Teaching with

Love Factually

THE PODCAST

A guide for undergraduate instructors

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Why teach with the Love Factually Podcast?

01 Popular culture shapes our beliefs

Far more people learn about attraction and relationships from movies and other media than from scientific research. Many don't even know that relationship science exists.

02 Hollywood gets some things right—and some things wrong

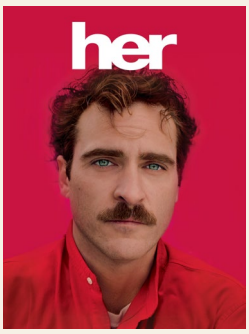
Films communicate countless ideas about how relationships begin, develop, and endure. Some are consistent with scientific evidence; others are misleading and potentially harmful.

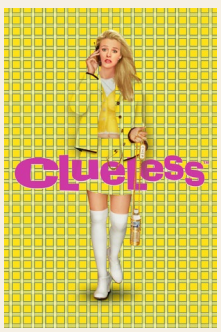
03 Students must learn to critically evaluate these messages

By examining films through the lens of relationship science, students learn to distinguish evidence from assumption, and they become more thoughtful consumers of romantic messages.









What is the Love Factually podcast?



Co-hosts Paul Eastwick and Eli Finkel take a deep dive into one movie per episode, using relationship science to examine the ideas about love and romance in the film.

EXAMPLE EPISODE:

Episode 52: Sleepless in Seattle (1993)

Each episode contains four sections:

1. What Does the Film Get Right?

> *The power of motivated perception: Annie wants to be with Sam, so she perceives small positive signs with him as "destiny" while ignoring equivalent signs with Walter.*

2. What Does the Film Get Wrong?

> *"Soulmate" beliefs are harmful, not benign: The movie implies that Annie and Sam are meant to be together, and so they fall in love instantly, and they presumably live happily ever after.*

3. What Moral Issues Does the Film Raise?

> *The film normalizes severe stalking behavior: Annie stalks Sam from across the country, but we are encouraged to forgive her because she's adorable and Sam falls for her anyway.*

4. What Does the Science not Yet Know?

> *Does infidelity occur through small incremental steps? Annie convinces herself that she is doing nothing wrong because each step toward Sam (and away from Walter) is small and defensible.*

Assignment 01: Write a Letter



Students write a two-paragraph email/letter to a friend or family member that translates relationship science into everyday language, using film as a medium.

EXAMPLE EPISODE:

Episode 02: La La Land (2016)

This assignment has three parts:

1. Watch the Movie.

Choose one (or more) of several available films.

2. Listen to the Episode.

Check out the podcast episode that corresponds to the film.

3. Write a Two-Paragraph Letter to a Friend.

Paragraph 1 (10 points): Explain a course theme that the film gets right or wrong, using an idea from the podcast.

> *Seb and Mia serve as a "secure base" for each other's career ambitions.*

Paragraph 2 (10 points): Explain a different course theme that the film gets right or wrong, but that the podcast did not discuss.

> *Within the Triangular Theory of Love, Seb and Mia experience passion and intimacy, but not commitment (i.e., they have "romantic" love).*

WHY THIS WORKS

Students practice applying science and explaining research to a nonexpert, without simply repeating class material.

EASY TO IMPLEMENT

Flexible take-home assignment; grading is straightforward if students are given a limited set of films to choose from.

Assignment 02: Analyze a Scene



Students watch an instructor-provided clip (e.g., the epic fight from Marriage Story) and identify what the film gets right according to class material. Students listen to episodes in advance to learn critical thinking skills.

EXAMPLE EPISODE:

Episode 22: Marriage Story (2019)

This assignment has three parts:

1. Describe the Scene.

Describe the scene, interaction, or theme in enough detail that someone who hasn't seen the clip could understand the aspects of it that are relevant to your analysis (4 points).

2. Explain the Science.

Succinctly explain the relevant relationship-science principle or concept and describe at least one specific empirical finding from the course (lecture or reading) that supports it. Your description should make clear what the researchers found (8 points).

3. Integrate the Evidence.

Explain specifically how the scientific evidence you discussed in Part 2 helps us understand why the scene, interaction, or theme from Part 1 is something the film gets right (8 points).

