

The Effects of Romance Novel Readership on
Relationship Beliefs, Romantic Ideals,
and Relational Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Gerbner & Gross' (1981) Cultivation theory has been used to study the effects of television on people's perception of reality, showing that heavy viewers of television develop a more unrealistic view of reality than light viewers. This unrealistic perception of reality also transcends to false views of romantic relationships. As a result, individuals who are heavily exposed to television begin to adopt and develop dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals. They begin to have high expectations and standards for their own relationships.

The focus of this thesis was to study the effects of romance novel consumption on relationship beliefs and romantic ideals. Results showed that women in their late teens and early twenties had very high ideals and expectations when it came to relationship characteristics, but did not have many dysfunctional beliefs or romantic ideals. They tended to be very satisfied in their romantic relationships, and were more satisfied when their actual relationship resembled their ideal relationship. Results of this study also indicated that women were not just solely drawn to romance novels that supported their currently held beliefs, but postulated that such an attraction could also have originated from their own hopes and desires for their actual relationship. The content of these books influence the thoughts and perceptions of million of readers around the world, making it into a very powerful medium. Similar to television, romance novels portray reality in many unrealistic ways, therefore influencing the perceptions that readers have about social constructs and relationship standards and expectations.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will examine how dominant themes and ideologies in romance novels help to influence and cultivate dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals in its female readers. The beginning of my thesis provides some background information and history on romance novels and their formulaic natures. This information will help readers better understand the role in which romance novels play in the lives of women all around the world. The questions I will answer are:

- *What* is the presence of the romance novel in today's culture?
- *Why* do women read romance novels?
- *Where* in the text do dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals arise?
- *How* are these beliefs and ideals adopted by readers?

First, I will provide some brief statistics on the romance novel industry and its readers. Second, I will offer four reasons for why so many women read romance novels. These reasons are as follows: (1) nurture deprivation/ recapturing intense feelings of love, (2) entertainment value/ escapism, (3) female empowerment, (4) dealing with patriarchy. Third, I will use scholar Helen Mae Sterk's (1986) nine basic stages of a romance novel plotline in order to point out when and where certain dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals are introduced. These beliefs and ideals incorporate what is considered to be "repetitive themes and dominant ideologies." Fourth, I will address the different ways in which female readers are influenced by these repetitive themes and dominant ideologies, and adopt them into their philosophies of good, happy and successful romantic relationships. Some theories that will be addressed in this section are Gerber and Gross' (1969) Cultivation Theory and M. M. Bakhtin's

(1986) Addressivity and Assimilation Theory. Finally, I will propose my hypotheses in relation to the research I have done and the information I have accumulated.

In order to test my hypotheses, I have created a study in which female college students will be surveyed, through a website, on their romance novel reading habits, their romance genre preferences, their actual and ideal relationships characteristics, their dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals, and the level of satisfaction they feel in their relationship(s). The results from this study will help indicate whether or not exposure to romance novels does in fact influence the relationship beliefs and romantic ideals of its readers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is the presence of the romance novel in today's culture?

According to Kristen Ramsdell's (1987) definition of a romance novel, it is "a love story in which the central focus is the development of the love relationship between the two main characters, written in such a way as to provide the reader with some degree of vicarious emotional participation in the courtship process" (pg. 4). Romance novels present relational lessons, proposing that with perseverance, trust, and faith, love will prevail (Benjamin, 1999). These novels have been around since the 1950s.

Unfortunately, statistics on novels and the individuals who read them have been difficult to gather, and what has been gathered are usually fractional and focus on one specific genre or area.

According to the most recent statistics, romance novels constitute 40% of all general paperbacks sold (Stoffman, 1999). It places first in the list of books bought by all kinds of women. Second comes historical novels, many of which are only thinly veiled

romance novels, followed by the distant third, mysteries. Together, romance novels and historicals make up 47% of book purchases made by women (Wood, 1980). Still, mass-market sales continue to boom, even among women who are, by any standards, successful in life- women with careers, in graduate schools, and involved in satisfying relationships with men. College women, on the other hand, have different rankings in their book-buying activities. For them, romances constitute only 16% of their book purchases, ranking fourth in preference behind historicals, best-sellers; and mysteries (Wood, 1980).

