in the women's body language and verbal narrative that they pity Julie and are generally indifferent about her career. Before even allowing Julie to answer the question, the women quickly excuse themselves to take phone calls. The lack of interest and time given to Julie in the scene illustrates the limited value placed on her and the importance of her current career. This is also later illustrated when Julie's friend Annabelle asks to include her in an article without revealing that it will cover people nearing age thirty who once displayed great career promise and now appear to have lost their way.

There were several signs and myths worth noting within the scene including friendship, the business suit and a Cobb salad. The main underpinning of the lunch scene is the cynicism of Powell's friendships. The irony of the scene depends on a shared understanding of the myth of friendship. Friendship is typically associated with common

interests, mutual respect, trust, compassion and positive reciprocity. However, the opposite of these elements are displayed in the scene. Not only does Julie struggle to keep up with the conversation, but she also has very little to contribute. At one point in the scene when the other women are bonding over the ineptness of their assistants, Julie awkwardly chimes in suggesting a solution to the problem. Her comment is answered with quizzical looks from the women and a quick change of the subject. The interaction between Powell and the other women during lunch appear to be less like that of friends and more similar to that of frienemies.

Next, the restaurant is filled with patrons wearing dark or grey colored suits. Business suits convey a conservative and formal style and as everyday attire is generally limited to middle- and upper-level corporate management. In contrast to the other patrons, Julie is dressed in a tweed jacket overtop of a dress, accessorized with a bright red purse and large plastic bracelets. Since the Victorian times tweed fabric has been most commonly associated with non-business use. Powell's non-business attire and accessories are used to highlight her unfitting presence.

Additionally, the use of a Cobb salad as the customary entrée for the ritual lunch suggests that the women are particularly health-conscious. Due to their low caloric density, salads are most often consumed by individuals aiming to regulate their food intake and are most associated with dieters. Perhaps Powell's decision to order the Cobb salad is meant to convey her desire to not only appear health-conscious, but to also fit in with the other women. This is the only time throughout the film when Powell is seen consuming a salad.

Absent from the scene, however, is any discussion of relationships, family or work-life balance. This is particularly interesting because it signals important

characteristics of the modern woman. A study by Kathleen Gerson examining changes in gender ideology relative to work and family life indicates that younger women are more concerned with looking for definitions of personal identity that do not pit their own development against creating committed ties to others (2002). It also reports that younger people generally do not believe work-life balance is possible (Gerson, 2002). Thus, the omission of relationships, family and work-life balance implies that today's woman prioritizes career success over family and identifies herself best through her work. It also implicates a social and moral dilemma for women to choose between work and family life.

Scene: The Julie/Julia Project (*Chapters 4, 5 and 6*)

Narrative

Scene four opens with Julie still upset over the article that her friend Annabelle published identifying her as a member of the "lost generation". As she prepares dinner, she paces back and forth from the kitchen to the dining area gossiping to her husband about how Annabelle has now recently started a blog about her life. Agitated by Annabelle's newfound success, Julie boasts to her husband "I could write a blog." Eric agrees and adds that she is actually more qualified than Annabelle given that she is a writer. Julie disputes this claim pointing out that one is not a writer until he or she is published. Because the publishing company rejected her novel she does not consider herself a writer.

The conversation continues as the two of them sit down to dinner. Eric tosses out several fruitless topics for the blog until Julie asserts that her blog must be a way for her to escape what she does all day. Inadvertently, she compares the purpose of the blog to cooking and how it has become her preferred tactic to escape the troubles of her workday. Thus, the idea for Julie to blog about her experiences cooking her way through Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* is born.

Before going to bed that evening, Julie studies Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* while trying to come up with a way to tackle cooking all 524 recipes. Realizing that she rarely finishes anything, Julie decides that she will need to give herself a deadline. Eric proposes that she complete the recipes in 365 days. To this Julie scoffs thinking that there is no way she can complete the task in a year with a full-time job and a husband. Although the thought of the project seems crazy, Powell is excited to challenge herself and agrees to take on the mission.

The film transitions back to Paris as Child is adjusting to life in France. During the day she wanders through the outdoor markets picking fresh fruits and vegetables and

taking pictures with local vendors. In the evening she and Paul stroll through the streets of Paris hand-in-hand, visit museums and eat at some of the finest French restaurants. One night over dinner Child confides in her husband asking his opinion of what she should do with herself while in Paris. When Paul asks what it is that she likes to do, Child wittingly replies “eat” and the two of them burst into laughter before deciding that Child will take up bridge lessons.

A few weeks later Julia celebrates her birthday with friends at a quaint French restaurant. At the end of dinner Paul presents her with a French cookbook to compliment her love of French food. That night, excited about learning how to cook French fare, Julia sits in bed trying to translate the recipes. As Paul takes the book from Julia’s hand and closes it to prepare for bed Julia suggests, “Why don’t I go to cooking school?”

Analysis

The scenes categorized as the Julie/Julia Project are significant for a number of reasons. Fundamentally, the scenes indicate an important turning point where Powell and Child each choose to take on a difficult challenge in order to prove something not only to themselves, but in a larger sense to society. However, neither is aware that the journey she is about to embark upon will forever change her life. Moreover, the scenes portray Child as more than the iconic culinary legend that she was, but as an idealistic figment of Julie’s imagination. Theoretically, the scenes offer insight into how career and social variables contribute to Powell’s overall well-being.

As chapter four opens Julie is still distressed about being classified as a member of the lost generation. Outwardly she expresses envious criticism of her friend, however, privately she is hurt and frustrated over her failed attempt to publish her first novel. As she explains to her husband that in order to be a writer one must be published, it is evident that her recent rejection has damaged more than just her pride, but also her confidence. This exchange conveys that Julie lacks qualities of positive personal well-being (self-esteem, positive feelings and autonomy) and professional well-being (career

satisfaction and opportunities for advancement). The lack of these qualities is important to note for later consideration.

Child, on the other hand, is depicted in the film as living a very fortunate lifestyle. She and her adoring husband are living in France where they enjoy the charms of French life, including fine dining and leisure time together. Although the couple is not rich, they live a comfortable life on Paul's government salary giving Julia the opportunity to explore her interests void of financial worry. In spite of what appears to be a carefree life Child shows signs of discontent, expressing her desire to be more than a frivolous housewife. Child displays positive personal well-being, however, similar to Powell she lacks qualities of healthy professional well-being.

Despite the film's heartbreaking depiction of Powell's work and social life pitted against Child's seemingly picture-perfect existence, the two share a common belief that if only they can find something to give their lives purpose they will be happy. Powell creates the Julie/Julia Project in tribute to the fearless Julia Child, while Child unintentionally challenges long-held social ideologies by daring to enroll in culinary school.

A significant feature introduced in these scenes is the development of Julia Child in the film as a larger-than-life character. Early on, Julie reveals her idol-like admiration for Child. She refers to Child as a "Good Fairy", fondly recalling a childhood memory when her mother called upon Child's famous Beef Bourguignon recipe to impress her father's boss. Julie's characterization of Child as a fairy conveys an image of a mythical being or legendary creature sent to protect and aid someone from harm. Julie also reveres Child for her unmatched talent and class. This point is highlighted in Julie's first blog

post when she writes that even after forty years have passed since the publishing of Child's cookbook, yet and still no one can touch her talent.

