

MILLENNIAL MEDIA:  
A FANTASY THEME ANALYSIS OF THE SHORT FILM “NARROW ROADS”

By

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## ABSTRACT

Millennial Media:  
A Fantasy Theme Analysis of the Short Film “Narrow Roads”

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As we move into the future of media and technology, society has become more involved with the media they consume. Younger generations in the past generations have been effected and have affected media development in various ways. The Millennial generation of today is no exception. This thesis discusses the effects of media on the millennial generation through fantasy theme chains of an original video narrative. Millennial students will watch the narrative and discuss with other Millennials the themes presented and perceived from the video. The results from this study will give a look into how millennial interaction about visual media makes a difference in the area of media.

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Millennial Media:  
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Chapter 1-Introduction

Purpose

Increases in technology and key advances in media, both mass media and interactive media, have seen a huge growth in recent years. One of the main contributions to this trend is the emergence of the millennial generation. The millennial generation is now accustomed to having a special role in the media that they consume. Teen social, emotional, spiritual, and physical issues are what many teen informational and entertainment media are focusing on. There is need for specific communication in order for them to discuss, learn, and debate about issues that are brought up in certain media that they watch. Interactive communication has opened the door for the communication in more ways than ever imagined. In an article in the Interactive Poster entitled “Teen Use of Messaging Media”, the author Diana J. Schiano confirms this.

“One out of 3 people in the world today is a teenager. US teens comprise 13% of the population, the largest generation in history [1]. With greater access to technology than any before, today’s youth are coming of age with the rapid growth of the Internet and global adoption of mobile phones and other wireless devices. Seen as a bellwether of future trends with substantial spending power, teens are a focus of media attention and market research.”

This author believes that it is necessary to fully understand some specific areas of youth and media in order to understand the effects of media on the millennial generation.

## Problem

As we move into an age in our society where the masses have a legitimate role in deciding what media contains and presents, it is necessary to look at the generation that will continue to develop the rise of media both interactive and mass. Popular programming is being influenced by the thoughts and desires of today’s younger generation. The area this thesis project addresses is explained in two questions. How do Millennials view and address teen issues that are brought up in visual media and society through communication in interactive media? In relation to that, how is that communication important to media today? This project proposes to show how media affect the Millennials who in turn affect the media by using fantasy chains to create symbolic convergence among a group of Millennials. The project will consist of a video written and produced by the author that will present teen themes to Millennials so they can interact and show how their fantasy themes develop and “chain out” amongst other Millennials.

In the second chapter, this paper will look at the history of a relationship between media and younger generations starting with the Baby Boomers and going through the “Me” Generation and into the Millennials. It is important for us to see the difference between generations, but also how they contributed to the media of today. The second chapter will also look at the development of media in the millennial age and the effects of Millennials on media and media on the Millennials. The third chapter will discuss the methodology that has been used to conduct the fantasy theme study of Millennials and media. The video project along with the process for developing fantasy chains will be expanded upon. The fourth chapter will discuss the results from the fantasy chains gathered from the Millennials and show the themes that were intended, the themes the Millennials saw, and the analysis of the chains.

This research will show that media effects are a dual process. Millennials affect the media, and media affects the Millennials. This research seeks to show a deeper knowledge of the impact of specific themes in their thinking, media interaction, and social interaction. There are issues that can trigger fantasy themes in Millennials’ minds which can spark a wave of interaction with other Millennials, which can chain out to others; and media, in this case, visual media can have a desired effect. What is more important in media to reach a desired audience?



## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

### Younger Generations

In his book *Saving the Millennial Generation*, Dawson McAllister suggests that the youth of the present culture have been molded by the youth of past generations. Prior to 1961, the Baby Boomer generation continued in the footsteps of its predecessors, building a nation that was focused on the well-being of America as a whole. The popular individualistic mentality of teens developed during this era. Before this, there really was no middle area between youth and adulthood. Youth began to lead families, work, and transition into their adult lives early on in life. Dawson McAllister, a youth pastor during the early 70s, realized that his heart was for youth and began a 2 hour call-in show program for teenagers called “Dawson McAllister Live!” McAllister states that “the concept of leisured youth took hold after World War II, and the term teenagers became part of the popular vocabulary around the same time. Teenagers became an identifiable group of people, and they basked in the newfound wealth and attention of postwar America.” (McAlister 3) The main goal of the media in this era was to present information about certain issues and mostly to provide entertainment. At the time, the media were not focused on the youth of the American culture. America, as a whole, focused on the patriotic lifestyle and culture. This attitude, however, did not transcend to their children. Instead, the Boomers grew

up to become the society controlling, idealistic generation that were out to make significant changes in life. Sheri Ortner has been an instructor of anthropology at the University of Michigan, the University of California at Berkley, and Columbia University. She characterizes this generation as the “Me” generation and writes in her article “Generation X: Anthropology in a Media-Saturated World”

The “Me” generation, or Generation X, had a number of reasons why it became so individually focused. One was the bad economy. The consequence of all this is the doom saying prediction that has by now become one of the hallmarks of Generation X: ‘The baby busters (Generation X) may never match their parent’s living standards. And that would make them the first U.S. generation to do so’.... In addition to generating a bleak future for the busters, the bad economy generates boring, low-paying, non-career-track jobs in the here and now. (Ortner 417-418)

Social difficulties, such as divorce rates and family issues, are also listed as a contributing cause of this individual focus. Yet the main complaint is against the parents themselves. Ortner presents both the “parental generation” and the baby boomers as the problem. “What unites them ...is the notion of self-indulgence....It was this collective self-indulgence, in turn, which generated the economic, social, sexual, and psychological problems.” (Ortner 418) There has been a downward spiral to individual and self-centered gratification that did not take the media long to notice. Now, instead of having a Baby Boomer generation that made the media what it was, we have a generation that is being conformed by the media. What better way to do this than to target them in that individualistic teen stage?

During the “Me” generation (1961-1981), the real issues and real life situations began to gain a dominant position in media. Youth began to define themselves by popular TV shows. More of these shows popped up and have been an equal if not more dominating opponent to its cousin Reality TV.

Reality and real life provides the basis for how Generation X defined themselves. They see characters in a show and say, “That’s me.” Axel Aubrun, a Senior Research Fellow at the FrameWorks Institute specializing in anthropology, and Joseph Grady, professor of linguistics at the University of Maryland, co-authored a number of works dealing with youth studies. In their article, *Aliens in the Living Room: How TV Shapes Our Understanding of Teens*, they comment that “Series such as ‘Popular’ and ‘Freaks and Geeks’ explore both the experience of stereotypes (of popularity in this case), and the larger question of what it means to be subject to stereotypes. Many shows for teens include an attempt at putting the world in perspective” (Aubrun and Grady 5). Putting the world in perspective is the whole idea behind the teen world. This age group has moved from stage to stage so quickly, that growth is inevitably at a faster pace than seems bearable. One of the easiest places to look for guidance is in the shows that give an example or advice.

The guidance provided through these shows provides an impact that defines the teens of this generation. Many parents are defining their children by the teen situations and characters on these shows. Aubrun and Grady write:

TV greatly exaggerates this normal tendency, caricaturing the individualism of adolescence to the point of creating a dangerously misleading portrayal. On television, and in public discourse, the picture of teens as individualistic predominates to the point of making it difficult for the public to accept information about real teenagers – people who

get along well with their parents and participate in the world around them. The cumulative effect of representations of teens on TV is that a limited number of highly reinforced scripts and prototypes shape expectations about what teens think and do. When a viewer sees an image of a teen walking down a street, for example, he or she is less likely to imagine that the teen is thinking about family, work or academics than about sex, drugs or some other risky behavior. (Aubrun and Grady 8)

The Millennial generation found themselves formed by a process of the Boomers being a controlling, media-making generation and the Xers being an individualistic, media-made generation. It is a historical process that shows how much media is apart of younger generations. The Millennials are the same as the Boomers and Xers in the sense that they have contributed in effecting the media. Yet, there are a different generation entirely when it comes to teenagers in general.

There are certain aspects of the Millennials that need to be understood. First, Millennials are a computer savvy generation. They live life through the computer. Education, socializing, work, etc are all done through the information and global giant called the Internet. Technology and electronics is what describes the basic make-up of their hobbies. In the journal article “Boomers, Gen-Xers, and Millennials: Understanding the New Students”, Diana Oblinger gives some statistics about the tech-savvy teens of today.

In a study of how those age twelve to seventeen use the Web, researchers found that 94 percent use the Internet for school research and that 78 percent believe the Internet helps them with school work. Among teens, instant messaging and e-mail seem to be natural communication and socialization mechanisms: 70 percent use instant messaging to keep in touch; 41 percent use e-mail and instant messaging to contact teachers or classmates.

An even higher percent use e-mail to stay in touch with friends and relatives. In fact, a slight majority (56 percent) prefer the Internet to the telephone. (Oblinger 3)

Second, the Millennials are a generation based on idealism and tolerance. They will accept, or at least research, more than just one possibility or belief. Ideas and concepts are accepted above actual truth. Personal experience is trusted above the wisdom of the experienced.

Third, the Millennials are not afraid of change. They adapt easily and quickly to change. “For Boomers, change was a mandate. They were out to change the world. Change was threatening to the Xers who felt unsafe and unstable in the world the Boomers created for them. Millennials, however, thrive on change. It is the air they breathe, and the more of it, the better. All of us are breathing this air, but the Millennials enjoy it.” (McAlister 7)

#### Transformation of Media in the Millennial Age

The most important technological change that has erupted in the past few years is the emergence of interactive media. The change has made it harder for mass media around the world to attract the youth of this generation. Media attraction has always been a prime motive for all aspects of media. This has been the focus of demographics, ratings, sweeps, advertising, etc. Teens’ individualistic and impressionable natures have been a primary target for media. The big consumer for new media is mainly youth. For this upcoming generation, the newest media giant is the Internet. Sonia Livingstone and Moira Bovil, in their study on Youth and New Media, have concluded that media is not taking over everyday life activities in youth life, but as new media are introduced, they are incorporated into their lives automatically.

The overall impression from talking to children and young people around the country was of lively and resourceful young people who are putting considerable energies into

actively constructing and sustaining a varied leisure mix which spans both media and face-to-face interaction, indoor and outdoor activities, time with friends, time with family and time alone. (Livingston 5)

The Millennials are not the same generation that mass media has always dealt with in the past. Attraction to mass media is not as popular because there is a new medium that is taking over. Purdue Communication Professor Glenn Sparks, in his book *Media Effects Research*, explains the reason:

When we talk about the impact or effects of new media technology, there are a host of effects that we might potentially contemplate. Computers and the World Wide Web have certainly changed the way we behave in many domains. People shop online, trade stocks online, get their news online, initiate friendships online, and so forth. Children spend time playing the latest computer games...What is all of this new technology doing to us? One thing that it is doing is encouraging traditional media effects scholars to ask new questions and design new research paradigms. One of the old labels used in media curricula at various universities is “mass communication”. If you think about some of the new technologies that are emerging today, it seems clear that they challenge the traditional concept of mass communication. (Sparks 212)

Several interactive media have emerged in the last few years. The Millennial generation is consuming it heavily. Businesses and organizations are realizing their popularity and potential. The global community is accepting them. We will take a look at three: weblogs, online communities, and virals.

Blogs are short for the word “weblog”. Blogs are the equivalent to a person’s diary or journal with the potential to reach the level of a journal article or new report on a more personal

basis. Blogs serve the purpose of sharing one's events or situations in a person's life or news that is happening locally, nationally, or globally. In a journal article entitled "A Case for Blogging, the E-Global News provider", Line 65, gives a brief look into the blogging world.

Blogs have been around in some form or another since the birth of the Web. When the first blog-specific tools were introduced in 1999, only a few blogs existed. A year ago there were about 300,000, and now there are more than 3 million. Blogs have passed the tipping point, with Technocratic reporting that about 15,000 new ones pop up every weekday. Celebrities and politicians are blogging, and Forbes magazine now rates the top blogs in multiple categories. Organizers of the Democratic National Convention issued press credentials to bloggers, and at press time the Republicans were considering the possibility. Blogs are taking hold within corporations as well, especially in the technology sector. Microsoft employees have created more than 700 of them to facilitate communications with customers outside the firewall. IBM developed Blog Central to enable its employees to create blogs inside the firewall, and thousands have responded. Blogs are both a technology and a way of communicating. On the one hand, they are nothing more than simple Web sites, often published in the form of a journal, that provide original content, links to other relevant content, simple editing features, comment capability, archiving, search, and security options. This ease of use provides a vehicle for the writer's unedited personal voice, which is considered a defining aspect of blogs. While many uses beyond personal journalism have emerged, the individual voice remains a central characteristic, even in the corporate setting.

The individual voice has caused many youth to start blogs of their own. Through these, the opportunity to share personal thoughts with a global community is presented. Because blogs are

specialized, they can be searched by subject and preference, and they can be subscribed to. The interactive part occurs with the responses and discussions that usually accompany someone's blog.

The second interactive development is the rise of On-line communities. Most of them such as Myspace, Friendster, Facebook, Xanga, and many others are free to join and offer participants the opportunity to operate their own personal networking community. Myspace and Friendster already have more than 40 million users, and if we are just talking students, then Facebook is more than 7 million and growing. In his article "A Dad's Encounter with The Vortex of Facebook", TIME's assistant managing editor Michael Duffy gives a good description of the popular student community.

Facebook started out as a digital version of those little photo guides of incoming college freshmen and quickly expanded to include the student bodies of more than 2,100 colleges. Last fall, high schools were invited to join, and now Facebook has 7 million members. Like all secret societies, it has its own language, passageways and handshakes. You can "poke" a friend--sort of like a wink or a wave--without saying much more. You can check the "pulse" to see what movies, books and music are topping the charts at your school. You can post pictures of yourself and your friends, and there's a nifty feature that allows kids to create specialized subgroups of Facebookers who share hobbies, obsessions great and small or inside jokes. And then there's "the wall," which may be Facebook's most distinctive feature. It's the place on every member's site where friends can post messages, have conversations and just generally keep up. The wall makes sense in one respect: it's easy and fun to spot an incoming message. But in another it's curious: you can peruse the postings of everyone else at your school. Which means the wall is one



of those giveaway clues about Generation M: teenagers think their lives are private just so long as their parents aren't tuning in.

In their book *Children, Television, and the New Media*, Paul Lohr and Manfred Meyer give an example of how younger children use this media magnet.

Storm, a girl of 12 years of age, already owns three houses. Exotic pets jump around there, across tables and sofas: a cuddly toy frog named Jasper and Callie, the cat... Storm has also got a friend: Rachel, who is 13. She even has her own castle, which she keeps on filling with new pieces of furniture. Storm and Rachel are just two average American girls. They romp and roll in cyberspace, their possessions are virtual, (and) their home is a fun world built from bits and bytes. (Lohr 134)

A majority of the participants engulfed in this frenzy are teen youth. Personal homepages are made with information describing themselves. They have music, videos, pictures, and written text, some of which are blogs that can be shared with people globally. In a study on virtual communities, Christopher Johnson gives a look at what these communities entail.