Harlequin Enterprises, a publisher based in Canada, controls about 80% of the romance market (Grescoe, 1996; Stoffman, 1999). In 1992, sales had boomed to \$346 million. After Harlequin bought out Silhouette, the biggest American-based publisher of romances, they were able to monopolize the romance novel industry. According to market research on North American readers done for Harlequin Enterprises, results show that:

- 70% of women readers are under 49 years of age
- 45% of them have attended college
- 79% are involved in heterosexual relationships
- 66% own their own home
- 68% read a newspaper everyday or nearly every day (a figure that is higher than the national average)
- 71% purchase romance novels at least once a month (Linz, 2001, pg. 13).

Although romance novels are considered beneath recognition by many of the people who study literature, they are found to be incredibly fascinating by large numbers of women. Research shows that romance novels have universal appeal. Currently, Harlequin publishes in 26 languages and 108 countries (“Her Passion,” 1993). Nearly all

readers of romance novels are female (Jenson, 1984). Women of all ages, careers and ethnicities are attracted to these novels.

Based on the results from surveys done on Harlequin readers, romance readers are virtually a “cross-section of the whole female population” (Mann, 1981, pg. 13).

According to these studies, the median age of North American readers is 41 years old. In relation to their work life, 58% work outside of the home, and the median household income is \$35,600. The women who read these romance novels come from all types of professions: lawyers, professors or even managers. In relation to relationship status, about 60% of these readers are married (Stoffman, 1999).

Just as romance novels appeal to women from all demographic segments, so too do the heroines. As R.C. Hubbard (1985) states it nicely:

She represents many women, all of whom may be heroines. She may be a young woman or as old as 45. She may be small or nearly six feet in height. She may struggle with hardships like divorce, a child born out of wedlock, a troubled husband, but she is not weak or ordinary. She is most often highly skilled, artistic or well-educated, occasionally holding a graduate degree...her energies are devoted to her career and her independence, and she maintains healthy self-esteem...She may be a virgin, but most often she is fully aware of her own sexual needs, and when she is not promiscuous, she is sexually active...Further, she does not readily accept a marriage proposal until she is sure that she and her hero can negotiate terms (pg. 120).

There are four key characteristics that are common to all romance novels:

- 1) a heroine
- 2) a hero
- 3) a conflict-ridden story
- 4) a happily-ever-after ending (Barlow, 1992, pg. 47).

This seems to be the formula, in its simplest form, by which romance novels are written.

Although scholars may postulate that most novels strictly adhere to this one single formula, there are actually many different genres of romance novels that readers can

choose from. There are romances that revolve around time-travel, science fiction, fantasy, mystery, and even westerns (Benjamin, 1999). These variations in theme help to fulfill the readers' expectations, yet at the same time offer them a predictable and guaranteed happy ending. What happens to the characters within these romances depends on the logic of poetic justice. The hero and heroine never fail to find each other, and evil-doers are always punished.

Why do women read romance novels?

Reading is an experience, and a cultural one at that. It is an integration of reader and text in which they both have inherent characteristics and qualities that create an individualistic and distinct outcome when combined (Tompkin, 1980).

Women may be drawn to romance novels because they allow them the opportunity to confront messages and meanings that have value to their lives. In accordance to Tompkin's (1980) views on the combinational effect of the reader and text, Norman Holland (1980) also states that romance novels affect readers psychologically. He states in his work:

All of us, as we read, use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves. We work out through the text our own characteristics patterns of desire and adaptation. We interact with the work, making it part of our own psychic economy and making ourselves part of the literary work- as we interpret it. For, always, this principle prevails: identity recreates itself (Holland, 1980, pg. 124).

Both Holland and Tompkin believe that the content found in romance novels do affect its readers psychologically. One way in which text affects readers is through the shaping of one's identity. This study will examine the effects that romance novels have on one's relationship beliefs and ideals. The way in which this process occurs is that readers seek

out what resonates in them from the text. This step is considered to be a “recognition of the Self”, and once the connection is established, the reader is open to the adoption of new meanings and messages. In this way, the text, which already contains dominant ideological meanings, can influence the reader’s thoughts and actions. As Sarah Benjamin (1999) puts it, “the reader and the text combine to be responsible for meaning production, consequently specific qualities of the textual object significantly influence the meaning(s) that are absorbed” (pg. 68). Benjamin believes that the cultural experiences captured in romance novel reading are derived from very real psychological needs and desires. The women who read romance novels are actively seeking to identify and explore, along with the heroes and heroines, relational conflicts and concerns (Benjamin, 1999).