The idolization and romanticism of Child's character are essential elements of this scene because they situate the character's role throughout the film. Child's character is intentionally exaggerated to communicate the idealism behind Powell's vision of the legend. As a result, Julia Child's character is presented as an ideal individual. Through the character of Julia Child, Powell's conceptualization of personal and professional achievement is conveyed.

Scene: Eggs Two Ways (Chapters 7, 8 and 9)

Narrative

After having the "second worst work day in recorded history", Julie determines that there is no better time than the present to tackle her fear of eggs. As Julie stands in her cramped apartment kitchen over a pot of simmering water, her friend Sarah carefully reads Julia's detailed instructions on how to poach an egg. Several attempts later, still Julie cannot seem to master the art of poaching an egg. Eventually, with additional help from her husband Eric, the three of them nail the task.

As they sit down for dinner, Eric and Sarah watch with baited breath as Julie takes a bite of her first ever egg. After taking a few moments to savor the taste Julie announces, "I thought eggs were going to be greasy and slimy, but it tastes like cheese sauce. Yum." Her dinner mates then join her in a toast to Julia. After which, Sarah asks whether Julie thinks that Julia knows about her. Smiling, Julie gives an account of one of her elaborate fantasies about how Julia would come to dinner and the two of them would bond over Julie's new lemon zester and become fast friends. Returning from her fantasy world, Julie reveals that no one seems to know about her blog and that she feels as though she is "just sending things into this giant void." The conversation is then shifted to a discussion of Annabelle's blog. With a look of disgust Sarah and Julie share tales of Annabelle's latest mile high club adventures before Julie interjects to ask, "What do you think it means if you don't like your friends?"

The scene then shifts and Julia is seen standing next to two women in what is assumed to be her first day of culinary school. With a look of boredom, Julia listens as the instructor begins class by telling the ladies that they will start with learning to boil an egg. After class Julia goes to speak with Madam Brassart, proprietress of Le Cordon Bleu, in hopes of being placed in a more advanced class. Madam Brassart gives Julia a perplexed look and explains that she is not an advanced cook. However, Julia is persistent and eventually Madam Brassart mentions that there is one other class for professionals. She goes on to tell Julia that she won't like the class because it is "all men, all GIs and

very expensive.” Despite Madam Brassart’s admonishment, Julia is never one to back down from a challenge and decides to enroll in the class.

On her first day of the professional course Julia lags behind the other students. The men quickly chop onions with professional precision, while she struggles to hold the knife properly. Embarrassed, she goes home that night and feverishly practices chopping onions until she is able to do it just like the men from class. When her husband Paul arrives home from work that evening he asks her “you’re being a little over competitive, don’t you think?” With tears from the onions in her eyes Julia replies, “You should have seen the way those men looked at me as though I was some frivolous housewife just looking for a way to kill time.” Paul exits and Julia continues chopping. The next day, determined not to let her all male classmates get the best of her, Julia works diligently, listening to the instructors every word, and completes each task first.

Analysis

As the plot continues to unfold, these scenes open with each of the main characters in a state of frustration. Julie is upset over a difficult day at work, while Child is unimpressed with her first day in culinary school. What happens next to each character is as much about the ending results as it is about the journey and persistence it took each of them to get there. Julie thought that poaching an egg would be easy, that is until she actually tried. She quickly realized that she was wrong when the task did not go as planned. The same could be said for Child when she arrived for her first day of the professional cooking course. She walked in the room with as much charm and confidence as ever and yet she was still neither able to keep up with nor win over her more experienced male classmates.

Whether discussing Julie trying her first egg or Child thrusting herself to the head of her culinary class, both women demonstrated bravery in the face of challenge. At first it may seem like an unequal test, however, each woman’s trial was consistent with where she was in her life at that time. Julie was learning to step outside of herself and to live bravely when challenged to do things she would not normally consider. After almost thirty years of avoiding eggs, she was finally facing her fear head on. However, what was

most interesting was that in the end it was Child who she gave the credit to. This act suggests that Julie did not have the confidence in herself to believe that she could face her fears without Child.

On the other hand, Julia who had never met anyone who she could not win over was up against a class full of men who saw her as “a frivolous housewife just looking for a way to kill time.” Despite the critical eye of her classmates and Madame Brassart, Julia never lead on that she was intimidated or inexperienced. She approached each challenge with focus and a fearless attitude and amazed both her classmates and her instructor, eventually winning each of them over. In due time, the blank stares of her male classmates were replaced with friendly smiles and nods of approval. In the end both women surprised not only themselves, but also those around them with their courage and determination.

There were several interesting notes in the visual imagery of these scenes. Julie’s kitchen was small and crowded, both with items and people, as she attempted to poach eggs. The lighting was dim against the dark grey walls that framed the apartment and there were no windows to be seen. Even during dinner the apartment was lit by only a few small lamps, Christmas lights hanging in the distance and tea lights sitting on the table. All of these visual elements convey a sense of vulnerability associated with Julie’s character.

Although brighter still than Powell’s kitchen, Julia’s home kitchen was also fairly dim. The walls were dark beige and the cabinetry a blue color. The windows were covered with sheer yellow window treatments casting an evening shadow on the room. The gloominess of her kitchen was meant to emphasize Julia’s feelings of internal

disappointment. It was unclear whether her tears were simply from the abundance of onions she was chopping or from the distress of the day.

Quite the opposite, however, the kitchen at Le Cordon Bleu was bright with cream walls and sunlight shining in from the outdoors. The matching professional grade copper pots and pans lining the walls were perfectly organized. The sunny kitchen and stark white uniforms were an ideal backdrop for Child as her shining personality re-emerged and she took to the head of her class as the scene developed.

A theoretical review of the scenes exposes central ideologies about gender roles of both the 1950s and twenty-first century relative to cooking. In the 1950s males dominated the culinary arts. It was thought that only men had the technique, discipline and passion that make cooking consistently an art. While women were expected to prepare domestic meals for the men and children, they were believed to be incapable of elevating cooking to an art form. Therefore, Julia's decisions to not only enroll in culinary school, but to also distinguish herself among the male students defied commonly held gender stereotypes within the profession.

The gender barrier within the culinary arts was illustrated in the film first when Julia met with Madame Brassart to inquire about other, more advanced course offerings. Brassart could not imagine that a woman would be interested, nor capable of learning the difficult techniques required of a culinary artist given the history of the profession. In fact, she attempted to reason with Julia pointing out that the class was all male and that the tuition was very expensive. In addition, Julia was an American, making her even less likely to be able to master the classic French cooking techniques. Once enrolled in the advanced course, Child was not received well by the men in the class. Holding to

common stereotypes they dismissed her presence until she proved that she was more than a housewife looking for a hobby.