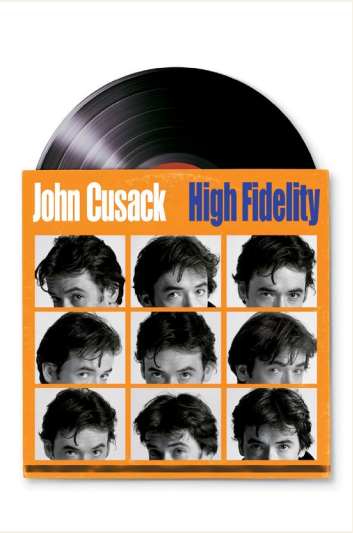
WHY THIS WORKS

Students move beyond recognizing a concept: they must recount evidence and explain how it supports their reading of the film.

EASY TO IMPLEMENT

Works with a single short clip, and clips can be shown during exam periods (with or without advance notice).

Assignment 03: Research Report



Students trace a claim from Love Factually back to the original research and evaluate how well the evidence supports the podcast's conclusions.

EXAMPLE EPISODE:

Episode 27: High Fidelity (2000)

This assignment has four parts:

1. Choose a Theme in the Movie.

Identify a core, arguable message of the movie.

> *A central claim of the film is: Sharing personal tastes predicts relationship quality.*

2. Translate into a Hypothesis.

Turn the movie's claim into a testable hypothesis.

> *Similarity in music preferences predicts attraction and relationship satisfaction.*

3. Seek the Evidence.

Find original research (with help from the Love Factually Substack).

> *Does similarity in music preferences matter? Read: Lewis et al. (2011, PNAS); Selfhout et al. (2009, J. of Adolescence); Tidwell et al. (2013, Pers. Rel.).*

4. Evaluate the Science.

Compare what the study (or studies) found with what the movie and podcast claimed. Identify strengths, limitations, and whether the conclusions were justified.

WHY THIS WORKS

Students practice reading primary research, distinguishing findings from interpretations, and evaluating claims.

EASY TO IMPLEMENT

Works as a short written assignment or discussion. Substack episode notes provide a starting point for locating original studies.

Assignment 04: Ethical Analysis



Students identify what bothers them about a film, then distinguish objections to its scientific accuracy from objections to the values it promotes.

EXAMPLE EPISODE:

Episode 44: Fatal Attraction (1987)

This assignment has three parts:

1. Choose a Movie that Bothers You.

Identify specific scenes, characters, or messages that seem troubling, misleading, or offensive.

2. Separate Two Kinds of Objections.

Scientific: Is the portrayal inaccurate, uncommon, or misleading?

Moral: Does it promote values or messages you find harmful or objectionable?

3. Make Your Case.

Support scientific objections with research. For moral objections, explain the values behind your judgment. A film can be inaccurate, immoral, both, or neither.

> *Scientific objection: Dan cheats for no discernable reason other than "opportunity," which does not fit the infidelity research literature.*
> *Moral objection: The audience is meant to fear that single, working women like Alex pose a threat to the nuclear family.*

WHY THIS WORKS

Students distinguish evidence-based claims about how relationships work from value judgments about how people should behave.

EASY TO IMPLEMENT

Works as an essay, discussion, or presentation. Students choose their own films; assess scientific and moral reasoning separately.

Assignment 05: Present a New Film

Students (in teams) select a movie NOT covered on Love Factually and give a short presentation evaluating its messages about relationships through the lens of science.

This assignment has four parts:

1. Choose a Film.

Pick a film with themes that revolve around attraction and close relationships.

2. Listen to Podcast Episodes about Similar Films.

Listen to Love Factually episodes to internalize how the different segments are structured, and to cultivate the relevant critical thinking skills.

3. Organize Themes into Three Categories.

Draw from original studies and class material to justify which themes from the film belong in which category:

1. What does the film get right?
2. What does the film get wrong?
3. What does the science not yet know?

4. Give a Presentation to the Class.

Give a clear, engaging presentation that explain the themes and the relevant science in accessible language and respond to questions from classmates..

WHY THIS WORKS

Students practice applying scientific evidence to familiar stories, explaining research clearly, and speaking confidently before an audience.

EASY TO IMPLEMENT

Teams can distribute the workload, and the assignment provides an entertaining way to end an academic term.

Additional Assignments: Create Something

Students move beyond evaluating Hollywood to creating and testing ideas about relationships.