There are also other reasons given for why so many women read romance novels. As the statistics show, there is a huge fan base for these types of books, and women all around are devouring them. The reasons given can be broken down into four categories:

- 1) nurture deprivation/ recapturing intense feelings of love
- 2) entertainment value/ escapism
- 3) female empowerment
- 4) dealing with patriarchy

Nurture Deprivation/ Recapturing Intense Feelings of Love

One reason provided for why women read romance novels is to fulfill the needs of a nurture-deprived reader. Suzanne Juhasz (1988) believes that there is a nurturing bond between the mother/writer and the daughter/reader that helps the reader to further develop her own identity. Juhasz claims that human beings have inherent gender-based

psychological needs, and romance novels help to meet the needs of those who are born female. She states:

In contemporary romance fiction, women want meaningful work, but they want love more – and this may be understood as a revelation of how central the original deprivation has been, how crucial is the yearning for the preoedipal mother and for the bond, at once mutual and unconditional, we believe should have been our birthright. Indeed, quest for achievement in the world matter; but love comes first – or ought to have (Juhasz, 1988, pg. 250).

Although feminists may vehemently disapprove of her theories, Juhasz believes that heroines abandon their careers and independence for male companionship because romantic relationships cater to the deepest feminine needs for love and support. As a result, romance novels are functional in that they help women regain what they deeply crave – the feelings of being nurtured (Juhasz, 1988).

Another major researcher who studies romance novels and their effects is Janice Radway. Radway (1991) in her study of romance readers concludes that romance novels provide readers with the opportunity to experience the type of care and attention that they give to others (pg. 100). She states:

Reading romance novels provides vicarious emotional nurturance by prompting identification between the reader and a fictional heroine whose identity as a woman is always confirmed by the romantic and sexual attentions of an ideal male. When she successfully imagines herself in the heroine's position, the typical romance reader can relax momentarily and permit herself to wallow in the rapture of being the center of a powerful and important individual's attention. This attention....provides her with the sensations evoked by emotional nurturance (Radway, 1991, pg.113).

Radway agrees with scholars of her time that the content found in romance novels help to influence and shape the identities of its readers. She also adds the idea that romance novel reading not only influences thoughts and beliefs, but also acts as a way to escape into

another world and take on the role of a fictional character. This identification with the literary heroine may promote vicarious feelings of desirability and importance of an intensity often found only during the initial stages of falling in love and courtship (Benjamin, 1999; Radway, 1991).

In her study, she finds that women want to feel what it is like to be the object of a passionate love relationship, one in which the man's entire energy is directed at wooing and winning the woman. Without the heroine, the male hero dies. With her, he lives. In the culture of the romance novel, the male hero is the 'dialectical entailment' of the heroine. At least here, the hero's existence depends on the heroine. Unlike the men of the real world, this man wishes to share every aspect of his woman's life (McGee, 1985). In these books, readers live (or relive) the intense feelings of that first all-encompassing love, a love stronger than even a parent's love. By reading romance novels, women may be able to achieve either for the first time, or again, feelings that they miss and would like to feel again in their lives.

Radway concludes that women want to participate in a relationship that grows from communication rather than lovemaking. As Helen Mae Sterk (1986) says, "Women read to feel as if they are part of a mutual relationship in which the man and woman feel equally strongly about one another." This shows that women place a high value on mutual love. It is among their priorities, and is a major part in their lives. These women read romance novels because there is something deeply important in the content of these novels that touch a chord within them in relation to their standards, beliefs and values. As a result, a great deal of their beliefs and life decisions will be based on their desire for the ideal romance and relationship.

Romance novels help to promote the idea that love is great, and one is not truly living if they have never experienced it. Love is fulfilling and blissful! Merely existing and receiving a man's love is enough! Love is a central component in these novels. All actions and behaviors are based on love or the lack thereof, which helps to explain the motives and emotional displays of the characters. In these novels, love is true and pure and a very strong force to be reckoned with for it can *conquer all*. Women who read these romance novels are reminded about the kind of feelings induced by falling in love, of being truly valued and cared for. Therefore, it is no wonder that researchers believe romance novels meet a need for nurturance.

Entertainment value/ Escapism:

Radway also believes women read these novels in order to escape from their oppressive social responsibilities- children, family, and less than satisfying love lives. Reading in general is a way to spend a few hours in one's imagination. As Benjamin states, "The romance novel's capacity to manufacture personal time/space may draw women to the experience, and, the fact that these environments provide a particularly feminine narrative, might be what keeps women returning to this particular genre" (Benjamin, 1999, pg. 74). This escape may not necessarily refer to a foreign world; in fact, women still find solace in reading about a world similar to their own, just much better. In other words, a familiar utopia (Radway, 1999). Negative commentary has also been derived from this theory. Women who read romance novels are said to be weak and unable to deal with the "real world". They read because they have the desire to remove themselves from a harsh and unwelcoming world.