In the twenty-first century setting of Julie Powell's cooking challenge most middle-class American women had abandoned the kitchen for careers outside of the home. The perception was that their predecessors were forced into the kitchen by necessity or cultural pressure. Therefore, many modern women chose against traditional gender roles, exercising their right to market work. Some might argue that Powell's love of cooking symbolized reclamation of a traditional female activity, however it is likely that Child would view Powell as the middle-class hobbyists that she was first stereotyped as at Le Cordon Bleu.

Scene: Lobster Thermidor (Chapters 10, 11, 12 and 13)

Narrative

As scene ten opens, Paul sits writing a letter to his twin brother Charles while watching Julia in the kitchen. He explains that watching "Julia in front of her stove has the same fascination for [him] as watching a kettle drummer at the symphony." He illustrates her charm recalling how she snatches a set of cannelloni out of a pot of boiling water and cries out "these damn things are as hot as a stiff cock." The screen then shifts to Queens with Julie reading from the same letter in Julia Child's *My Life in France*. Aloud she reads the same quote from Paul's letter to Eric as he brings in the mail and joins her on the couch. Julie closes the book and as she opens a fan letter containing hot sauce, she gushes to her husband about how just the day before she received twelve comments from readers, none of which she knew.

On track with 103 recipes completed in just over two months, Julie realizes that soon she will have to overcome her anxiety about killing a crustacean to make Lobster Thermidor. Yet, as she and Eric travel to the market to purchase the live lobsters all she can seem to talk about are her new readers. After arriving home from the market with the lobsters, Julie stands in the kitchen carefully re-reading Julia's instructions, while dreading having to kill the lobsters. Meanwhile, Eric playfully dances around the apartment poking fun at her by chanting "lobster killer". In a moment of boldness, Julie takes a deep breath and replies to Eric, "I don't need you at all. You are completely useless and I'm just going to throw them in the water and put the lid on and that will be that." A few seconds later, just as Julie takes a sigh of relief feeling as though the hard part is over, the lid pops off the pot and sends Julie running into the other room. There to

save the day, however, is Eric. He rushes into the kitchen and tames the lobsters before Julie reappears in the doorway declaring that he is a “saint”.

Later that evening friends arrive for Powell’s Julia Child-themed, 30th birthday party. Throughout dinner Julie obsesses over Child, entertaining her guests with story after story about Child and her marriage to Paul. Following dessert, Eric presents Julie with a pearl necklace, to which Julie responds smiling “they’re just like Julia’s”. As Eric gets up from his seat to put them around her neck he utters “only hers were probably the real deal.” Lightly touching the pearls around her neck and with tears in her eyes Julie turns to her friends and closes the scene by revealing “I’m th-irty. I thought it was going to be terrible, but thanks to you and thanks to Julia it feels like I’m going to get through.”

Over the next couple of days, Julie appears cheerful, even at work. She receives fifty-three comments on her lobster blog and learns that her blog is ranked the third most popular blog on Salon.com. That night while drifting off to sleep Julie proudly boasts to her husband, “It’s like there is this whole group of people who are sort of connected to me. They need me in some way. Like if I didn’t write they would really be upset.” Eric, realizing that Julie has already fallen asleep, sarcastically replies, “they’d probably take like poison and try to kill themselves” before ingesting a tums antacid tablet and then turning off the light to go to sleep himself.

As the film returns to Paris, Julia sits in the ladies lounge of a party thrown by the Gourmettes, an exclusive women’s eating club, with several other women all freshening up their make-up. One woman asks Julia whether she is still making hats and Julia delightfully replies, “Oh, no I abandoned it. But, I am ready to graduate from Le Cordon Bleu. But, I can’t get the damn woman who runs the school to schedule the test.” Simone “Simca” Beck, sitting just one vanity away, overhears the conversation and chimes in. After introducing herself and her friend Louisette Bertholle, it is revealed that Simca and Louisette are writing a cookbook for American cooks. Subsequently, the trio become fast friends and before long Simca and Louisette invite Julia to join them in a venture to form a cooking school focusing on teaching French food and classical techniques to housewives in Paris.

Several meltdowns later, the film returns to Powell. Her erratic behavior is beginning to wear on Eric. Standing by as Julie throws one tantrum after another he finally suggests that rather than beat herself up about not completing Julia’s chapter on Aspics, she simply lie in her blog. Perplexed by the suggestion Julie retorts, “I can’t. I just can’t. Julia will know. It’s like she’s watching me. I’m under her influence. I’m becoming a much better person because of her.” A few recipes later, Julie who is sprawled out across her kitchen floor crying over her ruined stuffed chicken, receives a call from a news reporter interested in interviewing her for a story about her blog.

Analysis

The underlying theme of this particular subset of scenes in the film is overcoming adversity. Julie was fearful of having to slaughter the lobsters in order to complete the recipe. Even while rereading Child’s detailed instructions, she was doubtful that she

could complete the task. Eventually, she was able to muster up the courage to tackle the task and although it took the help of her husband to get over her fear, in the end her lobster blog proved to be one of her defining moments.

Also, the scenes underscore the transformation of Julie's admiration for Child into a condition of dependency. In the close of Julie's 30th birthday party she graciously acknowledges that in addition to her friends, it is Child who makes her feel as though she can continue to get through this rough time in her life. This is further illustrated when Julie places undue pressure on herself to complete the Aspic recipes. In the midst of a breakdown, Julie states that she cannot lie about completing the recipes because Child is watching her and she is under her influence.

However, positive developments concerning Julie's growing readership initiate a shift in Powell's state of well-being. After receiving a large number of comments on her lobster blog and learning that she is the third most popular blog on Salon.com, Powell's reaction indicates a more favorable outlook. Julie expresses positive feelings about her progression through the Julie/Julia Project and is pleased with the reception of her readers. Her increasing engagement in the project also suggests that she is developing constructive patterns of personal well-being.

There were several modifications in the film's scenery. First, as Julie prepares Lobster Thermidor in her tiny Queen's kitchen, for the first time not only does the kitchen appear to be well organized, but also sunlight is shining in from outside. Unlike in previous scenes, the window above the stove emerges as a prominent feature in the room. The window and the sunlight shining in indicate Julie is cooking during the day, possibly on a Saturday afternoon. This is striking because up to this point in the film Julie

has only been seen preparing meals in the evening after work, signaling that Julie is becoming more engaged in the challenge and her outlook on life is improving.

Significant signs and myths that emerge throughout these scenes include the pearl necklace given to Julie on her 30th birthday and the single-word phrase “saint” used by Julie to describe Eric. In an earlier scene, Julie was in awe of the pearl necklace worn by Child, even as she prepared meals in the kitchen. Historically, the finest quality natural pearls have been highly valued as gemstones and objects of beauty. Because of this, pearls have become a metaphor for something seen as rare, fine, admirable and valuable. Thus, Julie came to associate these treasured qualities with Child.

Furthermore, when Eric gifted Julie with a pearl necklace for her birthday he was not only conveying his love and support, but more importantly the gift symbolized a transfer of meaning or value to Julie. As Eric put the necklace around Julie’s neck he was bestowing the attributes that Julie admired in Child onto her. It is also important to note Eric’s subtle reference to the variance between the two couples’ economic status during the exchange of the gift. As Julie delicately touches the necklace as it is placed around her neck, Eric confesses that he was unable to afford a genuine pearl necklace, as it is almost certain that Child’s necklace was fashioned with precious gems.