Virtual communities use networked technology, especially the Internet, to establish collaboration across geographical barriers and time zones. In comparison to traditional communities, virtual communities in cyberspace differ in several respects...virtual communities exist according to identification to an idea or task, rather than place. They are organized around an activity, and they are formed as a need arises. Squire and Johnson (2000) also note that virtual communities do not need formal boundaries for they can be fluid. Because the members cannot see each other, norms do not dominate as much as in traditional communities, thus allowing for greater individual control. In other words, the Internet, or the WWW, becomes the "place" for the community; thus

networked communication has increased the parameters of what is known as a community. Both virtual communities and communities of practice have life cycles. Thus, in communities of practice and virtual communities, language, practices, customs, and resources develop over time. Virtual communities are networked communities that bridge time zones and geographical locations. Networked technologies, especially the Internet, allow virtual communities to exist. (Johnson 7)

The third development, virals, has circulated throughout the web just recently in the past year or two. The basic premise is that a small video from 10 to 30 seconds long is created. This is not usually professionally done, and it is usually done for comedy. The impact of these virals is better than most thought it would be. Businesses are not starting to use virals for advertising purposes to youth because of their popularity. The article "Mad Ave is Starry-eyed over Net Video" in Business Week spring of 2005 states:

...marketing departments of some of the world's biggest advertisers, from General Motors Corp. (GM) to Unilever, online video represents a golden opportunity to move beyond the 30-second spots that TV viewers so often zap or ignore. These advertisers view online video as a laboratory for new ways to connect with customers. And they're busy figuring out ways to use the Internet to transform the most powerful advertising tool in history: television.

The biggest producers of these online virals that advertising and marketing is going crazy over are teens. The ideas are not professional and spectacular, but they are creative, random, and they get the attention of online audiences their own age.

Virals, online communities, and blogging are just a few of the media that are embedded in the lives of Millennials. The media knows that because of this there is no better way to

influence this generation than through the media that they live and embed themes and messages in them.

In order to do this effectively, media in general has realized that there is a transfer of power in the media. Mass media has run the stage so long. It has always been one message to the people. Now, we are seeing, interactive media taking one message and sending it to one person. Then that person can take the message and share it or provide feedback. This is a big change that the Millennials are adapting to and encouraging.

According to the old definition, the source of a mass communication message was a large organization. The message was sent out to large, heterogeneous, scattered audiences.

Today single individuals use the Internet to set up websites that millions can view. Some sites get huge traffic, but others may get none. All of this seems to blur the lines between the traditional notion of mass communication and the new communication environment. Consequently, scholars who were trained under the assumptions of the old environment have to make some adjustments in their thinking about what counts as a legitimate phenomenon to examine. (Sparks 212)

While the rest of the world is examining the changes, the Millennials are already exploring them. Blogging, communities, and virals are very broad subjects to mention, but they are the beginning of the interactive world out there that the Millennials are devouring.

The Millennials have struggled to get out from under the pretense that what the media says about them is automatically true. This is what parents and society are used to, and the media is what they look to in order to define youth. Most youth actually find themselves not relating to the situations that the characters find themselves in TV shows. They relate to a

character's characteristics. Many parents are defining their children by the teen situations and characters on these shows. It's a natural tendency.

The most obvious negative effects of TV relate to distortion of people's understanding of the typical teenager. TV viewers are flooded with images that do not accurately represent the reality of American teenagers. When the preponderance of local news coverage of teenagers portrays them as perpetrators or victims of crime, for example, the "typical teen" comes to be associated with crime, in a way that doesn't match the lived experience of most teenagers. When TV representations imply that most teens conform to some particular description, they reinforce the objectification of teens, which limits teens and sets them apart from adults as a curiosity, threat, and so forth. (Aubrun and Grady 12)

Most parents dread the teenage years for fear of how their child will turn out. With the Generation Xers, the Baby Boomer parents paid little attention to the issues that started to penetrate the teenage lifestyle. These issues are hitting earlier and more frequently with the Millennials. McAllister suggests:

The good thing is that parents today are more attentive and concerned about their children than they have been in many years. The bad news is that their efforts are often overshadowed by forces beyond their control. Today's teenagers are the children of late Boomer and early Xer parents. Early Boomer permissiveness with Xer children has changed dramatically. Today's parents have reacted against the inattention given to the Xers. (McAllister 21)

The fact that parents are paying more attention to the things that their children are dealing with is great. What is confusing many parents is the uniqueness of these youth. No one is exactly sure whether the Millennial generation is something that should be worried about or praised. As a

father, Michael Duffy, Time Magazine's assistant managing editor, isn't too thrilled with the online aspect.

...to me the bigger worry with those sites isn't so much the privacy or security issues, though those are real enough. It's the sheer amount of screen-sucking time they consume in lives that are already overscheduled. Being a teenager is one enormous exercise in time management. Watching my kids try to juggle school, homework, sports, music lessons and sleep, I sometimes think my life is easier than theirs. That's partly because I have some tools they lack, but it's also because I think I know an abyss when I see one. Facebook is one giant time vortex--a black hole of chatter--and for many kids it's hard to find an exit... Those sites are a huge distraction.

However in his article in Time entitled "Don't Fear the Digital," Steven Johnson takes the opposite view.

Any time a new technology comes along, an implicit cost-benefit analysis gets made. The trouble with the current debate about Generation M is that we have a phalanx of experts lined up to measure the costs but only a vague, intuitive sense of the benefits. Start with the costs. Is all this screen time diminishing the kids' face-to-face social skills? Hardly. Remember, the total number of hours spent in front of a screen has not increased over the past 10 years. Teenagers are irrepressibly social animals; it's in their DNA. They're not using the technology to replace their real-world social life; they're using technology to augment it.

Spiritually, the Millennials are one of the most religious generations ever. Christianity is not a foreign concept to them; however, religion is not closely associated with Christianity. The Millennials are just overall open and explorative. This openness or tolerance of almost

everything is what is making it hard for parents and society to teach specific values and ideals. These youth are not taking one view over another. Instead of hearing the one right view on an issue, they would rather you go through all of the views and let them choose. According to McAllister:

They are independent, trusting, only in themselves for direction and motivation, and they resent any connection with the slacker image of the Xers. Parents can do a lot to nurture their children. The family has been, is, and will remain the strongest influence on the lives of young people. But conservative, Christian parents today have to realize they are battling uphill against the onslaught of the insidious, pervasive, postmodern, post-Christian culture that steeps kids in relativism and undermines truth as the foundation for their lives.

#### Media Affects

There is clear evidence that the Millennial generation is embedded with media. This is a factor that makes media effects and messages a huge topic of importance to many researchers. For years, researchers have turned to different theories about the affect of media upon individuals. In the early 1950s when television was just a baby in the media family, Paul Lazarsfeld was one of those researchers who searched for a theory that would explain the effects of media to the skeptics that felt that media was an evil influence of humanity. Lazarsfeld's theory considered media as a "reinforcement of existing social trends and strengthening rather than threatening the status quo" (Davis and Baran, 12) Though this theory has been both criticized and acclaimed, those researchers who really want to delve deep into the study of the social world and its relationship with media are finding it difficult for some specific reasons.

One reason is that humans are very complex and hard to study. Human behavior can be hard to predict because even though we all have similarities, each person is different. It may be easy to measure something that scientifically be measured like the time it takes for water to boil, but putting a human element in scientific research open a study up to a possibility of immeasurable factors. Humans may have specific behaviors, but there are also attitudes to measure. A teenager may not watch a particular show for several reasons. He may not be in the mood to watch the show, he may have heard bad publicity about the show, and he may have had a bad experience pertaining to the shows topic. He may watch the show for those specific reasons, but may not be affected by the show's message for different reasons. And these reasons can all change on a daily or momentary basis.

Another huge factor in studying media messages and affects is due to the third person effect. The third person effect says that individuals will acknowledge that the media does have an affect on others, but will not acknowledge that they too can be affected by media messages as well. "We're not so easily influenced by the media, we say. But ironically, most of us are convinced that other people are much more likely to be influenced by the media. So although we don't need to be protected from media influence, they might." (Davis and Baran, 28) People in general know that the media can have an effect; the problem is getting them to realize that there is an affect on them just as much as there is one on everyone else. In an article in Educational Studies, C.K. Cheung states:

Exposure to the media has now become the primary learning route for most pupils, supplanting the place of traditional formal education. The media portrayal of society becomes the constructed reality perceived by children, affecting their values and ideologies. Television, film, songs and MTV have become the storytellers for our

generation; these stories define our identity, beliefs and our purpose in life. While people are worried about the influence of media on children, the advancement in technology has been dramatic. Besides mass media with a long history such as television, radio, films and newspapers, computers and the internet are widely used not only in companies, but also at home. Advanced technologies are also breaking down the traditional boundaries between telecommunications, broadcasting and computing. It is therefore necessary for people to understand what messages the mass media produce and how they influence them. (Cheung, 362)

Technically, our education is coming from the media. This does not pertain to only our academic knowledge and using media as a medium, but this pertains to the social and perceptual education that we receive from TV shows, websites, interactive media, etc. Media messages are becoming our primary sources for learning. The question of whether this is a negative aspect or positive aspect is still being answered although, the notion that media is having a negative affect is still on the tips of researchers' tongues just as it was during the early 1950's when TV first came on the scene. "Media have become a primary means by which many of us experience or learn about many aspects of the world around us. Even when we don't learn about these things directly from media, we learn about them from other people who get their ideas of the world from media" (Davis and Baran, 228)

While there is no conclusive evidence that media is inoculating us with hypnotizing messages and we as individuals have no free will in succumbing to its power, there are some general items we need to realize. Humans are slowly becoming more and more media immersed. It is apart of our everyday lives, therefore, it is going to influence the way we think, the way we



act, and the way we live ultimately. Yet, the media is only a tool. The people behind the media carry the message, and it is the message that penetrates through to the individual.

In the thinking that there possibilities of positive effects and uses for media, there are theories that have been formulated that constitute study of the uses for media. The Symbolic Convergence Theory is a theory that provides an explanation of human communication and interpretation via community. Ernest Bormann invented this theory realizing that humans have a need to create, discover, and form meanings by which a culture survives. Bormann, in his article “The Symbolic Convergence Theory of Communication: Applications and Implications for Teachers and Consultants”, defines culture as “consisting of shared norms, reminiscences, stories, rites, and rituals which provide the members with a unique symbolic common ground”. (Bormann, 50)

One of the basic ways of a culture experiencing symbolic convergence is through the uses of fantasy themes. Fantasy themes are oral or written dramatized messages “in which characters enact an incident or a series of incidents in a setting somewhere other than here and now of people involved in a communication episode”. (Bormann 52) Fantasy is not coined in the sense of far-fetched imagination, but in regards to an interpreted meaning that fulfills a communication need. Through fantasy theme, a group of people can each bring to the group their own interpretations and fantasies in order to form a chain of fantasies thereby achieving symbolic convergence.

We have looked at the younger generations leading up to the Millennials, and we can say without doubt that there is a relationship between younger generations and the media. We can also say that the Millennials are a totally different generation than its predecessors. Where this research desires to go implies that there needs to be an action that follows this knowledge. There

is a simple process to follow. This author proposes that there are fantasy themes that are brought out through media. Interactive media, which is mostly used by the Millennials, is a way to take viewer's fantasy themes and watch how they become fantasy chains. These fantasy chains in turn can provide information that media can use to provide better media. This project tests this process. The project has been divided into two parts: the video production and the analysis of themes seen in the production.

### Chapter 3- Methodology

The production side of this thesis project is in the filming and editing of a 15- 20 minute visual drama. The purpose of this drama will be to introduce three issues that teens deal with through a video drama. The script for the film will be finished in February of 2006. In the film, 16 year old Ashley Jefferson is faced with the issue of presenting a story that she feels needs to be shared with other youth in her generation. She has been encouraged to do this through blogging. Ashley starts the story reminiscing about her mother, a distinguished college professor and author. She is waiting to go to a special banquet in honor of a book release. Her father is rushing to get dressed in order that they are not late. Ashley, along with her older sister Liz and her younger sister Rachel are left at home. At the ceremony, Lisa Jefferson makes a speech about her work. Throughout these first few scenes, we see small clips of the couple's trip home from the ceremony back home. There is car trouble and Kevin and Lisa Jefferson get involved in a car accident in which Lisa Jefferson is killed. A year passes in the story, and Ashley Jefferson has assumed the role of the family's mother and is assisted by Rachel as the glue of the Jefferson family. Liz has become a rebel at home and at school. Kevin has become entrenched in his job as a lawyer and has forbidden any mention of what happened to the girls' mother.

This particular day is the one year anniversary of Lisa Jefferson's death. Liz is interrupted in her daily morning workout by Ashley pestering her about being late for school. Liz blows up at Ashley for trying to be the mother of the family. The breakfast table is mainly quiet as Rachel eats her cereal and tells her un-responsive father about a school project. Liz and Ashley soon leave for school arguing as usual. Rachel hesitantly mentions that she and Ashley were going to their mother's grave later that day. Kevin quickly ends the conversation and tells Rachel to get ready for school.

The action then takes us to Liz and her friends, Jamie and Shawn, talking in the hallways. It is evident from the beginning that Liz and Shawn are a potential item. The conversation starts with Liz's nomination for Homecoming Queen and then turns to the return of a former student troublemaker who turned good after an unknown absence from the school. Brad Echart has been rumored to have turned into a religious freak. The three make jokes about it, and then Shawn asks if Liz is going to hang out with a group of them that night. A knowing message seems to pass between the two and Liz accepts the invitation.

Next, Kevin enters his office ready to grab a cup of coffee from his secretary Kate. We are introduced to Jerry, who is the best friend of the family and Kevin's law partner. Just like Rachel did earlier in the morning, Jerry brings up the anniversary of Lisa's death. Kevin again quickly shuts off the conversation.

The next scene shows Ashley getting ready to teach an ice skating lesson. Ashley meets with a student who is none other than Brad Echart, the transformed troublemaker from school. Ashley and Brad have a small conversation about the change in his life. Ashley is in complete surprise about it, especially when Brad asks to go to church with her.

Kevin is in the office when Kate announces that he has a visitor. A young man comes in carrying a small book. He introduces himself as Isaac Quinton, a former student of Lisa Jefferson. Isaac tells Kevin how he had worked with his wife on a book that Lisa had kept as a secret project. Isaac also gives Kevin a journal of Lisa's that she gave him the day of the accident. Isaac then tells Kevin that the car accident may not have been an accident after all.

Ashley and Rachel sit at the graveside. Rachel asks her sister if things will ever get back to normal. Ashley tries to comfort her sister and tells her not to give up on their father and sister. One day things will be better.