Female Empowerment

In addition to escapism, women can become empowered through the messages found in romance novels. Women are empowered through the attainment of knowledge. Those who read romances, especially historical romances, can learn about new places and people.

Romance novels are also a source for sexual issues. In a world that often denies female sexuality, romance novels provide the opportunity to explore, understand, and inform women of their own sexual natures. Romances allow women to develop their sexual identity, which may in turn, lead to a stronger personal identity. The stories show women how to be comfortable with their sexuality, and helps them understand that their bodies are not dirty and untouchable. The women learn how to be “intelligent owners” who are “in control of what is theirs” (Friday, 1991). The erotic themes and passages allow women the pleasure of role playing with the characters in the books. They are able to explore sexuality in a safe way that is both freeing and acceptable to most.

Janice Radway postulates how women readers, by identifying with heroines, might learn ways of dealing with and solving their own personal dilemmas, develop greater personal understanding, and receive validation. Through the context of the romance, readers are given the chance to role-play and see the outcomes of possible solutions to real life problems. Readers are given the possibilities for courses of action and consequences of those actions. This role-playing gives the reader a feeling of control over her environment, and the strength to overcome the hardships that she personally has to face. She interprets the stories as “chronicles of female triumph” since the heroine always conquers the hero in the end. The stories are about intelligent, independent, yet

traditional heroines that achieve mutual love and respect at the end of the novel, leaving the reader feeling triumphant also (Radway, 1984).

As Hubbard (1985) states, the reader's ability to identify with the fictional characters acts as a sense of validation that the reader herself and the values she holds is "OK". Nina Baym, another scholar of the field, asserts that romance novels show female readers how valuable they are as individuals even though they might appear to have little or nothing to call their own (Baym, 1971). The reader's values are further reinforced by the idea that her perspective is acceptable and even shared by other women. Women find that they are not alone in the way they choose to live their lives, and in so doing, they find a community of women with the same mindset. They experience a "ritualistic" bonding with others like them, and through such an experience, they are able to find out what makes them similar to other women and what they need to do in order to be happy in their roles as women. In this way, readers can examine patriarchal attitudes and confront personal fears in a safe environment.

Tania Modleski (1982) believes that romance novels serve as a coping function. She states, "romance novels work as narrative strategies for smoothing over the tensions they encounter in their daily lives – running a household, being a caregiver to children, and a loving wife to a husband."

Dealing with Patriarchy

The presence of patriarchal discourse within the romances has led many academic theorists to denounce the genre. Many have criticized romance novels as being "anti-feminist", and brainwashing the women who read them with traditional patriarchal values. In these novels, the women do not feel fulfilled unless they have a man in their

lives, the women strive to be good housewives and mothers, and the women are usually powerless in comparison to the dominating men they encounter. As Germaine Greer (1970) so vehemently puts it, “the traits invented for the hero have been invented by women cherishing the chains of their bondage” (pg. 202). Critics claim that romance reading is really an act of patriarchal reinforcement. Yet, even with this critique, there are millions of women who read romance novels. As Juhasz (1988) says, “the perspective which condemns romance novels as patriarchal reinforcement is not only limiting but far too quick to condemn without proper evaluation of content and potential.” Juhasz understands that there is a powerful element of romance reading that readers can relate to. Women rely on these romance novels to help them fulfill deeply psychological needs. These romances affect and influence readers in psychological ways that scholars have yet to investigate. This study will focus on how romance reading influences the beliefs that women have about relationships. These romance novels may do more than amuse and entertain, they have the potential to shape human thought and action by reflecting certain aspects of culture. They may influence that shape of that culture by persuading readers to think and act in one way rather than another.

Janet Patterson, another scholar who has been known to criticize romance reading, nevertheless admits that romance novels have played a major part in women’s lives. She concedes that:

Harlequins address this fundamental tension in women’s lives; the Romances create and solve the problems of social bonding in a patriarchal world, but do so in a female language created by the joint effort of the narrator of the heroine. Because the narrative technique is female...Harlequins can be seen as active attempts by readers to interpret their world through their own language (Patterson, 1986, pg. 80).