The first time Julie uses the term saint to refer to Eric is right after he steps in to help her steam the live lobsters just as she thought she was defeated. The word saint is usually used to describe a virtuous person and implies that Julie regards Eric’s actions as more than an obligatory measure of their marital partnership, but as a God-like quality employed to save her from trouble. Although Julie applies the title in praise of her husband, Eric is disturbed by the pressure of being called a saint and disapproves of the label.

Visibly absent from these scenes is physical closeness between Julie and Eric. The physical attraction that appeared in earlier scenes is no longer exhibited. This exclusion is made obvious in Eric's attempt to seduce Julie in their kitchen after the lobster fiasco and his telephone call to her at work to jokingly complain about eating too much food and not getting enough sex. Also absent from these scenes is Julie's life at work. She is only shown once in her office and even then she is not seen taking customer calls, but discussing the success of her blog. These omissions infer a perceived difficulty among women with regard to obtaining success in various aspects of their lives simultaneously.

Scene: Guess Who? (Chapters 18, 19, 20 and 21)

Narrative

As scene eighteen opens Julie plays a game of "Guess who's coming to dinner?" with her readers. In a previous scene, when a reporter with the *Christian Science Monitor* called to inquire about interviewing Julie he also explained that he wanted to introduce her to a special friend of Julia Child. It turns out that the guest in question was Judith Jones, the editor responsible for publishing Julia Child's cookbook *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. In honor of Jones, Julie elects to prepare Beef Bourguignon, the first dish that Jones cooked upon reading Julia's cookbook for the very first time.

Eager to not only meet Jones, but to also impress her Julie meticulously prepares the stew the night before their dinner. After placing the dish in the oven and setting the timer for two and a half hours, she joins Eric on the couch to relax. The pair laugh while watching Dan Ackroyd perform a parody of Julia Child on Saturday Night Live before falling fast asleep. In the middle of the night Julie is awakened by the sound of fire trucks passing by and jumps from the couch only to realize that she has overslept and her Beef Bourguignon is overcooked.

The film then transitions to Julia in Paris. This time Julia and Paul are both working in their parlor. Paul is writing at his desk as Julia is typing out a revised recipe on a typewriter and rambling on about the cookbook. She tells Paul, with a smirk, "it's just a big, dry collection of recipes. It doesn't work at all. I'm just gonna have to throw most of it out and start all over again." Interrupting her, Paul slowly walks over to Julia as she types and asks, "what if we had to leave Paris?" He points out that they only have eight months left in his assignment in Paris and that starting the cookbook over will likely take longer.

In the next scene, Julia and Simca are pictured hurrying to catch a train to Louisette's home for afternoon tea. To their surprise when they arrive, Irma Rombauer,

author of *The Joy of Cooking*, is there waiting in the parlor. As the ladies sip tea and talk about Rombauer's famous book. Rombauer recalls the hardships she experienced while trying to publish the cookbook. She also explains that the publishing companies swindled her out of thousands of dollars. Disappointed that Rombauer had turned out to be more concerned about the money involved in publishing her cookbook, rather than the art of crafting the recipes, Julia returns home. Upon her arrival she sits down to read a letter from her pen pal Avis DeVoto. In the letter Avis admits to sharing Child's recipes with the editor of a publishing company. The editors were impressed with the recipes and expressed interest in publishing the cookbook and awarding Julia, Simca and Louisette an advance to complete the book.

The film shifts back to New York where Julie has decided to stay home from work to prepare another Beef Bourguignon and a Raspberry Bolivarian Cream Pie for her dinner guests that evening. By the end of the day, Julie is brimming with excitement as she sets out a vegetable platter and paces around the house making sure that everything is perfect for her guests' arrival. After sneaking a mouthful of food from the pot, Eric suggests, "Maybe she'll offer you a book contract?" To which Julie anxiously replies, "What if she does? I mean what would that mean? That would mean I might be a writer." Just then, the phone rings and on the other end is the reporter calling to reschedule due to the terrible rain. Visibly disappointed, Julie slumps down on the couch and begins to complain about how her readers will be disappointed. An argument ensues between Julie and Eric and he finally confronts her with his concerns that she has become completely self-absorbed in the project and has lost sight of the adventure that it was suppose to be for the two of them. The scene closes with Julie locking herself in the bathroom and Eric storming out of the apartment.

Analysis

At this point in the storyline Julie and Julia have each become completely immersed in their culinary projects. Despite some hardship, each character shows a high level of engagement and satisfaction with the work she is completing. Additionally, these scenes demonstrate Julie's growth from a state of dependency to a sense of partnership with Child. Also, fundamental ideologies about the work needed to achieve career success are revealed.

After learning that Judith Jones will be coming to dinner, Julie decides that she must prepare Child's Beef Bourguignon. As Julie prepares the infamous dish the audience overhears Julie's thoughts, "I almost feel as if Julia and I are communicating over space and time on a deep spiritual, mystical level." Julie's illusion conveys that the

perceived connection with Child has transitioned from dependency to a partnership where the two of them work in concert with one another. As the success of her blog has continued to grow and with budding interest from a national publication, Julie feels validated and has become more confident in her own abilities.

Evidence of increases in Julie's self-confidence, engagement and vitality are present throughout the scene. Most noticeably, these characteristics are observed in the moments leading up to and within the scene's closing argument with Eric. Before discovering that Jones will not be able to make it to dinner, Julie flirts with the idea that her work is good enough to be published and, if published, she would be considered a writer. This contrasts with earlier scenes when she emphatically announced that she had not reached the level at which she could be recognized by society as a writer. As the argument with Eric escalated, Julie also revealed that she was "finally, totally engaged in something". This statement is particularly suggestive because engagement is an important component of positive personal well-being, something that Julie is striving to achieve.

Similarly, Child also goes through a dramatic range of emotions during these scenes including disappointment and accomplishment. Julia's unexpected meeting with Rombauer, who was in many ways one of her inspirations, seemed at odds with how she might have imagined it. Although, most noticeably Louisette, and Simca were intrigued by Rombauer's accounts of her publishing mishaps it was evident that Child expected a very different first meeting. Initially, Child was delighted to be in the presence of a culinary legend. After being introduced, Julia greeted Rombauer with respect and admiration. However, as the scene continued Child's body language and questioning became more aggressive, indicating that Julia was upset and disappointed by Rombauer's lack of enthusiasm and passion for the craft of cooking.

Following Child's anticlimactic meeting with Rombauer, Child received news that Avis had shown recipes from the cookbook to a major publishing company and the executives were interested in publishing the completed book. This moment parallels when Powell, laid out on her kitchen floor, received the call from the *Christian Science Monitor*. These moments represent a turning point when each of the women first began to receive public acknowledgment for their work.