Liz, Shawn, Jamie, and a friend of Shawn exit the movie theatre at night. Jamie heads off with the two guys while Liz lets Shawn know that she doesn't want the night to end, but wants to have sex with him.

Ashley catches Liz coming in late and confronts her. Liz gets defensive and blows up at her sister for trying to snoop in her life. Ashley tries to tell Liz that she loves and cares for her. Liz wants none of it and blows by her sister. Ashley ends her blog for the night leaving the viewers with a sense that there is much more to come in the story.

This is a blatantly Christian film. However, it deals with issues that all viewers will be able to relate to such as death of a loved one, family problems, denial, rebellion, and faith.

Kristina Drumheller, in her article *Millennial Dogma: A Fantasy Theme Analysis of the Millennial Generation's Uses and Gratifications of Religious Content Media*, she says

"The Millennials are now entering the "impressionable period." During this period, which lasts from late adolescence to very young adulthood, social and political attitudes are formed. College-aged youth are more volatile in their views than older adults, and the views change from generation to generation making the direction of their changes quite

unpredictable. Millennials, following in the footsteps of Gen Xers, might use media and technology for spiritual gratification. Due to the pervasiveness of the Internet, expanded television programming, and mass release of films, uses of religious content media may serve information-seeking and identity-formation functions as Millennials search for their own brand of Spirituality.” (Drumheller 4)

This film is geared specifically toward Millennials who are defined for this paper as ages 24 and under, which goes with the information given earlier in the paper listing Millennials as born in the year 1982 and on. Within that group, teens from age 12 to age 20 will be looked at specifically. While *Narrow Roads* can be effective to any part of that segmented age group those who are closer to the 16-20 age range will benefit more from the movie. Two reasons for this is because that is the largest age group represented in the video and the students participating in the project responses will be in this age group.

The purpose of second part of the thesis project is to provide a content analysis of how Millennials use interactive media to effectively discuss teen issues brought up in visual media. This film will be shown in Matthew Warner’s three Communications 101 classes, which again fit into the age group described above, and treated as part of an extra credit assignment. Bormann’s Convergence Theory of how fantasies chain out to create a reality in the here and now will be used to see how millennial teens relate to social and spiritual values presented in a video produced and written by the author. This methodology discusses an overview of the script, an analysis of fantasy chains, and the process of achieving the project’s purpose. The film will be uploaded onto Blackboard. Each of the students in the class will be instructed to watch the film. They will be directed to a discussion board on Blackboard in which there will be three questions.

- 1) What were some major themes that you saw in this film and why did they stick out to you?

2) Comment and discuss your reaction to the themes that others in your class have seen in this film 3) Choose a character from the film and discuss what is happening to this character in the film. After these questions are answered, each student will participate in discussions with other classmates. In this way, we will see how these conversations chain out. Fantasy Theme information from the discussion board will be used in order to measure responses and participation by Millennials.

The script for the film was finished in February of 2006. *Narrow Roads* was born from an original story that was written by the producer in 2005. The first chapter was adapted to be the script for this project. Casting was completed by April of 2006. Each of the cast members were chosen by comparison of the character in the script and the character of the students chosen. Out of all the cast, only one was not a student of Liberty University. The Locations were secured in April of 2006. These locations included businesses and Liberty University associated organizations that allowed *Narrow Roads* to be filmed on their premises. September 2006 began the cast meetings. Cast meetings included practicing lines and getting to know the characters in the video. All of the cast were aware of the purpose of the video and the purpose that it played in the thesis project. One of the difficulties was that some of the cast members did not get a chance to meet together for the meetings. One of the members from Maryland was only able to travel down for the day her scenes were shot. October 14<sup>th</sup> began filming of the production. All of the shooting occurred in five Saturdays with re-shooting to be done whenever possible. Scenes were shot according to availability of the cast and by location. All scenes that took place in Kevin Jefferson's office and scenes that included Liz and her friends were shot on the first Saturday, all scenes with Lisa Jefferson were shot on the next Saturday, the ice skating scene was shot on the third Saturday, and finally all scenes taking place at the Jefferson house and the graveyard scene

was shot on the fourth Saturday. Re-shooting occurred on the fifth Saturday. Editing was finished by December 13<sup>th</sup>.

One of the difficulties the millennial generation is dealing with is the negative outlook that is already placed on their age group by society and media. The issues that they face are being emphasized more than ever. With the emergence of new interactive and online media, the gap between the Millennials and everyone else is steadily lengthening. Bormann, in his book *The Force of Fantasy*, explains that “symbolic convergence stems from the human tendency to try to understand events in terms of people with certain personality traits and motivations, people who make decisions, take actions, and cause things to happen. We can understand a person making plans in order to achieve goals and succeeding and failing to do so, because we often interpret our own behavior in the way in out personal fantasies”. (Bormann 9)

Interactive media is the medium in which this symbolic convergence is occurring, and this thesis project will be the tool to decide whether interactive media is truly being used for that purpose. In the case of this thesis, we are looking at the millennial generation as a culture and will be creating a dramatic message that is intended to inspire symbolic convergence. Bormann’s dramatizing message contains one of the following: narrative, analogy, allegory, or fable. In the case of this project, the message will be a fictional narrative.

Narrow Roads proposes to show that there is an affect that media can have on Millennials, and through the symbolic convergence created by fantasy theme chains on a discussion board, the Millennials can offer information that can affect the media they consume.



## Chapter 4- Results

This project sought to answer two specific questions: How do Millennials address teen issues that are brought up in visual media and society through communication in interactive media, and how is that communication important to media today? In that, the project would discover how Millennials affect the media, and media affects the Millennials with the assistance of fantasy chains.

The final product of the Narrow Roads video deviated a little from the original vision. The 15 to 20 minute time limit was maintained even with deletions and additions to the script and the cast. One of the difficulties in the production and shooting was the small margin for mistake and correction. A majority of the video was filmed by one person, two of the cast members were only available during one of the shooting days, and one of the cameras had minor technical difficulties during one of the shoots. However, the production turned out as planned and was edited with ample time to be presented to Millennials. The film Narrow Roads was presented to three Communications 101 classes under instructor Matthew Warner. The film was broken up into three parts and originally placed on the application Blackboard with the assistance of Scott Pleasants who is an Instructional Technologist who works with the Blackboard application at Liberty. The video was given to Mr. Pleasants and uploaded onto blackboard with

links to the videos for the students to access. Mr. Warner then presented his classes with the opportunity of watching the videos and responding in a discussion board their thoughts and feelings according to the questions discussed in the previous chapter. Mr. Warner also gave the students a choice of writing three chapter summaries to achieve the same amount of extra credit points.

One immediate problem arose when some students commented that they were unable to view the video through the Blackboard application due to streaming problems that occurred with their computers. It was decided that the video files would then be moved to Youtube.com in order for there to be easy access for all of the students to watch the video. The blackboard application was only to be used for the discussion board. While not all sixty students in the combined three classes participated, most of the students did yielding some interesting information about their thoughts.

### *Analysis of Themes*

The video *Narrow Roads* centers on three major themes that were intended by producer. The subjects were chosen deliberately to portray issues that Millennials were likely to relate to on a general basis. The three subjects are 1) death of a family member, 2) religious faith in the midst of struggles, and 3) family communication. When looking at all three of these subjects as a whole, the importance of them in context is key to understanding why they fit together. This video specifically looks at a situation in which death is seen in the context of family. In their article “The Role of Communication and Storytelling in the Family Grieving System”, Cecilia Bosticco and Teresa Thompson explain the situational environment that can be expected.

“Death causes a change in the balance of a family system. For example, roles

and responsibilities must be shifted to accommodate new realities. Although this process is not easy, it can intensify connections between family members and prompt renewed commitment to and appreciation of life. Families face bereavement in the context of their existing body of beliefs and values, and, most importantly, using the methods of communication and interaction to which they are accustomed in daily life. Families orchestrate and direct how they will communicatively grieve. Tasks of bereavement for families mirror those previously outlined for individuals, with a strong emphasis on sharing the experience through communication. It is important to recognize that individual members of a family will probably not be feeling the same emotions or be dealing with the same elements of grief at the same time. Discord in relationships can be expected. Various family subunits and participants may grieve differently. (Bosticco and Thompson 7)

This is the central story-line of *Narrow Roads*. Accompanying this is the main theme of the video: Faith in God is the only way to deal with our trials.

Several themes were brought up by the Communication students that participated in this study including the themes that were originally intended by the producer. The first intended theme was that of death in the family. Death is presented in this video in regards to a family who is already divided in a sense, but with the loss of a key member in keeping the family together, the Jefferson family is divided even more. Death in the family brings out other supporting themes in the movie such as division and grief, both of which are used in order to show how death of a family member affects the family. While death is hard on everyone, people will all respond in different ways. The Jefferson family demonstrates this. Presented below is a chain responding about this theme.

1. This was about the story regarding death and life. When people confront with the sudden death related to their family or love ones. It seems how people cope with bereavement and get over grief about death. There were five in the family at the first time. I think that the mother must be a Christian. After the mother was gone, I could separate two groups from them. One group represents Christian including the middle girl and the youngest girl. The other one represents non Christian including father and the oldest girl. Father and the oldest girl seemed not to be able to accept the mother's death because they did not know how to cope with grief about death. Only the way they knew was forgetting the mother's death. On the other hand, the middle and the youngest girl knew about how to overcome grief because they believed not only Jesus let their mother lead to heaven, but also their mother was still alive in heaven looking them. So, they seemed to be able to get over grief about the mother's death and enjoy their life. I think that we have to know about why we are here and where we should go back regarding life and death. In other words, this video tells us about the origin, identity, meaning (purpose), morality, and destiny.
2. Well said, I agree with your points. It seems that the Father and oldest daughter were struggling because they wanted to be strong, but they are beginning to break down. The Father will, hopefully be able to read that book, and eventually become a born again Christian, but the oldest will need more time, and love.

The second intended theme was faith in the midst of struggle. This theme is seen heavily throughout the movie in reference to Ashley and Rachel. The two youngest Jefferson daughters have developed the faith of their mother and though they are without the mentor they had, they are determined to stand strong for their father and older sister. Ashley makes reference in her

blog about God's sovereignty through the situation even though it is not clearly seen. In the cemetery scene, Rachel and Ashley dialogue about that faith. Ashley tells Rachel to keep praying for their father and sister. The faith theme brings out two other themes: redemption and hope. There is no hope in the eyes of Liz and Kevin because they do not have the faith that Ashley and Rachel do. In a different matter, there is redemption for those who have found the faith of Ashley and Rachel, which is seen in Brad Echart's character. Here are some of the chain responses based on this theme.

1. I believe the theme of this movie is that everyone needs God in their lives to get through rough times. When a tragedy happens like this, God is the one we can turn to, who we can guarantee will be there for us always.
2. I can see where the theme of needing God could come from, and I completely agree that it was a prominent theme in the third scene because it was said that Mr. Jefferson and Liz did not have Christ in their lives, and they seemed to be the most miserable and lonely ones in the entire movie. Therefore, seeking God is a very possible theme for the entire movie.
3. I agree with Caitlyn. If Liz and the father realized that they needed Christ in their lives then they would not be a miserable and things would come easier to them because their living their lives for God.
4. Yes, I also believe that seeking God is a prominent subject in this movie. Now, if only Liz and her father would make the proper steps to seeking the comfort of God's love!

5. This short story shows that unpredictable things can happen and through all of life's problems we will be alright if we just trust in Christ and go to his presence for all answers, situations, etc...
6. I agree god will send certain test through out life to see how much you believe in him
7. I would essentially agree with the fact that this theme is present in the film, BUT, not entirely. "Everyone needs God in their lives to get through rough times," I take this to mean that in order for all (inferred by "everyone") to get through a rough time, all need God. Hopefully this is a correct restatement. I believe that the movie indeed depicts 2 characters who "depend" on God in this rough time. However, the story also portrays 2 characters who don't depend on God during the rough time. "To get through rough times," or restated: in order to get through rough times; this statement is proven wrong in the fact that the 2 characters who don't depend on God indeed make it to the end of the movie or to the furthest part in the "rough time" that we are able to view. The movie shows two paths that can be taken, one ("depending on God"), however, not being the only "successful" one. Getting through rough times still occurs without those who are "getting" being dependent on God, which the movie portrays.

The third intended theme is the theme of family communication. This theme is seen in the sibling arguments between Liz and Ashley. Almost every conversation they have is turned into an argument. Liz makes no attempt to hide her dislike for the role Ashley has taken in the family and the faith that is being "pushed onto her" by her sister. Ashley is frustrated with the life Liz is leading. Rachel's character is ignored in many cases. Liz brushes her off as seen in the communication with her and about her. She still considers Rachel a baby who can't possibly

be struggling as much as she is. Kevin Jefferson has also closed himself off from Rachel. There is a scene when Rachel mentions that she and Ashley are going to visit their mother's grave, and Kevin completely cuts her off and changes the subject. Here are some of the responses based on this theme.

1. "Practically parentless," as seen in the youngest sister, is the theme that most stood out to me. Most clearly in the scene where they're eating breakfast can one see the apparent control that work has over the dad, thus portraying the seemingly lack of parenting on his part. Without a mother at this point in the story, the youngest sister is left with the second to oldest sister for any sort of parental figure as is depicted in the cemetery scene. The youngest is left practically without a parent.
2. Another theme that stands out to me is that of tension. This is seen in the nature of the relationship between the 2 older sisters, how the younger is trying to influence the older for the better, this however not being appreciated by the older. I think the real producer of the tension is that the older knows that the younger is most likely right in what she says and does. Tension is also noticeable between the dad and the student of his late wife, in the scene in the dad's office. The tension results from the student's attempt to "talk about the past." I would say that in this case as well, the real source of the tension is the dad's knowledge of the fact that the student is most probably right, in that he should talk/deal with the past instead of not. So, tension is seen in 2 relationships where in both, one person, in part, calls out the other, and the one who's called out refuses to even deal with the allegations leveled at them, whether to agree or disagree with the credibility of them. The people making up each relationship then stand in disagreement, and it is this lack of agreement that comes through as tension.

Several unique themes were brought up by individuals and most of them followed the popular theme responses given by others. They include: division, guilt, frustration, transformation, renewal, tension, and parenting. What becomes clear in looking at these themes is the ability and the tendency to characterize, group, or classify individuals even with little knowledge, students pointed out oppositions and contrast in characters. There is great significance in the themes that chained out.

The themes analysis is the first step to forming a fantasy theme. One of the goals of this project is to show the development of themes in interactive media. Using the discussion board, the Millennial students that participated in this study have shown not only that intentional themes brought through mass media can achieve their goal and be understood by the viewers, but also that themes not intended by the producer can be drawn out of the movie. There is also an element of relating that is achieved. The thought behind these responses says that these are themes that these students can comment about, relate to, and talk about. They are performing the first part of Bormann's symbolic convergence which is creating fantasy themes.