In romance novels, there is a world familiar to and populated by women, a world centered on the private lives of women and more specifically, on the private concerns of women (Robinson, 1978). It is a woman's world, and it is written in "woman" language for better comprehension. Romances, through both content and the way that content is structured, set the parameters of women's images of themselves as women. They define for women what it means to be feminine. Romances model a feminine life, showing how to derive the most benefit from such a life. In concurrence with Patterson, Lillian Robinson concludes that women find confirmation of their values and affirmation of their importance through these novels. These novels reassure women that they are of value simply because they are women. It lulls female readers in by telling them that nothing has to be done in order to be worthy of love. Therefore, romance novels may create a patriarchal atmosphere much like the world today, but through the text, female readers can explore and question such customs, and examine how they fit as women within the system. In addition, the happy endings provide a positive resolution to patriarchal problems, where women's identities and lives are accepted and appreciated.

By providing affirmation and support, romance novels have also tended to influence the thoughts and actions of its female readers. In romance novels, there is a great indication of certain ideal priorities for relationships that should take precedence over all else in a woman's life. These novels can be very persuasive in their portrayal of certain relationship beliefs and expectations.

Where in the text do dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals arise?

Now that the issues concerning *what* romance novels are, and *why* women read them has been addressed, the next question is *where* dysfunctional relationship beliefs

and romantic ideals are derived from. In order to answer this question, one must first get into the basic plotline of a romance novel. This is also known as the Romance Novel Formula. By understanding the plotline, one will also see how certain relationship beliefs and ideals have been formed.

Today's romances have settled in a predictable pattern. Romance novels are written in a formulaic style that promotes repetitive themes about romance socialization topics, and these themes transcend cultural boundaries. In addition, many of these themes are in accordance with basic social norms. Helen Mae Sterk (1986), a great scholar in the field of romance literature, has outlined nine basic steps in the plotline of romance novels. She bases her outline off of Silhouette books. Silhouette is one of the most successful romance novel publishing companies in history; therefore, Sterk's choice to focus on their books is understandable.

Sterk's nine basic plotline steps consist of:

- 1) the "Cute" Meeting
- 2) the Complication
- 3) the Circumstantial Proximity
- 4) the Escalation of Attraction
- 5) the Congruence
- 6) the Betrayal
- 7) the Crisis
- 8) the Union
- 9) the Coda

1. "Cute" Meeting

During the first step, the Cute Meeting, the hero and heroine first meet, usually in a situation that puts them at a disadvantage. In some stories, this first meeting is really played out and star-crossed lovers are described as *falling in love at first sight*. From this initial meeting, both individuals know that something has drastically changed in their

lives in that one moment in time. They may not know it is love yet, but they are fully aware of the effects they have on each other. Since there are so many novels that stress the idea of *love at first sight*, there may be many women who believe such an occurrence is usual, and will happen to them when they find their one true mate. In this first step, the stirrings of another romantic ideal is introduced, that of *soulmates*.

The idea of soulmates is one of the biggest romantic ideals found in love stories. The idea postulates that destiny plays a role in romance and relationships. Destiny creates and brings together potential romantic partners who are meant for each other based on predetermined factors. A person who finds his/her soulmate will achieve and maintain relationship happiness instantly. Also implied in this belief is the idea that long-term relationship success is not attainable with anyone else except for that one “true” soulmate. As a result, individuals who believe in this idea spend their time trying to find the “right mate”. Accepting a partner or relationship less than one’s ideal implies failure to live up to one’s potential. Adopting such a belief may lead to quickly ending relationships where initial satisfaction is low. According to scholar Bjarne M. Holmes (2004), the idea that one can find a soulmate that fits perfectly with preconceived standards and beliefs is an unrealistic view that fails to take into account the work required in developing and maintaining a healthy and loving relationship (pg. 3).

This first meeting sets the basic power relation between the hero and heroine. No matter how they meet, the heroine finds herself, in some degree, at the mercy of this strange, yet attractive man. When the hero first sees her, he desires her in a sexual manner. The heroine, on the other hand, is both attracted and repelled by his desire. Unable to deal with such a change, she shies away from him. Most commonly, the man is

depicted as having both physical and psychological power over the woman; thus, she feels as if she is at his mercy. He acts and she reacts. His desire enables him; hers enfeebles her (Sterk, 1986). This power play touches upon another dysfunctional belief – the idea that *the sexes are different*. Men are shown to have different physical and emotional needs than women have.