In addition to illustrating hardship along the road to victory, these scenes also reveal basic assumptions made by each character relative to career success in book publishing. Similar to the qualities Powell associated with Child's success, likewise, Child assigned qualities to Rombauer's achievement. Julie's decision to prepare Beef Bourguignon for Jones was symbolic of her desire to achieve publishing success, as did Child. Julie imagined that if she could recreate Child's infamous dish to perfection the editorial legend would see something unique in her, as she did Child, and offer her a book deal as well. Thereby establishing Julie as a writer, just as *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* had established Child as a bona fide culinary teacher.

On the other hand, Julia had assumed that in order for her cookbook to reach similar success to Rombauer's *The Joy of Cooking*, one of the United States' most-published cookbooks, certain steps must be taken. First, Julia imagined that Rombauer would have taken care to rigorously test each of the recipes before the book could be published. Julia and her colleagues had been meticulously testing and retesting each recipe before including it in their book. Child also assumed that following the publishing of a book one would enjoy financial rewards. When in fact Rombauer admitted to not testing many of the recipes contained in *The Joy of Cooking*. She also explained that she did not own the copyright to the book, therefore, she had very little say about

amendments made to the published book and reaped few financial rewards resulting from the reprinting of the book.

Omitted from this subsection of the film, however, is a strong desire for physical closeness and contact between both main characters and their husbands. The passion between mates, which was a prominent feature in the beginning scenes, was replaced with the women's near obsession for their self-prescribed culinary challenges. Additionally, this is one of the first times in the film where neither Powell nor Child is pictured in bed with her husband. While the physical nature of the relationships is no longer emphasized, the Childs continue to exchange romantic speech. This, however, is also absent from Powell's relationship with her husband.

Scene: What's For Dinner? (Chapters 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28)

Narrative

Scene twenty-four opens with Julie and Sarah sitting at a local bar discussing their relationship troubles. Julie shares news of her recent fight with Eric and sadly discovers that many of the things that he said about her before storming out of their apartment were in fact true. Later that evening on the way home Julie thinks about her life and compares it to that of Julia Child. She discovers that although they have many commonalities, no matter how much she has tried to be Julia-like, she is not Julia Child.

That night in an open letter of sorts on her blog, Julie admits that in her quest to be like Julia Child she has made fatal mistakes. The Julia Child that she read about would never have lost her temper because something in the kitchen did not go exactly as planned. She also would have never acted horribly towards her husband or dared to behave as if she did not have the time to be married. Julie was ashamed of how she had acted.

After reading Julie's latest blog post her mother calls to check on her. For the first time Julie's mother expresses support and urges her not to give up on finishing her cooking challenge. Deciding to take heed to her mother's words, Julie heads out to the local market. After carefully picking out the ingredients for dinner, she returns home to find Eric also arriving at their apartment. With a look of forgiveness and a quick smile he asks, "What's for dinner?"

Scene twenty-five opens with Julia and Simca arriving in Boston. The women have come to Boston to meet with representatives from a publishing company to discuss their cookbook. As Julia and Simca sit on a bench waiting for Avis to arrive, it is revealed that Julia has never actually met Avis. In an unusual twist of events, Julia

explains that the two women have been pen pals for nearly eight years. A few moments later Avis arrives and she and Julia embrace as if life-long friends.

Later that day as the ladies sit down to meet with the publishers, they are informed that the length of the book has caused some concern. Julia and Simca explain that their intention was to publish the book as a series of seven volumes. However, the publishing executives respond by clarifying that if the book is intended for American housewives it must be quick with a mix of recipes for everyday use. One executive suggests that the ladies consider revising their manuscript into one succinct book.

With their first attempt to get their cookbook published down the drain, the women sip cocktails in Avis' parlor trying to decide what to do next. Frustrated, Julia asks, "Why did we ever decide to do this anyway?" Just then she remembers that the real purpose behind all that they had done was to write a French cookbook for American women who do not have cooks. With that in mind, Julia proclaims that they will begin again.

Scene twenty-six opens with Julie anxiously awaiting the arrival of Amanda Hesser, a *New York Times* food critic, for an interview in the couple's Queens apartment. As they sit down to dinner, Julie excitedly explains all about the blog and the inspiration behind it. She mentions that sometimes she feels that Julia is in the kitchen cooking with her and that she is the one that she writes for everyday. At the close of dinner Julie confirms that she still has 15 days left and 24 recipes to go, one of which is boning a duck.

Following the release of Hesser's article in *The New York Times*, Julie receives an abundance of inquiries from literary agents and publishing companies interested in turning her blog into a book. She is overwhelmed with excitement and believes that now she is finally going to be a writer. At the height of her celebration, however, a reporter calls to get a comment of a different sort. He explains that he is doing a story on Julia Child's 90th birthday and when asked about Julie's blog, Child expressed that she found it disrespectful.

The storyline then shifts back to Julia who has just received a rejection letter from a second publisher. Disappointed she confides in Paul, "eight years of our lives just turned out to be something for me to do so I wouldn't have nothing to do." Paul comforts her by telling her that the book is a work of genius and someone is bound to read it and realize what she has done. He boldly states, "Your book is going to change the world."

As scene twenty-seven opens Judith Jones, an editor with Alfred Knopf publishing, receives a package containing Child's cookbook from Avis DeVoto. Curious to find out if the lengthy cookbook is even worth reviewing, Judith decides to test one of the recipes. She tastes one bite of Julia's Beef Bourguignon and concludes that this is just the unique cookbook they have been waiting for. After reviewing the book in its entirety, Jones writes to Julia explaining that she believes her book "will do for French cooking in America what Rombauer's *The Joy of Cooking* did for standard cooking." Beside herself with Joy, she and Paul celebrate.

Changing the mood, the film shifts back to Julie who is distraught over hearing that Child does not find her work serious. Eric offers that there must be something wrong with Julia Child if she does not get what Julie is doing. However, Julie defends Child saying, "there's nothing wrong with her, nothing. I've spent a year with her. She's perfect." Aware of his wife's delusions Eric reminds her, "the Julia Child in your head is

perfect. The Julia Child that doesn't understand what you're doing is not perfect. The one in your head is the one that matters."

In the final scene of the film Julie tackles the last recipe of her challenge, boning a duck. As she begins she carefully watches footage of Child instructing her every step of the way. Together, they complete the last recipe to perfection. That night friends and family join the couple for a rooftop dinner celebrating the completion of the Julie/Julia Project. After completing the project, Julie visits the Smithsonian Museum to view Child's Cambridge, Massachusetts kitchen. Julie admires the materials in Child's kitchen and takes pictures with a large photograph of Child before exiting. Moments later the exhibition rope disappears and the audience watches as Julia Child stands in that very same kitchen in 1961 opening a package containing the first copy of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*.

Analysis

This particular set of scenes is significant to this study because they illustrate each character crossing over into a state of positive well-being, accentuated by autonomy and vitality. They also display the culmination of the characters' journeys to complete the challenges began at the start of the film. Lastly, the characters realize the personal and professional purpose to which their quest was based.

Throughout these scenes the audience sees Julie's difficult road to self-discovery. In scene twenty-four Julie expresses that through her actions she has not lived up to Child's example. For the first time she realizes that while Child has remained her inspiration, her actions have been all her own. Julie continues to view Child as a partner; however, she is also able to acknowledge her own value. This is illustrated in scene twenty-six during Hesser's interview when Julie acknowledges Child as her inspiration, but discusses her own triumphs and traumas cooking through her life crisis. Even in one of the last few scenes after hearing that Child was not impressed with her work Julie comes to accept that this journey was more about finding and listening to her own voice than it was about following in Julia Child's footsteps.