### *Analysis of Characters*

Out of the twelve characters that are presented in the movie *Narrow Roads*, there are only about six that are developed enough to actually analyze in this stage. One of the unique things about the student's analysis is that since this video is in the form of a pilot episode, they have a chance to look at a possible future for a specific character. There are specific details about each character that, like the themes, have been introduced by the producer.

The students in the study were allowed to choose a character to analyze and predict what the future held for them. 43% of the students chose the father, Kevin Jefferson, as a subject to analyze while Liz has close to 21% and Ashley, Rachel, Brad, and Isaac Quinton make up the



other 36% together. Popularity digression is seen the characters chosen and how they can be classified in groups.

#### The Non-Believers (64%)

Kevin Jefferson is an important character to relate to in this film. While, he is not the main character or the most powerful character, he has some characteristics that stand out in the video which the students highlighted. Kevin is a very structured and organized character. He is characterized by Rachel as being almost OCD. Therefore, the unexpected death of his wife is going to be a hard thing for someone who does not handle unexpected well to handle. The anniversary of anyone's death is going to be hard, especially if it is your wife. Kevin wants to be in control of his family, the situations that surround him, and not allow anything to disrupt that. He is slowly realizing that this will not happen. His lack of caring is actually a struggle for control. Here are student analyses of Kevin Jefferson.

1. The dad appears to be struggling with dealing with the death of his wife, even quite a while after she passed away. Apparently the wife was a professing believer in God/church goer, and the dad isn't. I suppose what the movie is trying to depict is the fact that the dad has allowed himself to be pushed further away from acceptance of beliefs which coincide with his wife's as a result of her death. In light of my understanding of the Bible, i.e. the story of Pharaoh, I would wager that the dad stands in true risk of reaching a point of no return where repentance/believing will become close to impossible and certainly improbable. The fact, though, that his two youngest daughters are believers may work "in his favor." Were the two daughters to continue life in a righteous manner while continually praying for their dad, there's no

reason to believe that their "righteous prayers" wouldn't avail much. That is, the prayers of the righteous do seem to be fascinatingly powerful, whereby the repentance/believing of the dad may in time come to pass.

2. The father seems to be having an extremely difficult time. I think he's in denial a bit in the sense that he thinks he can keep his feelings bottled up and not have to deal with the issue. He doesn't want to talk with anyone about it, not even Rachel. I think by the end of the story he's going to receive an eye opener and this will lead him to GOD, he's going to let himself go.

The character Liz comes to be the second most popular character analyzed and comments for her were very similar from all participants. Liz has it all by any outsider's standards. She is popular, she has a boyfriend, and she is smart. Liz really isn't dealing with grief as much as she is dealing with jealousy. Although she claims to dislike her sister and the faith she proclaims, Liz sees Ashley as taking the role that she should be. Liz as the older daughter knows that Ashley has taken the role of the mother and comforter of the family, Rachel looks to Ashley, and Ashley is much stronger than Rachel. No matter how much she gains in physical prowess, Ashley still has something she can't compete with. Liz turns to anything that can take her mind off her family woes, but nothing really is satisfying her.

1. I think her name is Lizzy, or Elizabeth. She seems to be heading down a path that will lead to a dark place, where no one will love her, or take care of her. She has not chosen friends that will build her. They are just looking for a good time, and have no idea what the consequences will be. In the story, I would hope that she will eventually see the love of God through her family, but I think she will lead a shameful lifestyle before she sees God's love and free gift of Salvation.

2. The character Liz had a lot going on in her life. She was dealing with the death of her mother and was not a believer, so obviously did not trust that God would bring her through that time of immense sorrow. Liz put her faith in worldly things, such as a boyfriend, her social life, and drinking to fill the emptiness she was experiencing, and disregarded anything wise her sister Ashley had to say. Liz filled her life with "junk" and hid her true feelings about life and the death of her mother behind a mask. I think that in the future Liz will have an awakening experience and realize how much she needs the Lord. Her sister Rachel and Ashley are certainly a positive reflection of a life filled with God. Even near the end of the episode the viewer could see that Liz was starting to breakdown.

#### The Believers (20%)

Ashley and Rachel are predominantly portrayed as the ones who are on the right track. Yes, they are struggling, but they are struggling more to help their father and older sister see how much God can help them. Ashley is trying to make sense of everything in her head. She knows God is in control, she knows that she must continue to trust in God, but she also wishes she didn't have to be the strong one in the family. Ashley is not the opposite of Liz as far as having friends, being smart, and having a social life. She is a sporty girl who has a love for ice skating. Ashley has had to put her personal desires on hold for the sake of the family. With Rachel's assistance, Ashley is the one who cooks the meals, cleans the house, does most of the shopping, and really has taken the mother role. Because Liz is closer in age, Ashley really would like to have a better relationship with her. She is specifically trying to protect Rachel from getting hurt and losing faith.

The following are anonymous quotes from students concerning these two characters.

1. Ashley is one of the strong characters in the movie and could be considered the "motherly type." She knew who she was and even though there was so much turmoil around her, she knew that her trust lies in Jesus Christ. While other characters had given up all hope because of their loved one's death, Ashley was there to be a solid place for her younger sister and other family members, even without their support.
2. Ashley the eldest sister is trying to keep the family together as mom would have done. She's trusting in God but not seeing His abilities yet in this situation.

Rachel is looked over because she is still the baby of the family. She misses her mother and has dreams of the way life could have been if she hadn't died. She knows the hardships that Ashley is going through to take care of the family and has been there to help in any way possible.

Rachel doesn't quite understand why things are happening, but she does understand and is almost to the point of frustration with her dad and Liz.

1. Rachel is the youngest of the three sisters. Since her mother's death she has witnessed her family divide right in front of her. Rachel has all these influences in her life and she is at such an impressionable stage in life. She needs security and comfort. She believes in God but probably struggles to see Him. Her feelings are torn in so many directions: she seeks to connect to her distant father; she finds peace, comfort, and security in Ashley; and she sees a bad example of how to deal with the situation in Liz. She is a very intelligent girl (as seen by her description of her speech) and has vast potential.
2. I think Rachel is a strong Christian for her to be so young. I think Rachel is neglected and her father puts himself into his work because his wife is gone.

## The Mysteries (16 %)

Brad Echart and Isaac Quinton are the only other two characters that are analyzed by the students. While these two do not have a great deal of screen time, the both add an element of mystery to the video. Brad Echart is the depiction of redemption in the film. Brad had the reputation of being the ultimate rebel. His mysterious absence at school for a year becomes an even bigger mystery when he returns the next year a self-proclaimed Christian who has given up his past ways. His interaction with Ashley proves him to be someone who is trying to better himself by hanging out with Ashley, getting involved in church, but his reputation is going to be a hard thing to change.

1. I think Brad is the newly converted, former "bad guy. Hopefully he will offer some amazing testimony to God's grace - both to students at their high school, and to the Jefferson family - especially Liz, who would probably be more open to him concerning Christianity than anyone else. I'm glad the video makers included him because he provides some relief to the story - in the midst of the hardship and what seems like an unjust God - Brad provides a clear picture of the mercies of God.

Isaac Quinton provides an almost opposite feeling; a feeling that something dark or sinister is going on. He is a former student of Lisa Jefferson. Because he has helped with research on her book, one can assume that Isaac is an intellectual and a scholar. There is a struggle presented in him as well. He has waited for a year to give this book to Kevin, he knows there is more to Lisa Jefferson's death, and he knows more about the family than they know of him.

1. I think that guy seems to be only a messenger to hand over a book to him, Jefferson
2. I think that the mystery guy is going to be a key in the whole ordeal.

3. Quinton, was a bright student who only wanted to share his opinion about Elisa with her husband because he admired her work and wished to reveal some secrets of his own like she did. However, he was nervous to because there was a possibility that Elisa took her own life as a result of revealing her deep secrets that could ruin her reputation

Another element that is provided in the character analysis section is the prediction of what will happen in the video to these characters. Students have the chance to respond giving there theory of either hope or hopelessness. The following are predictions for the analyzed characters:

Kevin

1. I believe that somewhere in that book he will find a satisfaction and perhaps a change of heart toward his family and to God.
2. I think by the end of the story he's going to receive and eye opener and this will lead him to GOD, he's going to let himself go.
3. I think that in the future he will realize how much he misses his wife and that he needs help. Hopefully he will turn to God for help.
4. I think in the future, he is going to heal because he has many people around him who are willing to go through his situation with him.

Liz

1. She will probably become a Christian by the end of the film, due to the persistence of her younger sisters' prayers and their examples. She's probably going to make mistakes and have a breakdown first though.

2. . I think that in the future Liz will have an awakening experience and realize how much she needs the Lord.

#### Rachel

1. Because of her age if she doesn't connect with the parent she may become apprehensive to connection with others later in life.
2. She will probably struggle through high school with loneliness after her sister moves forward in life but will continue to look to God for security. Rachel will overcome her extreme circumstances and see the grace of God in her life.
3. I believe she'll have a very good future because she's letting it all fall in God's hands. She knows she can't do anything to change the past, so she's coping with it quite well.
4. Eventually if Rachel doesn't get the attention she needs she might become rebellious like her older sister Liz. Then the family will eventually deteriorate. Once the father and Liz catch on that their lives are not as good as they could be, then everything will pull back to normal.

#### Ashley

1. In the future I can see her having a hard time hanging out with friends and dating. She is under more stress than anybody in the family and she might miss out on a lot of opportunities because of her situation.
2. So Ashley will eventually get tired of her dad's avoidance and of Liz's rebellion and stop caring for the family. She might just focus on caring for Rachel and let Liz hurt herself.

Brad

1. I think he will have problems convincing his old friends that he is different and they will cause temptations to go back to the way he was. I also think that he will eventually date Ashley
2. Hopefully he will offer some amazing testimony to God's grace - both to students at their high school, and to the Jefferson family - especially Liz, who would probably be more open to him concerning Christianity than anyone else.

Isaac

1. I believe that Quinton will write his own book about his journey and his trials that he had kept stuffed inside; and I bet he will dedicate his writings to Elisa Jefferson for inspiring him to express himself through writing.

Character development is the second tool in establishing a fantasy theme. A sense of identity is formed between the viewer and characters. Here is a specific example of this.

1. I found Brad to be an interesting character in the story because I feel like I was once in Brad's shoes. When I was younger, I was rebellious in many ways and didn't know how to live a Christ-centered life, just like Brad. Seeing Brad confess that he came to Christ, reminded me of how wonderful of a realization that was.

The students were able to highlight certain aspects that they saw in the movie including characteristics, situations, and dialogue. From that the students were able to give their thoughts on how the characters can be developed. Over 75% of the final responses showed that there was hope for the family and others surrounding them in the end. This further develops fantasy themes among the participants. Redemption, even in the early stages of the story, is being given by the students. Both of the characters who were deemed on the wrong path were given a



redemptive hope by a majority of the student participants in their responses. This means that they see the future as being good.

A process occurred with the student participants. They have started with their own fantasy themes, identified with the characters, and taken that identification one step deeper and into the future of the story. The last step is seeing how symbolic convergence is formed through this.

#### Characteristics of Fantasy Chains

Symbolic Convergence is achieved after the development of individual fantasy themes. Students have already formed these fantasy themes by analyzing theme and characters individually and posting them on the discussion board. Kristina Drumheller comments:

“Fantasy theme analysis relies on the theory of symbolic convergence, which is a chaining of group fantasies. One person begins to tell his or her fantasy, or message, which "contains a story about people, real or fictitious, in a dramatic situation, in a setting other than the there-and-now communication of the group” This triggers others to tell their stories until the group has converged with a dominant fantasy theme.”

(Drumheller 6)

The fantasy chains that the students formed through the discussion board had several elements worth mentioning. First, only the first or first two posts on the discussion board for each class actually developed into chains. This seems logical because as more students began to comment, they naturally commented on the post that already had comments in order to engage in a discussion. Starting a discussion was not a main priority for any participant; it was first come first serve theory. Here is an example from one of the fantasy chains:

1. I believe the theme of this movie is that everyone needs God in their lives to get through rough times. When a tragedy happens like this, God is the one we can turn to, who we can guarantee will be there for us always.
2. I can see where the theme of needing God could come from and I completely agree that it was a prominent theme in the third scene because it was said that Mr. Jefferson and Liz did not have Christ in their lives, and they seemed to be the most miserable and lonely ones in the entire movie. Therefore, seeking God is a very possible theme for the entire movie.
3. I agree with Caitlyn. If Liz and the father realized that they needed Christ in their lives then they would not be a miserable and things would come easier to them because their living their lives for God.
4. Yes, I also believe that seeking God is a prominent subject in this movie. Now, if only Liz and her father would make the proper steps to seeking the comfort of God's love!

A second element is the development of agreement and disagreement in the fantasy chains.

While symbolic convergence sees everyone participating in a disclosure of fantasy themes, there is no guarantee that themes will be agreed upon even among like-minded individuals or those that are members of a specific group. In this case, the students who participated are apart of the same class, claim to share the same beliefs, and have developed their own fantasy themes about the same video. Here are examples of both agreement and disagreement in a fantasy chain:

1. This short story shows that unpredictable things can happen and through all of lifes problems we will be alright if we just trust in Christ and go to his presence for all answers, situations, etc...

2. I agree god will send certain test through out life to see how much you believe in him
3. I would essentially agree with the fact that this theme is present in the film, BUT, not entirely. "Everyone needs God in their lives to get through rough times," I take this to mean that in order for all (inferred by "everyone") to get through a rough time, all need God. Hopefully this is a correct restatement.

A third element is that the fantasy chains did not incorporate discussion as much as individual comments. This is seen as we pass the first and second posts. From the third post to the last one in each class, we see the element of discussion change to merely the element of commenting. This makes the fantasy chain harder to see.

The fourth and last element is based on the depth of the answers. Many students examined a number of themes, discussed some deeper issues, and even used the context of their faith in their discussion. Here are two examples of this in the fantasy chains:

1. The dad appears to be struggling with dealing with the death of his wife, even quite a while after she passed away. Apparently the wife was a professing believer in God/church goer, and the dad isn't. I suppose what the movie is trying to depict is the fact that the dad has allowed himself to be pushed further away from acceptance of beliefs which coincide with his wife's as a result of her death. In light of my understanding of the Bible, i.e. the story of Pharaoh, I would wager that the dad stands in true risk of reaching a point of no return where repentance/believing will become close to impossible and certainly improbable. The fact, though, that his two youngest daughters are believers may work "in his favor." Were the two daughters to continue life in a righteous manner while continually praying for their dad, there's no reason to believe that their "righteous

prayers" wouldn't avail much. That is, the prayers of the righteous do seem to be fascinatingly powerful, whereby the repentance/believing of the dad may in time come to pass.