01 Design a Study

RESEARCH DESIGN

Choose a claim about relationships that is implied by a film. Propose a study that could test whether the claim is true.

Assignment: A short research proposal

02 Write & Perform a Scene

CREATIVE APPLICATION

Write a short scene that illustrates a principle from relationship science. Perform it for the class, then explain the research behind it.

Assignment: Script and/or performance

WHY THIS WORKS

Students practice scientific reasoning in two distinct ways: collecting evidence and communicating ideas creatively.

EASY TO IMPLEMENT

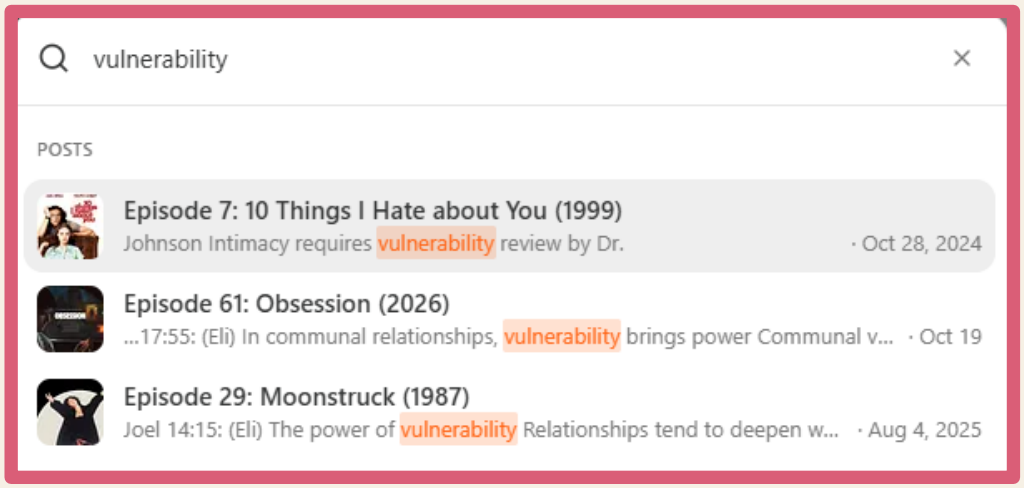
Offer either option or let students choose. Both can be completed individually or in small groups.

Find Film Examples for your Lectures

The Love Factually Substack contains show notes – including relevant journal articles – for all the movies covered on the podcast. Search for any topic to get ideas for film clips and/or articles to cover in class.

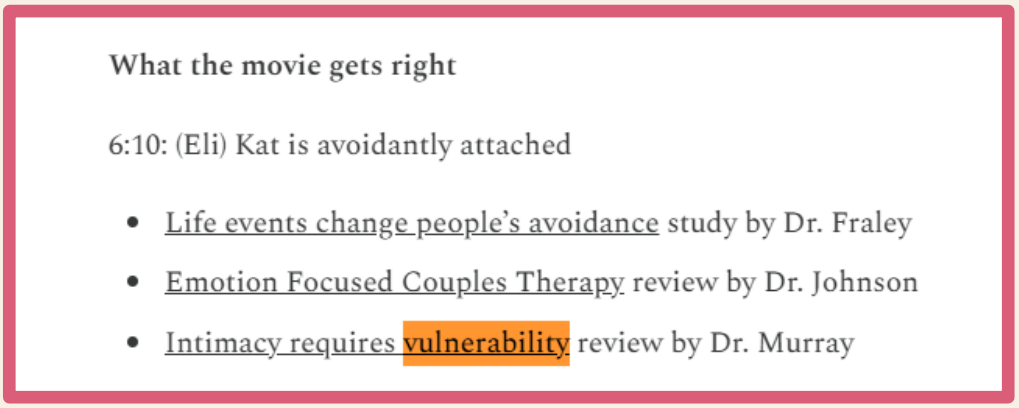
1 Search for a keyword

For example: "vulnerability" yields relevant moments across many films.



2 Find the moment in the episode

For example: Click on the episode, Ctrl+F "vulnerability" to find timestamp.



FROM SEARCH RESULTS TO CLASSROOM EXAMPLES

Open an episode to find the relevant discussion, podcast timestamp, and links to research articles. Try related keywords, too (e.g., vulnerability, vulnerable): Substack searches for the precise word.