Likewise, scene twenty-five presents a period of discovery for Julia as well. In the last set of scenes Child was disappointed to learn that Rombauer was not the idol she had imagined. However, this discovery relieved Child from feeling as though she needed to live up to the example she believed Rombauer to be. It also freed her to approach the cookbook with a new light all her own, refocusing on why the group had initially joined to write the book. Ultimately, the trials and tribulations that Julia had to overcome throughout the period of eight or more years working on the cookbook were exactly what helped her to refine the text into a functional, yet artful piece that would go on to revolutionize French cooking.

A review of these scenes would be incomplete without noting several significant signs presented in the closing scene. First, the very fact that Julia donated her Cambridge, Massachusetts kitchen to the Smithsonian Museum conveys Child's desire to share her passion for the culinary arts in hopes of inspiring others to realize the transformative power of food and cooking. Also, the kitchen's blue green color scheme is reminiscent of Julia's blue kitchen cabinets in France. The simplistic blinds contrast with the professional grade copper pots and pan and kitchen gadgets used by Child to skillfully prepare French fare. Lastly, the raised counter-tops not only accommodated Julia's six-foot, two-inch height, but also reinforce Child's presence in the film as a larger-than-life character.

In the background of the final scene where Julie visits the Smithsonian to view Child's kitchen Ella Fitzgerald's *Time After Time* is prominently played in the background. The lyrics "And time after time you'll hear me say that I'm so lucky to be

loving you” signifies Julie’s appreciation for how Child figuratively helped to pull her from an ocean of despair. The song also highlights Julie’s final words to the legend “I love you Julia.”

Overall Film Analysis

The detailed characterizations of Powell and Child as well as the depictions of historical and social issues help to explain the social foundations on which the representations of women’s happiness, well-being and life satisfaction are based in the film. The images taken together reveal common messages and themes, cultural norms and the dominant ideologies of society as they relate to women. This analysis will identify the historic and social issues, visual elements and underlying themes that combine to construct the film’s representation of women’s well-being.

Each of the main characters is specifically located in time and space. Child’s image as an American housewife in the 1950s references the historical Women’s Movement and rejection of the period’s dominant ideology that women were frivolous housewives. Her character exemplifies the discontent of many housewives struggling to break out to find meaning in their lives beyond caring for their husbands and home. In a letter to her friend Avis DeVoto, Child explains how much she is enjoying attending Le Cordon Bleu. She states that she had been looking for a career all her life and finally she had found it. Images of Le Cordon Bleu’s male-dominated classes and Child’s resistance to widespread gender stereotypes also help to better construct the respective time period in which Child lives.

Another important historical feature nestled into Child’s storyline was the depiction of the McCarthy era, also known as the Red Scare. Following World War II

thousands of Americans were being accused of being Communists or communist sympathizers without proper regard for evidence. Those accused became the subject of aggressive investigations and questioning before government panels, committees and agencies. In the film, Child and her husband are depicted as staunch anti-McCarthyite Democrats. The growing fear that was associated with McCarthyism in the United States was highlighted throughout the experiences of Paul and Julia in Europe as American citizens, especially when Paul is unexpectedly called to Washington, D.C. where he is interrogated.

Other subtle connections that link the film to the time period of the Red Scare are seen in an argument between Julia and her father and Julia's relationship with Avis DeVoto. While at the reception of Dorothy's wedding, Paul engages Julia's father in a political debate after being asked about their life in Paris. Paul states that McCarthy's hand has stretched too far and has affected not only his job status, but also where they will get to stay. When her father responds by stating that he likes McCarthy and all that he has done, Julia gets upset and has to be pulled away from the table by Paul. This scene depicts the political division among Americans during this time. Julia's relationship with Avis DeVoto, wife of Bernard DeVoto, also connects to the McCarthy era. Avis' husband Bernard was a New Deal liberal who attracted attention from the government when he wrote a column in Harper's Magazine mocking the FBI. In the article he criticized the American government and its violation of civil liberties. Even more interesting, Bernard DeVoto also reveals in his column that FBI agents often interrogated suspected Communists on their food preferences, as "foodie" behaviors were viewed as signs of Communist sympathies.

In contrast Powell's image references the twenty-first century workingwoman. She is seen waking for work each morning and traveling home in the evening thinking about what to prepare for dinner. Once at home, still in her work clothing, she whips up a meal and shares quality time with her husband over dinner. Powell's daily routine is meant to exemplify the demanding and somewhat burdensome workload carried by today's workingwoman. In the beginning of the film Powell struggles to decide whether she has the time or energy to take on the Julie/Julia Project. Although the basis of the project is to help her rediscover herself, she grapples with how she can fit another responsibility into her already packed day. This conflict emphasizes the pressure and difficult choices that characterize the life of a modern workingwoman attempting to balance work outside the home, household responsibilities and self-care all at the same time.

Other images that help to construct the characters' respective time periods are the fashion trends worn by each of the main characters. Child's conventional 1950s attire is marked by high-quality tailored suits with below-mid-calf length skirts, feminine cinched waistlines, cardigans embroidered with monograms, pearl accessories and red lipstick. Powell, on the other hand, wears less formal casual separates highlighted by feminine blouses, knee length patterned skirts or blue jeans, ballet flats and natural make-up. Her physical appearance was constructed to convey the devastation of the period following the September 11th attacks when fashion was not something that people were overly concerned with. Even the distinctive hairstyles suggest differences in the time periods. Child wears a traditional 1950s short, curled style paired with a hat, while Powell sports a popular, but natural short pixie cut.

With regard to visual elements of their external environments, Powell is rarely pictured outdoors. On the few occasions when she is, she is seen traveling to and from work or the market. Busy streets, packed subway cars and an absence of trees or other natural elements underscore Powell's New York setting. Child, conversely, spends a significant amount of time outdoors and is often pictured walking through street markets, strolling the neighborhood with her husband and walking to and from the culinary academy. Visual elements used to tie the two characters together include similar paint colors used inside each character's apartment and images of the women standing in front of windows or cooking over a stove.

Principal characteristics utilized in the film to express themes in the representations of the characters' well-being and life satisfaction include personality traits and emotional condition, career satisfaction, relationship health and income level. First looking at differences in personality traits, Child is characterized as an extrovert while Powell is much more introverted. Child displays an outgoing personality and appears very easy-going and approachable. She is often shown laughing and smiling and is described by her husband as having the ability to bring out the best in everyone around her. When faced with difficult situations or disappointment she tends to look for a positive solution to the problem and is unapologetic for her shortcomings. It is likely that while the real-life Julia Child was known for her exuberant personality, the film's depiction of Child is exaggerated to emphasize desirable qualities fancied by Powell.