2. I love characters like Brad because they show how good God is, how there is nothing we can do that God can't save us from, and how God is capable of producing life-changing transformation in anyone. Ben is a good picture of all Christians - we're all sinners, unfortunately!

## Chapter 5- Discussion

The main goal of this paper is to show the media affects the younger generation, which at this time period are the millennial, and how Millennials in turn can affect the media. How do Millennials address teen issues that are brought up in visual media and society through communication in interactive media, and how is that communication important to media today? If we place the video *Narrow Roads* into the context it is formatted for we will see the current relationship between media and the millennial generation, and be able to answer these questions.

Teen issues are being brought up in the media, and in this day and age, issues are being viewed at an earlier age than before. Drs. Stanley Baran and Dennis Davis, in their book *Mass Communication Theory*, comment on their own research on the situation by saying, “The researchers argue that by the age of two and a half, children have sufficiently developed viewing schema that allow them to comprehend specific television content conventions.” (Baran and Davis 202) Because of this and the fact that children have an early view into the “real world” through television at such an early age, issues brought up in media become ingrained into their schema and into their thinking.

There were certain intentions in coming into this project. *Narrow Roads* was produced in the format of a pilot episode of a TV drama. It shows believable characters and situations that

were intended for teens to relate to. *Narrow Roads* was intended to show a family's struggles to survive after the death of their mother.

The issues of family communication and struggle faith in God, and dealing with the death of a loved one are issues that the Jefferson family was to portray. The characters of the family were developed to emphasize these issues. Liz, Ashley, , Kevin, and Rachel, although not all are in the teen age demographic, all possess characteristics and perform actions that can be related to by teens. The video was intended to open-ended as far as interpreting themes and characters.

The results given in the previous chapter have shown that when a visual media have themes and issues that are presented, teens will develop fantasy themes. These themes may or may not be intended by the writers or producers. The student participants identified the intended themes, but also identified other themes and expounded on others. This aspect of the project shows exactly how the target audience is impacted by the video. Because they identified the themes that were intended the video achieved success in that area. Because they identified other themes not intended by the producer, the video can be viewed as a success since the purpose was to have other themes identified. The identification of other themes also means that participants were active listeners and able to voice their own opinion freely. Bible verses were quoted, discussions were formed, questions were raised, and examples were given.

Student participants were also asked to analyze characters. A relationship between the characters and the students started to form. While it is not likely that a strong relationship will develop in the first episode, one may begin to see characteristics, situations, and actions that will be relatable. The responses of some were how real the characters were, how they would most likely react in the same manner, and how they understood the character. Feelings towards the

character ranged from admiration of Ashley and Rachel to disgust, sympathy, and frustration of Liz and Kevin to questioning and excitement about Brad and Isaac.

Given that interactive media has recently emerged in the millennial generation, there is now a way for the fantasy themes that are being developed to be shared. If the opportunity is given, for instance through a discussion board such as in this project, Millennials will use interactive media to share their fantasy themes and create symbolic convergence by forming fantasy chains through interaction with other Millennials. If we look at specifics, we can see that in light of the results, Millennials have no problem in tackling deep issues such as death, family problems, and faith. Millennials have a desire to express their opinions about certain subjects and how they perceive certain issues. Millennials can relate to characters and situations that are presented to them. There can be both agreement and disagreement within the fantasy chains.

What can we do with this information? This is the basis for the argument of media effecting the Millennials and Millennials turning around and affecting the media. The scenario says that is visual media taps into the fantasy chains of a millennial audience that they are targeting, then they can have insight into how to relate that media to them. In many cases this opportunity does not need to be provided specifically by the producers or creators of the media, but closely monitored. There is also an opportunity for insight on character development through the monitoring of these themes.

In regards to *Narrow Roads*, with the information gained from the student participants, the producer now has to ask these two questions. First, how has my video affected the Millennials? The responses have told us that the video has encouraged discussion with other Millennials. While the project was an extra credit assignment, students had the choice of doing another activity instead of watching and participating in the project. They also went above and

beyond just answering questions and responding. They formed discussions that asked questions, talked about deeper issues, and argued points. Students were also affected by the characters. Several students commented on how the characters were real to them, how a character could be related to them, and how they could understand why a character reacted the way they did. Identification was achieved. Millennials were affected by mystery element of video. Brad and Isaac's characters and scenes in the video offered something to look forward to as far as keeping the attention and providing an insinuation to watch the next episode. A symbolic convergence was formed and a community developed. Agreement, disagreement, and questioning are all seen.

The second question asked is how do the Millennials affect Narrow Roads and its write/producer? The producer is informed about his target audience. The likes and dislikes are noted, the thought process is understood, and topics of discussion and fantasy themes are clearly stated through the use of interactive media. Narrow Roads also receives a free analysis. Aspects of the film that were not seen beforehand are put into writing. Themes are worded in individual words that are not the producers and are restated. Ideas and fantasy themes from Millennials can contribute to the formation of future episodes. Responses to the elements of mystery, pathos, and Christianity can tell the producer exactly what needs to be changed with these elements, reinforced, or ignored. Millennials effects Narrow Roads by telling what they related to, who they related to, what was reality to them in the film, and what was too unbelievable about a situation.

The project proved to be successful in answering positively that media do affect the Millennials. This is seen through the responses and the symbolic convergence that has been



formed from the Narrow Roads project. This project also answers positively that the Millennials can offer an affect on the media.

### *Limitations*

Limitations that were present in this study included:

1. Student participants were Christian
2. Blackboard technical difficulties may have discouraged some viewers
3. Time limit for viewing and responding to film
4. There was an incentive to participate in the study
5. More participants would see more developed themes
6. Video was not a regular show, therefore students only had one episode to develop a relationship
7. Only a small age group of millennial teens are represented

### *Future Research*

There are several areas of research that need to be considered in the future. Because the video used for this project was produced and written by the author, it is not a show that one can actually study the long-term effects of fantasy chains developed about a show. Further research should take a show that is in the beginning stages and follow the fantasy chains of the millennial viewers that form not just from one episode. The more the viewer journeys with the show, the more the fantasy themes grow deeper and the fantasy chains develop as well.

One of the key elements to this project was the fact that many of the participants claimed a Christian affiliation, and the video was a Christian based film. Further research should look at how Millennial viewers of different beliefs form fantasy chains about visual media that they

watch. The significance of disagreement and agreement should appear through this research as well as a more debate style of discussion.

This study specifically dealt with millennial teens. Since, it has been discovered that viewing schema is developed by two and a half years of age; a study can be done on the fantasy themes of children. Interactive media is being highly used by younger children and this would be a highly significant study.

Discussion boards were looked at heavily in this project. Other forms of interactive media should be looked at as well. Blogging is a very popular medium that is ideal for presenting an opinion or a form of fantasy theme. It can also serve as a form of discussion board. Instant message conversations about shows or media could be a research subject, and even more specifically, chat rooms.

Through this project we have received a look at the historical context regarding the millennial generation and how media has built a relationship with them, and it has shown that relationship through fantasy themes and chains that formed symbolic convergence. Fantasy themes and chains are very effective in seeing the relationship between media and Millennials because it creates symbolic convergence which provides an atmosphere that is conducive to producing important information. The themes and chains showed how the Millennials were influenced, how they related, questions they had, concerns, and effectiveness. For the producer, they showed possibilities, effectiveness, and gave him more insight about the target audience. The study of the relationship between Millennials and the media is still in its beginning stages. Because the Millennial generation is still growing, there is still a great deal of research to be done. With the relationship that has developed there are certain to be more developments in the future of this millennial generation and for generations to come.

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## Appendix A

### Original Script of "Narrow Roads"

FADE IN:

#### INT. ASHLEY'S ROOM- NIGHT

Ashley sits at her COMPUTER in a room by herself. She clicks the mouse button a few times and then starts to type.

ASHLEY (VO)

"I've really struggled with how to get this whole story out. I really don't have the time to be writing a book, and I'm really not that dedicated to doing that. My Coms professor was encouraging everyone to start writing blogs as an on-line journal. So, I've decided to blog about my journey. I figure, I can just tell it one post at a time. It's a story that I really don't know where it started. A few years ago? In some ways, it seemed like there was never a beginning. But let's try here."

#### EXT/INT. CAR AT NIGHT- DRIVE THROUGH WOODED ROAD

KEVIN is driving. He yawns and looks over at LISA who is sleeping in the passenger's seat. He smiles and turns his head back to the road. He then frowns.

#### INT. JEFFERSON HOUSE- NIGHT- BEFORE THE CEREMONY

LISA balances herself on one foot in order to reach down and slid her foot into the painfully tight HEELS. She gives one last grunt before stomping her foot into the shoe.

LISA

"It's time to go, Kevin! I don't want to be late!"

She looks down at RACHEL sitting on the bottom of the staircase holding her PURSE. Lisa smiled softly and reached down and grabbed the bag.

LISA

"You know, it's usually never the woman who is waiting for the man to get dressed."

RACHEL (LAUGHING)

"Mom, its Dad we're talking about, remember? He's like one of those impulsive people."

ASHLEY( ENTERING)

"Obsessive Compulsion Disorder, Rach. And Dad isn't that bad."

Sound of footsteps behind Rachel make her jump out of the way just in time as KEVIN comes bounding down the stairs still buttoning his JACKET.

KEVIN

“C’mon honey we’re going to be late.”

Rachel snorted at her mother’s glare.

LISA

“We’ll be back later this evening, girls, and tell Liz not to be on the phone all night.”

**EXT/INT. CAR AT NIGHT- KEVIN LOOKING AT ENGINE**

Kevin is looking under the hood of the car with a FLASHLIGHT. He turns around to see a pair of headlights approaching them down the road.

**INT- CEREMONY**

DEAN WHEATON stands at the PODIUM looking out over the audience.

DEAN WHEATON

“Before she comes up, I’d like to say how proud Westfield University is to have such a gifted author on our staff. Lisa has been a professor of Psychology and more importantly in my book, a fellow colleague for over ten years now. Tonight, I want you to not think of us honoring an author, but a friend of our distinguished community. Dr. Lisa Jefferson, ladies and gentlemen.”

Dean Wheaton motions to LISA as she goes up to the podium. She pauses for a moment and looks out at the audience.

LISA

“As a child, I always dreamed of going to a place where all my questions about life were answered. I had questions about friends, family, and life as a journey. I found that place, and for years, I kept it as my secret along with many other secrets. My new book coming out this spring is the beginning my revelation of it all. A Place Called Unaware is not a book about psychological mumblings.

**EXT/INT. ON WOODED ROAD-NIGHT**

KEVIN sees that the car is still coming at him and shields his eyes from the light. He begins to wave the car down, but realizes that the car is coming at him. He jumps out of the way.

LISA (VO)

God knows, I’ve done enough of that. No, this book looks deep into life; the true answers to questions I know you have and I have heard so many people ask, especially my students. If you want my opinion, I don’t think anyone will be prepared for the journey it will take them on.”

**INT. JEFFERSON HOUSE- BASEMENT**

LIZ struggles to do her last few crunches before falling onto her back and trying to catch her breath. She then goes and workouts out with the DUMBELLS while the music blares in the background. Suddenly the music stops and Liz quickly turns around and sees ASHLEY standing by the CD player.

LIZ (dropping weights)

“What do you think you’re doing? Did I say you could turn it off?”

Liz walks towards her sister.

ASHLEY (COVERING NOSE)

“Whew! Well, stinky, I tried calling your for breakfast, but you obviously didn’t hear me. You’re going to be late for school if you don’t hurry up.”

LIZ (GRABBING TOWEL)

“I have a watch, Ashley. I’m not Rachel; she needs babysitting, not me.”

ASHLEY

“Just looking out for you sis.”

Liz wipes her forehead with the towel and roughly brushes by Ashley rolls her eyes and follows her sister up the stairs.

### INT. JEFFERSON HOUSE- KITCHEN

RACHEL is sitting at the table with KEVIN while ASHLEY stands at the counter. Rachel takes a spoonful of CEREAL.

RACHEL

“So, I have to read my report on the Civil War in front of the class today.”

Kevin nods as he looks over some PAPERS laid out on the table. Ashley laughs as Rachel scowls.

RACHEL

“And I figured I would talk about how all lawyers are like Nazis who try to manipulate the jury for there own gain and they should be given the death penalty.”

KEVIN (STILL READING)

“Rachel, that’s great, I know you’ll do fine on it.”

ASHLEY

“Rach, you know that trying to get through to Dad while he’s in the middle of working on a case is totally impossible.”

LIZ walks briskly into the room and grabs some MILK out of the fridge.

LIZ

“We’ve got to get going, Ashley. I can’t be late to first period again.”

She pours a glass of milk and quickly gulps it down. Ashley follows her out of the kitchen.

ASHLEY

“Bye, Rach,” Ashley says.

RACHEL

“Bye. It was nice to see you, too, Liz!”

LIZ

“Yah, whatever!”

Liz yells back as the door slams closed. Rachel shakes her head and looks at her dad.

RACHEL

“So, what is this big case, dad?”

Kevin leans back in his chair.

KEVIN

“Well, it’s not really all it’s cracked up to be. Just a dispute over some zoning laws that a company apparently skipped over due to some forgery of legal documents.”

Kevin stood up from his chair and started to clear the table.



“So, what else do you have today—besides your report?”

RACHEL (FIDDLING WITH SPOON)

“Well, Ashley and I were going to go see mom today?”

Kevin’s form stiffens but he continues about what he was doing.

“I mean, considering that today was the day she...”

KEVIN (GRABBING BOWL)

“You almost done, Rach? We really need to get going. Go grab your stuff and I’ll finish this up.”

RACHEL

“Sure.”

Rachel slowly stood up from her chair and walked out of the kitchen.

ASHLEY (VO)

“Dad, never talked about mom after the accident. He took all of her things, packed them up, and put them in the attic. It was hard on Rach because she was the youngest, but it was hard on dad because of the three of us girls, Rachel was like mom in almost every way.

## INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY

ASHLEY (VO)

“Liz was harder to figure out. We kinda had this sister enmity thing between us, and I didn’t know how to break through to her. She and I were so different.”

LIZ walks down the hallway at school towards a small group that is gathered around a locker.

SHAWN

“And she walks like a future homecoming queen, too”

LIZ

“Haven’t gotten it yet. Besides, do Homecoming Queens get detention for the entire week?”

SHAWN

“Late to first period again, huh.”

LIZ (ROLLING EYES)

“Only by a few minutes. The teacher is a prick, I didn’t miss anything.”

JAMIE

“Well, I have something else that might interest you. You know how no one knew why Brad Eckhart didn’t come back to school last year? Well, he’s back from what I hear.”

LIZ (RAISING EYEBROWS)

“He came back? Brad Eckhart who used to come to school with hangovers and slept with like half the cheerleading squad? He came back? They let him back?”

SHAWN

“Senior year. He’s in our graduating class now.”