Powell, however, displays a highly emotional and vulnerable side not apparent in Child. She does not display resilience and often breaks down out into tantrums when things do not go as planned. After dropping her freshly prepared stuffed chicken on the floor she reacts with a child-like tantrum in the middle of her kitchen floor. This act,

among others, portrays her lack of positive personal well-being. She is also highly critical of herself and would be characterized by most as a complainer. She is unmistakably flawed and displays a range of negative emotions including self-doubt, fear, anger and disappointment.

In the film both characters utilize food as an inspiration and a resource to transform their lives and in turn their careers. Powell is distraught that her career as a writer has not blossomed as she had imagined, so she begins the Julie/Julia Project as a way to prove to society and herself that she is a skillful writer. Her non-traditional approach to the culinary arts gains her recognition as her blog following increases. Child has just moved to France and wishes to do more than busy herself with a meaningless hobby. She looks for an activity that will add a sense of meaning or purpose to her time in Paris. In search of a challenge she finds her truest passion in the midst of a social revolution. In both cases it was a love of food and cooking that lifted the women from despair and helped them reinvent themselves.

In terms of relationships both characters storylines are highlighted by a positive, interdependent and intimate marital relationship. The husbands play a very active role in helping the women make decisions, mainly by way of providing support. It is apparent that the women's personal welfare relies in many ways on receiving the support and approval of their husbands. Other relationships displayed in the film include social connections. Child portrays a higher level of social welfare. She joins a women's cooking club, socializes with friends, dines at restaurants, and travels. Unlike Child, Powell is rarely observed socializing outside of her home. She is pictured eating out in a restaurant only once during the Ritual Cobb Salad Lunch. Instead she hosts small intimate gatherings of friends for special occasions at the couple's apartment. Through a

combination of supportive and mutually beneficial relationships Child experiences greater social health.

Another theme presented in the film relates to income levels. The Childs appear to be upper-middle-class and get by on Paul's salary as a U.S. Foreign Service Officer. Their high-quality clothing and desirable living arrangements convey a sense that the couple has little financial worry. On the other hand, the Powells are less financially stable. Even with the two of them contributing to the household income they decide to move to Queens, NY and sacrifice a more attractive apartment in order to gain space and save money. Eric also implies the couple's meager finances when he mentions being unable to afford the luxurious pearls worn by Child and has to settle for buying Julie a costume pearl necklace as a 30th birthday present.

Noticeably absent from most of the film are references to motherhood and/or childbearing. This is particularly interesting because motherhood is often closely associated with women's happiness. However, throughout the film there are only two subtle references to motherhood. The first comes in the beginning of the film when Child pauses briefly to stare at a woman pushing a baby carriage. At this point most likely the audience is unclear as to why this is a significant moment in Child's storyline. The second reference comes as Child reads a letter she has just received from her newly married sister, who explains that she is pregnant. Child attempts to hold back tears as her husband comes over to console her. From this scene it can be assumed that although Child is happy for her sister, she is sad that she is unable to have children of her own. This is one of the few instances in the film where Child displays emotional vulnerability. While Child lives a very fulfilling life the one desire that appears out of her control is motherhood.

On the contrary, the issue of motherhood does not surface for Powell in the film. Although it is unclear why motherhood is not discussed, there are several assumptions that could be made. First, one might assume that at the time of the story childbearing was not a major concern for the couple due to other more pressing issues related to financial and career stability. Second, it can be assumed that like many modern couples, the Powells who were young in age and had only been married for a short while, may have chosen to postpone having children. Third, it is also possible that motherhood was not a factor in how Powell constructed her happiness. She may not have had the presumed innate desire of a woman to become a mother.

As previously stated, the goal of this thesis is to explore the representations of women's happiness, well-being and life satisfaction. Based on a textual analysis of the film *Julie & Julia* one could conclude that Powell presents the more emotionally vulnerable aspects of the representation of a woman. She also signifies the inherently flawed and impressionable nature of younger women. She is an achievement-oriented individual who represents overall well-being through personal, professional and financial security. One explanation for the makeup of Powell's well-being is the increasing complexity of well-being relative to workingwomen whose satisfaction reflects more facets of life compared with previous generations. While this aggregation may lead to lowered happiness, it is difficult to know whether this reflects a truly lower hedonic state. On the contrary, Child portrays the strength, emotional control and resilience also associated with the representation of a woman. She reminds the viewer that women have historically been considered the backbone of the family structure. Her overall well-being is based primarily on personal and social well-being with professional achievement as a

secondary goal. Child's composition of happiness, well-being and life satisfaction are idealized throughout the film and therefore promoted as the model philosophy.

DISCUSSION

This thesis examines the representations of women's happiness, well-being or life satisfaction within the popular Hollywood film *Julie & Julia*. It also explores common messages and themes that convey dominant cultural ideologies in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the "why" behind the "how" of the film's representations. Additionally, this thesis seeks to provide evidence that supports its perspective that popular films are cultural artifacts that help generate meaning and both shape and reflect societal norms specific to women's happiness. Four research questions were chosen to guide the focus of this thesis.

The first question asks what common sense messages (i.e. socially constructed) about happiness or well-being are presented in the film. The film presents several common sense messages relative to the roles of age, income and career satisfaction and success with regard to happiness. In the film's opening scenes Powell is distressed about moving into an unappealing apartment situated above a pizzeria outside of the city with her husband in order to save money. This is juxtaposed with Child relocating to France with her husband, where the couple will reside in a beautifully furnished apartment. These scenes present the Powells as the young couple struggling financially to make ends meet and the Childs as the older more financially stable pair. The juxtaposition of the scenes impart the notion that with age comes financial stability and in turn, happiness.

Another message conveyed early in the film is the idea that life satisfaction is based largely on success in achievement domains such as careers. The main characters each express a sense of discontent with their current occupations, which has led to their

overall life dissatisfaction. In conversations with their husbands they transmit the belief that if only they can find something to give their lives meaning they will achieve happiness. This suggests the conception that emotional engagement leads to career satisfaction and that career satisfaction equates happiness.

Moreover, the characters' classification of accomplishment throughout the film communicates a definition marked by industry recognition and followed by financial reward. Although each of the women had reached considerable personal achievement, it was not until they received recognition from an industry professional that they expressed feelings of success and accomplishment. These moments of completion were underlined by an expectation of accompanying financial reward. They also give the impression that success is validated by the acknowledgement of an industry expert and complemented with monetary gain.

The second question focuses on uncovering what aspects of the characters' lives are emphasized and/or omitted in order to construct representations of women's overall well-being. The film mainly emphasizes aspects of personal, professional and social well-being. However, it does give some consideration to financial and physical well-being.

The film's greater emphasis on personal and professional well-being signify the importance placed in these aspects of the characters' lives. In terms of personal well-being feelings of self-esteem, resilience, autonomy and engagement are most frequently referenced. However, a large focus is also given to denoting changes in the characters' level of satisfaction with their careers, available opportunities for advancement and emotional engagement in activities. The fact that elements of personal and professional well-being play a critical role in the storyline of the film further highlight their

importance in the film's representation and construction of overall happiness and life satisfaction.