JAMIE (TO LIZ)

“Yah, and from what I remember, you got pretty close to sleeping with him, too.

Liz casts a quick glance at Shawn.

LIZ (GLARING AT ASHLEY)

“But I didn’t. Besides, there are better ways to spend my time.”

SHAWN

“Like coming to hang out with us tonight after your little detention date? Maybe bring your lil sis along.”

LIZ

“Yah. I bring her and you’ll see what type of guilt trip she puts on you. She might even start quoting the Bible at you.”

They laugh.

SHAWN

“Well, as long as you’re there.”

JAMIE

“And I’m assuming there’ll be fun for **me**, Shawn. Make sure you bring some cute guys with you.”

### INT. LAW OFFICE- MORNING

KEVIN enters the office and walks by KATE’S desk.

KEVIN (NODS TOWRDS CUP)

“Morning, Kate. Got any more of that good coffee?”

She smiles.

KATE (SMILING)

“I think that’s the only reason you people want me around.”

She nodded towards the small room across from her.

“French kiss.”

KEVIN

“No thanks, Kate, but I’ll take some coffee.

KATE

“French kiss in the name of it, Kevin. (Sighs) You’ve already had a few calls this morning. A young man keeps calling to try to talk with you. There were some messages when I came into the office.”

KEVIN

“Well, I have to finish up the paper work from this case, and then I can call this person back.”

Kevin walked into the coffee room. The office door opens and JERRY walks in the door.

JERRY

“What a beautiful Monday morning, and I believe I smell something. French kiss?”

KATE (SMILING)

“No thanks.”

Jerry frowned with a confusing look. Kevin came out of the room.

JERRY (FROWNING)

“What you’ll let him have some, but not me?”

Kate shook her head and Kevin walked into his office. Jerry followed.

ASHLEY (VO)

“Jerry Brock wasn’t really our uncle, but we called him Uncle Jerry. He was my dad’s best friend and partner. The two had been together since college, and he had been a close friend of my parents ever since. Uncle Jerry was the one who stayed with us when mom died. He tried to keep us smiling under the circumstances. Jerry was the only one not afraid to bring up mom around dad, except for Rachel. Dad never got angry at Rachel though.”

JERRY

“How are the girls doing? I mean, today is...”

KEVIN

“I know what today is Jerry.”

Kevin sets his coffee cup down on the desk. Jerry shrugged and raised his hand in defense.

JERRY

“You can’t ignore it, Kev.”

KEVIN

“I bet I can, Jerry.”

### INT. ICE RINK

ASHLEY watches skating from outside of the rink and then sits down on the bench and laces up her SKATES before heading out on the ice

ASHLEY (VO)

“Ice skating was my world. It was something that I had learned as a little girl and grown to love. It was my freedom. Along with this girl Elisa, I taught classes to a couple of students three days a week. It beat working at a restaurant repeating the phrase, “can I take your order”, a hundred times a day. Some of my students were young kids, and some were people I knew from school.”

Ashley sees BRAD

Brad Eckert? You’re my student?

He laughs at Ashley’s surprised look.

BRAD

“Ashley Jefferson, how’s it going? I’m guessing by the look on your face that you weren’t exactly expecting me to show up here.”

ASHLEY

“No, not really, Brad. I did hear you were back though.”

Brad sits down next to his cousin, who is putting on her skates.

BRAD

“Yeah, that didn’t take long to spread around. Everybody was probably looking for me to come back with a hangover.”

ASHLEY

“Well, you didn’t have the most wholesome reputation, Brad. And when you didn’t come back last year—well.”

BRAD

“What was the best story? Was I in prison? Or killed? What?”

ASHLEY(SHRUGGING)

“I never paid any attention really.”

BRAD

“Probably the only one.”

ASHLEY

“ Let’s just get out on the ice”

BRAD

“Just make sure you take it easy on me.”

Ashley teaches Brad how to skate. At the end, they sit on the bench..

BRAD

“You guys are amazing.”

ASHLEY

“Glad you enjoyed yourself.”

BRAD (taking off his skates)

“I always do. Okay. So, I was thinking, Ashley—I know this is strange for you, but—I know you’re a Christian, too, and I was wondering what church you go to.”

ASHLEY (Raises and eyebrow)

“Hold up, Christian—too?”

BRAD

“I know. It’s not what you expected, but a lot changed in my life last year. God changed my life, but I really need to get into a good church, you know.”

ASHLEY

“Yah—um—I go to—First Baptist on Charles St. Sunday service at 10:30.”

BRAD

“Thanks, well, I’m sure that I’ll be seeing you around more. Great. See ya.”

ELISA

“Yah, see ya later, Ashley.

ASHLEY

“See ya,”

Brad walks off. Ashley sits down on the bench.

“Brad Eckhart? a Christian? Just wait till that spreads around.”

### INT. LAW OFFICE

KATE knocks on KEVIN’S door.

KATE

“Remember the guy that had been trying to get a hold of you all morning? He’s here and he says that he really needs to talk to you.”

KEVIN

“All right, Kate. Send him in.”

Kate steps aside and a thin lanky young man with glasses came in carrying a small PACKAGE. ISAAC nods to Kate and quickly walks over to shake Kevin’s hand.

ISAAC

“My name is Isaac Quinton, Mr. Jefferson. I was a student of your wife’s a few years back.”

Kevin watched Kate bit her lip and quickly close the door.

KEVIN

“It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Quinton. How can I help you?”

Isaac sits down across from Kevin.

ISAAC

“Well, I don’t know really how to start. I don’t know if she ever mentioned my name to you at all, but I was one of the students that helped her with research for her books.”

KEVIN

“Lisa never talked about work at home. She tried to refrain from that.”

ISAAC

“Oh—well, your wife taught me so much more than any other professor I ever had. She was challenging and she taught us not to just look at things, but to observe and go with gut feelings. That’s how she approached her classes and her books.”

Kevin squinted in confusion to where the conversation was going, and Isaac could see that.

“What did she tell you about the book *A Place Called Unaware*?”

Kevin shook his head.

KEVIN

“Like I said, we rarely discussed work at home.”

ISAAC

“So, you never asked her about the book at all? It was her passion to write.”

KEVIN(FRUSTRATED)

“Listen, my wife is gone. I don’t like to discuss it, and I don’t like to discuss the past. It’s dead along with her. So, if there is nothing more that you want to discuss...”

ISAAC (IN DEFENSE)

“I’m sorry, Mr. Jefferson. I didn’t mean to offend.”

Isaac took out the package.

“I received this book the day before your wife died. She told me that I should never keep it secret if anything ever happened to her.”

KEVIN(TAKING THE BOOK)

“If anything ever happened to her?”

ISAAC

“Mr. Jefferson, I don’t think your wife’s death was an accident. I think she knew.”

### **EXT. CEMETERY-AFTERNOON**

ASHLEY sits with RACHEL in the middle of the cemetery. Rachel is twirling a FLOWER in between her fingers.

RACHEL

“Do you ever think about what life would be like if she hadn’t died, Ashley?”

ASHLEY

“Of course. Everyday.”

RACHEL

“I think that she would have finished her book and been a best selling author and you could have continued to train in ice skating--- and Liz wouldn’t be acting so stupid, and Dad wouldn’t be afraid to talk to us.”

ASHLEY

“Dad and Liz are just hurting, Rach. You and I know that Mom is in heaven and that Jesus is in control. They haven’t gotten there, yet.”

Rachel looks at the tombstone and sighed while slowly placing the flower in front of it. Ashley puts her arm around her sister. Rachel looks up at her.

RACHEL

“But we keep praying, Ashley. They’ll get there. Right?”

### **EXT. OUTSIDE OF THE MOVIE THEATRE-NIGHT**

LIZ walks out of the movie theatre with the rest of her FRIENDS. SHAWN has arms around her waist and draws her closer to him. The group starts to head to individual cars. JAMIE heads off with two GUYS and gives Liz a thumbs up.

SHAWN

“So, where to know?”

Liz faces him closely.

LIZ(SOFTLY)

“We can go anywhere you want to take me.”

Shawn smiles and then licks his lips.

SHAWN

“Well, I have a few ideas. Get in.”

They both climb into the car.

### **INT. JEFFERSON HOUSE**

LIZ opens the front door to the house and shuts it softly. She walks into the kitchen and throws her BACK PACK on the table. As she is searching through the refrigerator, ASHLEY walks into the kitchen.

ASHLEY(TIRED,BUT FIRM)

“Do you know what time it is?”

Liz grabs a bottled of water. She looks at Ashley.

LIZ

“Yah, the last time I checked it was almost midnight, and I don’t know, that was like 30 minutes ago probably.”

Ashley shook her head in disgust.

ASHLEY

“Where were you, Liz? Please tell me you weren’t drinking again?”

LIZ

“You need to quit trying to act like Mom, Ashley. Last time, I checked, we don’t have one anymore.”

Liz goes to grab her bag from the table, but Ashley grabs her arm.

ASHLEY

“I’m not trying to be Mom, but I do care about you, you know. You’re my sister.”

Liz roughly twists away from Ashley and grabs her sister’s arm gripping it hard. Ashley winces.

LIZ

“I don’t need my little sister giving me a lecture or trying to be all Christian with me. I need you to back out of my life.”

Liz pushes her way by Ashley and exits the kitchen. Ashley sits down at the table.

ASHLEY(VO)

“It was hard. Mom had left us as a divided family. Rachel and I had our faith in God to keep us going, but Dad and Liz wanted nothing of it and didn’t react to well to it.

### **INT. KEVIN’S ROOM**

KEVIN sits in bed and looks at the BOOK. He thinks about opening it and then puts it away and turns off the light.

ASHLEY(VO)

Dad never listened to Mom when she pleaded with him to go to church with us. The weight was becoming unbearable at times.

**INT. ASHLEY'S ROOM**

ASHLEY typing on the computer

ASHLEY(VO)

Of course, I didn't see that the answer to everything was just around the corner, and God had already set something into motion that would change our lives entirely."

## Appendix B

### Fantasy Themes and Chains

#### COMS 101-25

#### Theme Chains

##### Chain 1

- thought that some of the themes that stood out in the movie were:

Grieving for the end of something and moving on with your life (The father and oldest sister had not moved on with their lives after the mother's death)

Trusting Jesus to take care of things (The two younger sisters wanted the father and oldest sister to move on, but they trusted in Jesus to bring healing.

- The three main themes that I found were:

Guilt felt by the father for bad choices he had made in his marriage (ex. not being involved with his wife's life) the older sister knew her that her new lifestyle was wrong and would not have been approved by her late mother.

Suffering is seen by everyone in the family. Each is trying to cope with the sudden death of the mother. They are also suffering in that they are not there for one another for support.

There is a sense of renewal in spirit seen in the middle sister during her skating lesson with a student that apparently has had a bad reputation around school. This new friendship is somewhat therapeutic because we see her having fun; this is something that is not seen anywhere else in the film (or at least I have forgotten). We see the two sisters sitting beside their mother's grave grieving but at the same time accepting the death. They communicate with each other and are making valiant attempts to move on.



So I am confused about the end. Did the mother commit suicide or was she killed. It was obvious that the guy at the end of the movie was hiding something but what? I think that partly my problem was that I could not understand half of what he was saying.

- So ya also there was something about that book she had delivered to the husband. Could it have been a journal? Don't know. I think the dad was basically trying to shut everyone else out because he had too much he was trying to deal with besides his kids. He put himself in the priority slot where his family should have been
- I think that this is correct, the father did seem self-centered. I wonder if any of us would do anything differently, the character is so real that I feel that his hurt is not making him turn away from his children but to a side of himself he has not been made to face. One of regret and shame, but like the rest of us with a few prayers, and time light is shown on the dark parts of ourselves and we can heal.

## Chain 2

- One theme I noticed was that the sisters that moved on seemed to be enjoying life again, I'm sure all of them were deeply touched by their loss, but the two that are struggling the most are the father and the oldest sister. They can't seem to let go and let GOD. The ones that are doing fine have decided to let Jesus comfort them, can't you tell the difference?
- Actually, I don't understand what your questions are. But, I agree with your thought. After mom's dead, the father should have a responsibility to lead his children to peace of mind rather than avoiding the fact. However, he was always taking care of himself because I think that his moral view was self-centered. In the video in that he was not an active person who find solution. I mean he did not want to talk with somebody even during meal. Later, he will have a visible change in his life with faith.
- After watching the movie I think that the father should have done more to take care of his family emotional wise not just physically with money. I think that he needed to pay more attention to his daughters and I also think that the roles should have been switched because the middle daughter had to go around taking care of the family and be the "mom" and the oldest was to immature and did not want to have anything to do with any one. What I found weird was the ending what was that guy talking about and who was he talking to? What was meant in all that and what was so important about the book? this is just what I got from the film
- The difference between the Christians and the non-Christians in the story was a theme that I noticed as well. It seems like the Dad and older sister were trying to deal with their grief by ignoring the problem and getting involved with other things such as work (for dad) and partying/social life (for daughter). The two younger girls were relying on God to heal and comfort them.

## Chain 3

- This was about the story regarding death and life. When people confront with the sudden death related to their family or love ones. It seems how people cope with bereavement and get over grief about death.  
There were five in the family at the first time. I think that the mother must be a Christian. After the mother was gone, I could separate two groups from them. One group represents Christian including the middle girl and the youngest girl. The other one represents non Christian including father and the oldest girl.  
Father and the oldest girl seemed not to be able to accept the mother's death because they did not know how to cope with grief about death. Only the way they knew was forgetting the mother's death. On the other hand, the middle and the youngest girl knew about how to overcome grief because they believed not only Jesus let their mother lead to heaven, but also their mother was still alive in heaven looking them. So, they seemed to be able to get over grief about the mother's death and enjoy their life.  
I think that we have to know about why we are here and where we should go back regarding life and death. In other words, this video tells us about the origin, identity, meaning (purpose), morality, and destiny.
- Well said, I agree with your points. It seems that the Father and oldest daughter were struggling because they wanted to be strong, but they are beginning to break down. The Father will, hopefully be able to read that book, and eventually become a born again Christian, but the oldest will need more time, and love.

#### Chain 4

The themes got out of the clip was that

- 1.) The mom had died.
- 2.) The father was depressed and bitter about it
- 3.) The kids were a wreck about the whole thing.
- 4.) Two of the girls were Trusting in God to provide and protect and comfort.
- 5.) The family was falling apart because of the death of the mother.
- 6.) There is a mystery of the book, what is it? What is in it?
- 7.) I'm feeling left out on the ending.

#### Chain 5

- The themes I saw in the movie were ones we are faced with every day. It seems that the family was parted in a sense, the father was bitter about his wife's death and one of his daughters (middle sister) has seemed to have found God through it. Another of the daughters (the youngest sister) seems to feel left out, and the other (oldest sister) seems to be following the wrong path.

#### Chain 6

- I noticed a theme of a heart in need and a desire for something more in life. How I saw the theme was in the father and older sisters struggles with the death of their wife/ mother.