In terms of social well-being the characters' romantic relationships are most visibly highlighted. Powell and Child spend large amounts of their time engaged in conversation and physical closeness with their husbands. The considerable time given to these relationships illustrates the important role that their male counterparts play in influencing the women's happiness. Additionally, social engagements such as birthday celebrations and dinners with friends are shown. It is important to note that when comparing the social engagement of the main characters Child experienced a greater sense of belonging, trust and support among friends and appeared to have more positive social interactions throughout the film.

Financial and physical well-being were featured in the film in a less direct manner than other forms of well-being. Indications of the characters' financial welfare were subtle. The most overt references were with regard to Powell and related to her overall financial discontent and dissatisfaction with her living conditions. Even less obvious, physical well-being was inferred in relation to healthy diet, exercise and sleep. During the Ritual Cobb Salad Lunch the women order salad entrées accompanied by water or diet soda. This scene draws attention to positive dietary choices, while most other scenes highlight the excessive use of butter. The context in which Powell mentions physical exercise is in relation to a lack of it and sleep routines are merely pictured.

The third question seeks to identify traces of well-being within the film and explain how they correlate with recent research findings on happiness and well-being. Evidence of well-being were found in relation to age, income and relationships. In terms of the age-happiness relation, research shows that with age comes an increase in positive

psychosocial traits (Yang, 2008). This was exemplified by differences in the initial levels of self-esteem and self-integration displayed between Powell and Child as well as through the character's individual positive psychological progression throughout the film.

When comparing the two characters against one another Child, who is pictured in her early forties, exhibits greater maturity, confidence and control of her emotions. Powell, pictured in her early thirties, has experienced a continual decline in her happiness resulting in what appears to be an early mid-life crisis. Individually, the women each mature and grow to accept various elements of their lives as they age. Initially, Powell demonstrated an abundance of negative emotions, but by the end of the Julie/Julia Project she expressed positive feelings of contentment, appreciation, enthusiasm and pride. Likewise, although less strikingly, Child developed a greater appreciation for her life and grew to understand the gift of passion that she had been given.

With regard to traces of income, studies show that financial stability improves an individual's sense of control and is an important predictor of well-being (Ross and Mirowsky, 1992). Child presents this notion in the film. She is characterized as being well educated and of upper-middle-class standing. Also, she appears composed and makes no reference to concern over finances in the film. Conversely, Powell and her husband are struggling to make ends meet. They have recently moved to an unglamorous apartment above a pizzeria outside of the city to save money. In addition, Powell's discontent with her living arrangements and assessment of her material well-being relative to social norms of what she believes she ought to have aligns with current research detailing the "keeping up with the Joneses" phenomena.

When examining how relationships contribute to the overall well-being of Powell and Child both characters enjoyed a satisfying and supportive marital relationship. Each

of their storylines was characterized by genuine trust, romance, commitment and emotional and physical intimacy. However, their distress and general lack of life satisfaction, goes against research reports stating that the stronger the relationship commitment (e.g. marriage) the greater the happiness and sense of well-being of each partner (Lang, 2005).

Research findings on the impact of familial and social relationships may help to explain Powell's unhappiness in spite of having a positive marital relationship. Both familial and social relationships influence a person's perception of happiness and life satisfaction. Specifically, familial relationships serve as the basis for emotional, social and cognitive experiences and set the tone for all other relationships. However, through much of the film Powell struggled to gain the support and approval of her mother with regard to the Julie/Julia Project. Her mother's disapproval likely impacted Powell's outlook on the project. Additionally, same-sex friendships constitute an invaluable personal relationship for a woman. However, Powell lacked important facets of healthy same-sex friendships – common interest, trust and allegiance – with the women depicted as her friends in the film (Hays, 1988). Therefore it is likely that the deficiencies in the areas of familial and social relationships were a major factor in Powell's dissatisfaction with life.

Last, the fourth question evaluates how the social construction of happiness evolves throughout the film. In the beginning Powell is unfulfilled by her most recent temp job, angry over the rejection of her novel and humbled by the achievements of her Ivy League friends. Each of these issues contributes to her initial understanding of happiness being defined by earning an economically prosperous living doing work that both engages and challenges her. However, over the course of the film as Powell attempts

to imitate Child's cooking techniques she receives more than just her culinary methods. Child imparts Powell with a passion for life, appreciation for genuine love and courage to live outside of the lines and expectations of others. By the close of the film Powell indicates that her happiness is a function of self-acceptance and personal responsibility to change whatever is making her unhappy. She no longer appraises her life satisfaction simply as a measure of career success, but by the totality of her own personal triumphs, the unfailing love and support of her husband, and professional accomplishments big and small.

Implications

This study on the representations of women's happiness, well-being or life satisfaction adds to previous media studies of representation. The study's use of a Hollywood film as a text is significant because it enhances understandings of the representations of women in popular culture. It also suggests that the conventions of happiness depicted in the film are made readily available to large audiences. Additionally, because popular Hollywood films are widely reviewed and written about the implications of the film's representations travel beyond the screen to reach a broader audience.

The dominant cultural ideologies expressed in the film also influence members of society and help to generate meaning relative to women's happiness or well-being. Moreover, the study's text fits into a growing genre of wellness and self-actualization media targeted towards women. Therefore, the representations of women's well-being within the film serve as a source of information about how women can construct their

own well-being. The representations also shape expectations of what happiness, well-being or life satisfaction entails.

Limitations

There are several limitations to be considered regarding the results of this study. First, the interpretations contained therein are solely that of the researcher. In utilizing the method of textual analysis it is possible that when reviewing the same text another researchers may interpret the signs, myths and relationships presented in a similar or different manner.

Second, although the film was based on Child's autobiography *My Life in France* and Powell's memoir *Julie and Julia: 365 Days, 524 Recipes, 1 Tiny Apartment Kitchen* it is not a biography. Therefore, the director was allowed dramatic license to exaggerate and/or alter elements of the characters and plot. These changes constrain the analysis and valuation of the significant signs to the fictional characters portrayed in the film.

Third, the use of sociological theories of well-being based on subjective evaluation and self-reported data effect the analysis of characters in a film. Because the characters themselves are unable to provide a subjective evaluation of their own well-being or life satisfaction the researcher relied on verbal references and physical mood signals throughout the film to evaluate the characters' well-being over time. This method of evaluation increases the likelihood that interpretations made by future researchers could vary widely.

Last, the researcher reviewed a widescreen DVD of the film primarily on a 13-in computer screen. It is possible that the researcher may not have noticed significant details

visible to a theater audience. These details, however small, may have enhanced the study of the film's representations of women's happiness or well-being.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study contributes to scholarship on representations of women in film; however, it also combines representations of women's well-being. With the rising popularity of women's wellness and self-actualization media, which includes books, television shows, magazines and feature films, it is suggested that future research seek to expand the examination of representations of women within this popular genre of media.

Wellness media has to date been most often characterized by wealthy White women searching for whole, empowered living. Therefore, studies examining the representations of minorities within wellness media or comparisons between representations of minority and non-minority women are also possible areas of research. An area completely lacking within the enlightenment industry is with regard to males and therefore presents another focus for future scholarly research. Studies that assess audience effects to determine the influence of popular representations of women's wellness and life satisfaction are also needed.

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