Why this theme stood out to me was the contrast between the saved members of the family and the unsaved members of the family and also in the confusion of the father and older sister.

#### Chain 7

- I saw the theme of brokenness. The Father is the guy who never shows his sadness and his true feelings. He is hurting deep inside, but he wants to be strong for his family. Redemption and change were also evident. The student that lived a broken meaningless life had finally found a purpose. He wanted to live serving His Savior, and he wanted others to know about it and rejoice as well.

### Character Analysis

#### Analysis 1

- The character of the Oldest Daughter was not a Christian, and was dealing with her mother's death by comforting herself with hedonistic things (sex, alcohol, maybe even drugs). She will probably become a Christian by the end of the film, due to the persistence of her younger sisters' prayers and their examples. She's probably going to make mistakes and have a breakdown first though.
- The father was dealing with some deeply rooted feelings of guilt. By keeping himself busy with his work, he would make less down time to think about his wife. In the end, we see him on his bed by himself and reaching for the book that was given to him by "that guy". The narrator makes it an appoint at this time to tell the audience his religious background and his late wife's multiple requests for him to join her at church; this could be an indication that something will happen to him be reading the book. I believe that somewhere in that book he will find a satisfaction and perhaps a change of heart toward his family and to God. I still want to know what's up with that guy. Anybody?
- I don't know well, I think that guy seems to be only a messenger to hand over a book to him, Jefferson. The father seemed to be always busy in working without caring for his children. I think father has to be a leader of the family, but he didn't care. Only the middle daughter takes care of the family with faith. Later, I don't know when they are going to change; the oldest one and father are supposed not only to regret the days when they have lived without Jesus but also to change the new ones with faith.
- for on i know this girl in real life lol but yes in the film i believe that she was blinded because of her mothers death and was looking to physical objects instead of turning to God. I think by how she broke down and cried at the end shot of the movie she will turn to God in the end.

#### Analysis 2

- The father seems to be having an extremely difficult time. I think he's in denial a bit in the sense that he thinks he can keep his feelings bottled up and not have to deal with the

issue. He doesn't want to talk with anyone about it, not even Rachel. I think by the end of the story he's going to receive an eye opener and this will lead him to GOD, he's going to let himself go.

- I think you're right about that. In fact I think that the mystery guy is going to be a key in the whole ordeal.

### Analysis 3

- In this video, the father seemed to be difficult to accept his wife's death. He never wanted to talk with anybody, even his youngest daughter, about her death, because he couldn't not only believe that she was gone but also realize what is more important in his life. In the video 3, I saw some boy brought a book which his wife wrote to give him. However, he didn't read a book because he was not strong enough to come over her wife's death. Later, I think that he will read a book and know the truth that she told him. Finally, he is supposed to lead his family to peace of mind out of difficulties.

### Analysis 4

- The dad seemed to be grieving a lot and not dealing with it in a healthy manner. He was throwing himself into work and trying to ignore the problem rather than dealing with it. Also he isn't really there for his daughters who need him. I think that although he is trying to deal with his grief by ignoring it and not talking about it, the book will force him to think about it. I think that in the future he will realize how much he misses his wife and that he needs help. Hopefully he will turn to God for help.

### Analysis 5

- The father in this clip seemed at first even that he wasn't happy at all. Leads me to believe that there were already problems with the family; possibly the father was work-a-holic. This would explain the lack of attention that he is now not showing the family. It seems as though the father wants to exclude himself from the family because he doesn't know how to deal with the issues at hand; or maybe he isn't able to think any farther than depression and toil inside his mind. It could possibly have been that he didn't catch the situation or approach the situation from the right angle from the very beginning. His lack of responsibilities toward his family is pushing the older daughter away from the family that is obviously not the only thing that is pushing away the daughter. As for how the situation is affecting the youngest daughter, her father, not being there for her is going to possibly throw her into a psychological stage called "fear and doubt." Because of her age if she doesn't connect with the parent she may become apprehensive to connection with others later in life.

### Analysis 6

- The father is a hard working man who at least in my opinion has his children at heart. His circumstances have made him bitter, but his children still mean the world to him. Like any other person he strives to do his best and carry on while trying to understand why he is going through what he is going through. I think in the future, he is going to heal because he has many people around him who are willing to go through his situation with him. Also the young man who said he knew his wife seems to have some sort of encouragement for him concerning her.

#### Analysis 7

- think that something will unfold the death of the mother/wife and this will have a positive effect on the family. I believe it will lead to the fathers and sisters salvation and the healing of the family's loss.

#### Analysis 8

- I think her name is Lizzy, or Elizabeth. She seems to be heading down a path that will lead do a dark place, where no one will love her, or take care of her. She has not chosen friends that will build her. They are just looking for a good time, and have no idea what the consequences will be. In the story, I would hope that she will eventually see the love of God through her family, but I think she will lead a shameful lifestyle before she sees God's love and free gift of Salvation.

## COMS 101-33

### Theme Chains

#### Chain 1

- One of the most constant themes in the movie is coping. Each of the family members deal with the loss of the mother in different ways. Attached to that theme is moving on and we see that at different stages in the father and the three sisters. Transformation seems to be another theme. Most every main character in this video has changed in some way due to life circumstances. Brad was transformed by God into a new person. The father became increasingly guarded. Isaac's life was changed by his professor. Liz changed dramatically since the accident. The whole family's life changed. God, pain, and personal influence all transformed different lives. Other themes I noticed were: Spirituality, Guilt, Hope, and Family.
- I agree that a major theme was coping. All of the characters were trying to cope with the mother's death. I also agree that most of the characters were transforming in different ways.
- I think one of the re-occurring themes is guilt. The father seems to want to forget his wife completely because he feels responsible for her death. The middle daughter seems

responsible because she never spent that much time with her mom or opened up her private life to her.

- I also agree with coping... Liz and the father dealt with the death of the mother almost identically.... father trying to find an outlet in work and Liz found a outlet through school mainly through here peers.

## Chain 2

- One major theme that I saw in this clip was division. The family was divided into two groups: the Christians and the non Christians. The Christians seemed like they were trying to keep the family together and the non Christians were just trying to survive the mothers death. Another theme that I saw was a theme of hope. The character Ashley personified this. Although the father and Liz seemed somewhat hopeless it seemed that Ashley and Rachel had hope that the father and Liz would find hope.
- very good observations. division was very evident in the video. I don't know if the family was trying to "survive" the death, considering how long ago it was but they were definitely divided in how they dealt with it. hope also was prevalent as well. good job in noticing both of those themes.
- I agree with Lisa. This video clip does seem to be about division. The middle sister and the younger sister are Christian so they can cope better with the loss of their mom. They have an assured hope of her salvation and that they'll see her again. The father and eldest sister don't believe yet in God so they can't cope with the loss. They think mom might have been selfish in leaving them alone. They don't think they will see her again.
- These themes where definitely present in the video. Good job.
- I agree with you about the division in the family and how having the believers and the non-believers created separation in their home. I also like what you said about hope; Ashley certainly did embody that characteristic and was a shining light for her family.
- Agree with the theme of hope. The hope that Rachel and Ashley had came from their belief and faith in Christ, whereas Mr. Jefferson and Liz didn't know how to have hope because their lives were not centered around hope. The Lord brings peace and hope in times when He sees you are troubled, Rachel and Ashley knew that and trusted in that.

## Chain 3

- The theme of this video is how the different family members dealt with the death of there mother. There were two types of people that divided the family; the Christians and the non-Christians. The two non-Christians of the family was the father and the oldest daughter, and the Christians where the middle and the youngest daughter. They where split into two groups to show how differently they reacted. The Father dealt with the situation by just saying she gone, don't talk about her, forget her. The oldest daughter dealt by doing mindless superficial things to fill that missing hole. The two younger

daughters they suck together trying to hold the family together which was almost impossible because they had the least amount of power.

#### Chain 4

- One of the themes that stood out to me in the episode was that of emptiness. Both Mr. Jefferson and Liz struggle with this throughout the episode and try to fill their lives with other activities such as work and drinking to cover up the sorrow that they hold inside. Another theme that stuck out was family, or the lack there of. The Jefferson family is split; Mr. Jefferson and Liz are unbelievers, while Ashley and Rachel are Christians which creates some tension within the family. Mr. Jefferson and Liz are also avoiding the thought of Mrs. Jefferson's death and almost trying to push it out of memory, while Ashley and Rachel want to discuss things and recover from her death in a healthy manner.

#### Chain 5

- I agree with the many different themes already discussed. I found that Mr. Jefferson and Liz, as non Christians, lived of the world. The audience can easily see the difference in the way the other daughters handled themselves with the issue of the death of their mother. They knew that as Christians, they were to live in the world, not of the world, as their other family members were doing.

#### Chain 6

- I believe the themes in the story were the differences in how Christians and non Christians handle worldly situations. In this scenario the situation was the death of a loved one. You could tell that Ashley and Rachel were at some kind of peace with their mother's death and found themselves at that peace because in their faith in Christ. On the opposite side, Mr. Jefferson and the old daughter didn't know how to come to peace with the death of the mother because they were not living in the body of Christ. Instead, Mr. Jefferson chose to ignore the situation, and the oldest daughter chose to outlet her emotions through sex and alcohol. I think the major theme is the differences between living for Christ and living for yourself.

## Character Analysis

### Analysis 1

- Rachel is the youngest of the three sisters. Since her mother's death she has witnessed her family divide right in front of her. Her father has trouble speaking to her and refuses any mention of his wife. Her sister Liz pushes the family away and seeks security in her friends. She pushes God out of her life completely and embraces a rebellious lifestyle.

Rachel's oldest sister, Ashley, trusts in God and tries to be the missing mother figure in her family. Rachel has all these influences in her life and she is at such an impressionable stage in life. She needs security and comfort. She believes in God but probably struggles to see Him. Her feelings are torn in so many directions: she seeks to connect to her distant father; she finds peace, comfort, and security in Ashley; and she sees a bad example of how to deal with the situation in Liz. She is a very intelligent girl (as seen by her description of her speech) and has vast potential. Granted she continues to look to Ashley as a role model, I suspect that she will grow to be a very influential person. She will probably struggle through high school with loneliness after her sister moves forward in life but will continue to look to God for security. Rachel will overcome her extreme circumstances and see the grace of God in her life.

#### Analysis 2

- Character: Ashley

I think that she is probably the one that is going through the most. She had to give up ice skating already, and there are probably going to be many more sacrifices that she is going to endure for her family (mostly for the youngest daughter). In the future I can see her having a hard time hanging out with friends and dating. She is under more stress than anybody in the family and she might miss out on a lot of opportunities because of her situation.

#### Analysis 3

- Brad Eckhart just came back to school after missing a year. Before he left school he did not have a good reputation but while he was gone he became a Christian. Now that he is back he is dealing with trying to establish a new reputation while also establishing his relationship with God and other Christians. I think he will have problems convincing his old friends that he is different and they will cause temptations to go back to the way he was. I also think that he will eventually date Ashley

#### Analysis 4

- Ashley the eldest sister is trying to keep the family together as mom would have done. She's trusting in God but not seeing His abilities yet in this situation. So Ashley will eventually get tired of her dad's avoidance and of Liz's rebellion and stop caring for the family. She might just focus on caring for Rachel and let Liz hurt herself.

#### Analysis 5

- The character Liz had a lot going on in her life. She was dealing with the death of her mother and was not a believer, so obviously did not trust that God would bring her through that time of immense sorrow. Liz put her faith in worldly things, such as a boyfriend, her social life, and drinking to fill the emptiness she was experiencing, and disregarded anything wise her sister Ashley had to say. Liz filled her life with "junk" and hid her true feelings about life and the death of her mother behind a mask. I think that in the future Liz will have an awakening experience and realize how much she needs the Lord. Her sister Rachel and Ashley are certainly a positive reflection of a life filled with



God. Even near the end of the episode the viewer could see that Liz was starting to breakdown.

#### Analysis 6

- For the character playing dad. I think he is having a hard time dealing with the death of his wife. I think in the end he will read the book that was given to him, and he will accept Christ into his life.

#### Analysis 7

- Mr. Jefferson took his wife's death the hardest. he would find his work as an outlet but he was later had a intervention from a former student that gave him a book and told him that his wife's death was not an accident. I think curious to find out more about this, he will read the book and begin to investigate with the former student.

#### Analysis 8

- I find Brad as an interesting character. With the way the film left off at the end, he seems to be becoming a dynamic character. His integrity will be challenged as he goes back to school and sees old friends from the old lifestyle. I think that in the future, as a new Christian, may be quite an influence on Liz, the rebellious daughter. I find that Brad's change, if sincere, will cause her to really think about life other than at the specific moment.

#### Analysis 9

- I found Brad to be an interesting character in the story because I feel like I was once in Brad's shoes. When I was younger, I was rebellious in many ways and didn't know how to live a Christ-centered life, just like Brad. Seeing Brad confess that he came to Christ, reminded me of how wonderful of a realization that was. I hope that in the future Brad will continue with his new found faith and can cause the non-believers, such as Liz, to become dynamic characters in the story, bringing them to Christ.

### **COMS 101-41**

#### **Theme Chains**

##### Chain 1

- I believe the theme of this movie is that everyone needs God in their lives to get through rough times. When a tragedy happens like this, God is the one we can turn to, who we can guarantee will be there for us always.
- can see where the theme of needing God could come from and I completely agree that it was a prominent theme in the third scene because it was said that Mr. Jefferson and Liz did not have Christ in their lives, and they seemed to be the most miserable and lonely ones in the entire movie. Therefore, seeking God is a very possible theme for the entire movie.

- agree with Caitlyn. If Liz and the father realized that they needed Christ in their lives then they would not be a miserable and things would come easier to them because their living their lives for God.
- Yes, I also believe that seeking God is a prominent subject in this movie. Now, if only Liz and her father would make the proper steps to seeking the comfort of God's love!
- This short story shows that unpredictable things can happen and through all of life's problems we will be alright if we just trust in Christ and go to his presence for all answers, situations, etc...
- I agree god will send certain test through out life to see how much you believe in him
- I would essentially agree with the fact that this theme is present in the film, BUT, not entirely. "Everyone needs God in their lives to get through rough times," I take this to mean that in order for all (inferred by "everyone") to get through a rough time, all need God. Hopefully this is a correct restatement. I believe that the movie indeed depicts 2 characters who "depend" on God in this rough time. However, the story also portrays 2 characters who don't depend on God during the rough time. "To get through rough times," or restated: in order to get through rough times; this statement is proven wrong in the fact that the 2 characters who don't depend on God indeed make it to the end of the movie or to the furthest part in the "rough time" that we are able to view. The movie shows two paths that can be taken, one ("depending on God"), however, not being the only "successful" one. Getting through rough times still occurs without those who are "getting" being dependent on God, which the movie portrays.

## Chain 2

- In the first clip I sensed a theme of frustration because Lisa was frustrated and worried about writing her secrets down and sharing them with the world, and Mr. Jefferson was frustrated with his life in general because the fact that he was a little OCD and his work was driving him crazy and now his wife was dead. Overall, I think this set the scene for sort of mystery about Lisa (the mom). In the second clip my feeling was that a lot of people were being ignored and forgotten about. The most prominent example was with Mr. Jefferson, who started off the morning ignoring whatever his daughter, Rachael, said because he was in mourning, also he ignored his secretary's feelings as he just ordered coffee, and when his friend Jerry came in, who he is usually open with, he shut him down as well. Ashley ignored much of Brad's feelings because she had this preset view of why he got kicked out of school and all, then she turns her back and is ready to ignore his feelings again by spreading rumors about his claim to Christianity. Ashley also treated her older sister Liz like she was a child and ignoring the fact that she could take care of herself. Lastly, in the third scene I felt a huge theme of regret. Starting with Mr. Quinton who came in to speak to Mr Jefferson about his wife and he revealed to him that his wife may have committed suicide. Mr. Jefferson expressed regret in that he did not even know his wife was writing a book or what it was about, going back to how he ignored a lot of things.
- I saw all three things that you mentioned. I thought your observations were good because, although I recognized all three themes that you cited, you interpreted some of

the characters actions much differently than I did. Your perspective of the characters was different and caused me to re-evaluate the film, its themes, and the perspective by which I interpreted the video. Ashley did have a pre-set opinion of Brad, but seemed to still accept him and feel comfortable with him. I do think, however, that her intentions were not to spread rumors about his claims to Christianity - but that her monologue about him becoming a Christian was more of her amusement at the idea that someone like Brad would ever become a Christian. (Thank the Lord he does save them, after all Christ came to save the lost - and we all certainly are/were lost - some just won't admit it). I never thought of the mother committing suicide until you mentioned it. However, I think it is a viable way to interpret the film (given Quinton's role). The movie wasn't very clear about how or when she died - it seemed like someone might have been run-over or hit at one point, I'm not sure. Nevertheless, I thought that was a good observation. I also thought that maybe Elisa could just feel that something might happen to her, or was about to happen to her - and entrusted Quinton with her book? in case something did actually happen to her. I think Ashley alluded to the fact that her mother was a Christian - and therefore may have had some premonition or awareness of an oncoming tragedy. Again - that's a far stretch, and I'm not sure.

### Chain 3

- The major theme to me, seemed to be the contrast between confronting tremendous loss in life (i.e. grief, depression, loneliness, abandonment, hopelessness, loss of meaning & direction) **without** religion (namely Christianity - a relationship with Jesus) - versus - confronting the same loss, and the accompanying feelings and emotions, **with** a relationship with Christ.
  - Without a true relationship with Jesus Christ (and the stable and fortified natures that result from a dependency in Him, and assurance that all things are accomplished through and by Him, for our good - Rom. 8:28), Mr. Jefferson & Liz turn to alternative means to satisfy the void left in their life by the loss of their wife, and mother, respectfully. While Mr. Jefferson turns to a life of numbness, ignoring and distancing himself from everyone, Liz turns tries to find contentment in social life (alcohol, parties, hanging out, sex, friends, etc.). I thought this was an interesting contrast to make between the father and daughter, further illustrating the theme that the two characters feelings of loss are not satisfied via either extreme.
  - The other two daughters, Ashley & Rachel - I think, portray how loss is dealt with from the Christian perspective. All family members experienced the same loss, all were deeply hurt. However, through dependence upon Christ alone, Ashley & Rachel were able to alleviate their pain and gain comfort through a method that provided true satisfaction for their feelings of loss.

This theme seemed to be appropriately illustrated by the contrasting lifestyles & attitudes of the aforementioned characters. How they reacted to different people - did they allow

them into their lives of push them away, how they felt after trying to cope with the situation in their ways - did it work. Sometimes music and/or lighting was used to help convey the theme as it related to a particular character(s) also.

I'm not sure exactly how quinton or the newly converted Christian guy fit into this particular theme, maybe they don't, or perhaps I should watch the video again.

- completely agree. I think that Levi is correct is both themes especially the first one. I believe that this film shows how awful life without Christ is for unbelievers. I do not understand how one can go through his life without the presence and comfort of God.

#### Chain 4

- "Practically parentless," as seen in the youngest sister, is the theme that most stood out to me. Most clearly in the scene where they're eating breakfast can one see the apparent control that work has over the dad, thus portraying the seemingly lack of parenting on his part. Without a mother at this point in the story, the youngest sister is left with the second to oldest sister for any sort of parental figure as is depicted in the cemetery scene. The youngest is left practically without a parent.
- Another theme that stands out to me is that of tension. This is seen in the nature of the relationship between the 2 older sisters, how the younger is trying to influence the older for the better, this however not being appreciated by the older. I think the real producer of the tension is that the older knows that the younger is most likely right in what she says and does. Tension is also noticeable between the dad and the student of his late wife, in the scene in the dad's office. The tension results from the student's attempt to "talk about the past." I would say that in this case as well, the real source of the tension is the dad's knowledge of the fact that the student is most probably right, in that he should talk/deal with the past instead of not. So, tension is seen in 2 relationships where in both, one person, in part, calls out the other, and the one who's called out refuses to even deal with the allegations leveled at them, whether to agree or disagree with the credibility of them. The people making up each relationship then stand in disagreement, and it is this lack of agreement that comes through as tension.

#### Chain 5

- I believe that one theme is what one person does affect many people around them good or bad. The theme that "what one person does affects many people around them good or bad" is clearly seen in the things that the father does. For example, he ignores his family and thus the family suffers and so forth. Another theme is reputations spread quickly. For example, this is seen in the rebellious teenage boy in the video. Once people heard of the things that he did everyone knew about it; once people knew that he was a Christian the news would also spread quickly.

- I agree with this and think that actions lead to more and more actions and a small thing can turn and grow into a much larger thing if not dealt with properly.

#### Chain 6

- I believe that after the Mom died the Jefferson family fell apart. The need for Christ, being saved, and being a Christian is a recurring issue in the movie. The father and Liz seemed caught up in themselves and with the "world" rather than with their own family and Christ. The father didn't pay attention to his daughters, he just put himself in his work after his wife died. The oldest daughter Liz was caught up in herself, friends, and popularity. Rachel and Ashley tried to keep the family together and remember their mother but their father made it hard. If the father would pay attention to his family instead of the law firm then he would be at peace with himself and the loss of his wife. Liz needs Christ before she ends up the talk of the school like the boy who got kicked out. I believe if the family took time to realize their faults and come together then they would all be happy because their living their lives for God and not themselves.

#### Chain 7

- The theme of the movie seems to me like the family needs to trust and believe in god through these tough times cause it says god gives strength to those who believe in him and thats what they need to do.

#### Chain 8

- I think that a major theme in the movie was hurt leading to more hurt. Most if not all of the characters in the movie were hurting in some way, which made them hurt other people. Some of the characters did this without thinking about the consequences of their actions and in turn hurt more people.
- I would disagree. Hurt does not always lead to hurt! I would agree that **most** of the characters in this video are dealing with change and confusion, but I would not call it all pain. The Jefferson family would be the only characters dealing with pain. However, all of the characters in this video are learning to deal with change. Granted some of the characters are conflicting with others but I would not say this is the overall theme in any way!

#### Chain 9

- The movie, for myself, presented the different ways people can treat trauma. Although, in each of the characters' lives, one constant was ever present, and that constant was the comfort of Jesus. Throughout the video, one can see how Jesus' presence in people's lives can make dealing with trauma much easier than the people who tried to do things all alone.

## Chain 10

- Contrary to the response of many others, the theme of this short video does have to do with dealing with the tragedies in life, however, the writer is trying to portray a broader range than just needing God. The characters in this play are all dealing with the same exact tragedy, yet they all have different relations to the tragedy and different ways of dealing with it. The writer's prominent goal appears to be that God is the best way of dealing with tragedies, but I would not say that is the overall theme.

**Character Analysis**

## Analysis 1

- I think Rachel has a lot going for her. She went through a bad experience like the rest of her family, but she's turning to God. I believe she'll have a very good future because she's letting it all fall in God's hands. She knows she can't do anything to change the past, so she's coping with it quite well.

## Analysis 2

- Even though Mr. Quinton did not appear until the last scene, I think the movie left it so that he would try to follow in Elisa Jefferson's footsteps. Quinton was a bright student who only wanted to share his opinion about Elisa with her husband because he admired her work and wished to reveal some secrets of his own like she did. However, he was nervous to because there was a possibility that Elisa took her own life as a result of revealing her deep secrets that could ruin her reputation. I believe that Quinton will write his own book about his journey and his trials that he had kept stuffed inside; and I bet he will dedicate his writings to Elisa Jefferson for inspiring him to express himself through writing.

## Analysis 3

- I think Brad is the newly converted, former "bad guy." I thought he was an interesting character in the video. I'm not sure why he was included except that maybe to show that Ashley was willing to accept him regardless of her pre-set, stereotypical opinion of who she thought he was (based upon her previous knowledge of him & his reputation). Hopefully he will offer some amazing testimony to God's grace - both to students at their high school, and to the Jefferson family - especially Liz, who would probably be more open to him concerning Christianity than anyone else. I'm glad the video makers included him because he provides some relief to the story - in the midst of the hardship and what seems like an unjust God – Brad provides a clear picture of the mercies of God. I love characters like Brad because they show how good God is, how there is nothing we can do that God can't save us from, and how God is capable of producing life-changing

transformation in anyone. Brad is a good picture of all Christians - we're all sinners, unfortunately!

#### Analysis 4

- Liz is going through a life of confusion and she is trying to find herself through problems she is facing. In the future she will turn out all right because i think her sisters are going to influence her in great God honoring ways.

#### Analysis 5

- The dad appears to be struggling with dealing with the death of his wife, even quite a while after she passed away. Apparently the wife was a professing believer in God/church goer, and the dad isn't. I suppose what the movie is trying to depict is the fact that the dad has allowed himself to be pushed further away from acceptance of beliefs which coincide with his wife's as a result of her death. In light of my understanding of the Bible, i.e. the story of Pharaoh, I would wager that the dad stands in true risk of reaching a point of no return where repentance/believing will become close to impossible and certainly improbable. The fact, though, that his two youngest daughters are believers may work "in his favor." Were the two daughters to continue life in a righteous manner while continually praying for their dad, there's no reason to believe that their "righteous prayers" wouldn't avail much. That is, the prayers of the righteous do seem to be fascinatingly powerful, whereby the repentance/believing of the dad may in time come to pass.

#### Analysis 6

- I think that the character Brad Ekheart is very interesting. First, he is the "bad guy." Second, he has such a harsh reputation because of the way that he used to be. During this movie, he probably is going through types of regret for things he had done, but you can tell that he is different by the way he acts and his former reputation. I don't completely understand the reason why he was in the film, but he by himself is a good story line.

#### Analysis 7

- I think Rachel is a strong Christian for her to be so young. The only person in her family that truly pays attention to her is her older sister Ashley. Ashley and Rachel get the big picture of still putting God first in their lives no matter what they are going through. I believe in the second part of the video Rachel talks to her father about her paper over breakfast, her father doesn't pay attention to her. I think Rachel is neglected and her father puts himself into his work because his wife is gone. The father should still take interest in his children no matter what happened. Eventually if Rachel doesn't get the attention she needs she might become rebellious like her older sister Liz. Then the family will eventually deteriorate. Once the father and Liz catch on that their lives are not as good as they could be, then everything will pull back to normal.

#### Analysis 8

- Liz is heading down the wrong path. She needs to find herself in Christ and not her friend popularity and guys. If she keeps going down the path she is on she might end up pregnant or at a dead end to where she quits on her self.

#### Analysis 9

- Ashley is one of the strong characters in the movie and could be considered the "motherly type." She knew who she was and even though there was so much turmoil around her, she knew that her trust lies in Jesus Christ. While other characters had given up all hope because of their loved one's death, Ashley was there to be a solid place for her younger sister and other family members, even without their support.

#### Analysis 10

- Alright, Liz, she's such a hard character to figure out. Ok, that was a joke; she wears her attitude out on her sleeves. Liz, being one of the characters in the movie without the comfort of Christ, has developed her own way of dealing with her mother's death. I think it would be a fair assumption to say that Liz has shrunk away from her family, especially from her Bible thumping sister. By withdrawing from the comfort of her family, Liz has created an emotional shell that she is constantly reinforcing through extracurricular activities (exercising) and a negative school social life (hanging out with that guy after the movies and getting home late). Not only has Liz worked to create this emotional shell, but she has also developed an uncaring attitude towards doing what's right for herself and her family. It's almost as though the death of her mother made her own life pointless. It's interesting to see that people who don't have the comfort of Jesus Christ often feel as though their life has no purpose when faced with trying times. I forgot to mention what I believed would happen to Liz in the future. Well, like I said, right now, it seems as though Liz's life has no purpose. The ideas of right and wrong have blended together, and with the loss of caring about right and wrong, a new sense of hopelessness arises. But there is hope! If Liz was to stay on her current path, things would begin to spiral even more out of control (like the situation with that boy after the movies), but the important thing to realize is that near the end of the film, Liz was beginning to show signs of what I believed to be true sorrow and regret. If I am reading Liz properly, she may end up coming to her sister for help, and her sister will lead her to the comforting arms of Jesus.

#### Analysis 11

- Mr. Jefferson is facing the tragedy of losing his wife, the one he loves! During this time of mourning many people constantly saying things that allow him to realize how much he missed out on while his wife was alive. He realizes how he did inquire about her work or the things she loved most! He is now grieving the fact that he missed out on so much. However, he does not deal with this the way the two youngest daughters do; instead, he holds it all in and will not allow his feelings to show. He needs some one to talk to and eventually he will breakdown and hopefully his best friend is there to support him and care for him when he alone can do it no longer. His best friend needs to be there to point Mr. Jefferson to God when he realizes that he can not deal with this on his own.

#### Analysis 12



- The guy is suffering and moaning the loss of a wife. Which resulted in him pushing far away from her religion. I think as time passes and he opens up more that he will have a break and then turn to god.

**Appendix B**  
**Table of Results**

<b>Number of Students Participating</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Character Analysis of Father</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Character Analysis of Liz</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Character Analysis of Ashley</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Character Analysis of Rachel</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Character Analysis of Brad</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Character Analysis of Isaac</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Major Themes</b>	<b>Coping with death Division in the family Faith in God Family togetherness Grieving Guilt</b>
<b>Fantasy Chains of 2 or more posts</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Fantasy Chains of 4 or more posts</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Fantasy Chains of 6 or more</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Positive Outlook in Fantasy Themes</b>	<b>72%</b>
<b>Negative Outlook in Fantasy Themes</b>	<b>28%</b>