2. Complication

The second step is the Complication, in which the two individuals face some problem that creates dissension between them. This step helps enforce the dysfunctional belief that *disagreement is destructive* in a relationship. This may be the couple's first bump in the road, yet the problem is shown to be a threat to the existence of the relationship. If a couple is not able to compromise or find a solution that they are both happy with, then the only other option presented is a breakup. The complication is depicted as extremely negative and not at all beneficial to the relationship. This type of mindset is considered dysfunctional because in reality, relational psychologists have realized that arguments and complications are very natural and normal for couples, and may even be good for relationships due to its ability to teach couples how to compromise and communicate with each other.

For readers who have had relationship experience, and have not been able to get pass this step (the complications in their relationship), may adopt a pessimistic view about the ability for couples to compromise or change for the continuation of a relationship. This is where the dysfunctional belief of *partners cannot change* becomes developed. Women who have encountered failure at this step start to believe that people don't change over time, and that their partners cannot change in the end. These women

are drawn to romance novels because the fictional couple always get through and resolve the problems in their relationship.

In this step, the power play continues in which the male hero holds more power than the female heroine. The female's resistance to the male ignites his desire for her. He finds her dissatisfaction at having to deal with him amusing and appealing, so he further presses his advantage by teasing her or laughing at her discomposure. She, on the other hand, can't help but be attracted by his strength of will and control over his life. As a result, she finds herself desiring him as well, but she fights to suppress her emotions because she doesn't want to lose herself. Her attraction reinforces the idea of *traditional sex stereotypes*. The hero exudes masculinity, and the heroine is shown to be attracted to such "machismo".

There has been a huge emphasis placed on traditional sex stereotypes in these romance novels. The hero exemplifies our culture's stereotype of masculinity. He is tall, silent, strong, handsome, and has complete control over his environment. When he finds a special woman, he reveals that he can also be sensitive, caring and loving. The romance hero exemplifies the manly man. In contrast, the heroine exemplifies all that is considered feminine. She is needy, gentle, serenely wise, beautiful, delicate and ethereal, exquisite and sweet. When she faces hardships, she is shown to be strong and determined.

Christian-Smith (1990) conducted a study on the characteristics of male and female leads in romance novels and found that heroines tended to be intelligent, funny, pretty, popular, and resourceful. Male leads tended to be handsome, humorous, strong, courageous, protective, the initiator, caring, courteous, rich, and had good social status.

These characteristics may influence what female readers desire and expect from their male partners. His study also revealed that girls saw themselves marrying, having children, obtaining some higher schooling, and working for pay. These results show that young female adolescents desire the traditional female lifestyle, but still strive to survive in an egalitarian world by attaining a degree and a career.

The stirrings of attraction they have for one another also contributes to the idea of *soulmates*. It seems as if fate is bringing them together through attraction even if they don't desire to feel such an attraction.

3. Circumstantial Proximity

The third step of the general romance novel plotline is Circumstantial Proximity. Since the heroine is disgruntled by the hero's presence, she wants to put both emotional and physical distance between them, but due to her lack of power and control over her environment, she cannot seem to do so. In this step, the woman tries to assert her independence. She is trying to run away from the power play, but can not seem to escape because the hero's will continues to compete with hers at every meeting. The hero sees her reaction towards him as rejection, and he tries even harder to control her. He increases the force of his demands, and in the end, she finds herself yielding to him until she realizes she is in love with him. Not only does this step reinforce the romantic ideal of *traditional sex stereotypes* in which the woman is attracted to the male's dominating presence, but it also confirms the romantic ideal of *soulmates*. The most crucial function of circumstantial proximity in the plot is to display the role of fate in the development of the relationship especially in the growing recognition of her love. Here is a woman trying

to escape from her attraction, but still ends up falling in love. She begins to see him as her destiny. The man does not undergo any drastic changes. He is still considered to be the dominant figure in the relationship, and he answers to no one while the woman constantly finds herself having to justify her decisions and actions. Pretty soon, she finds herself taking the first steps towards adapting herself to him.

In addition to the reinforcement of these ideals, circumstantial proximity indicates that a couple must spend a considerable amount of time together in order to sustain a healthy and successful relationship. Long-distance relationships are seen as prone to failure. The romantic relationship is portrayed as having utmost importance, and if a couple does not spend enough time with each other, misunderstandings will arise and threaten the existence of the relationship. In this way, there is an idea that *mindreading is expected* for a good relationship.

4. Escalation of Attraction

The fourth step is the Escalation of Attraction where the couple becomes officially established. At this point, emotions run high in both the hero and heroine. As Sterk (1986) states, “the woman feels anger, resentment, and yet, at the same time, undeniable pangs of love towards this man. He feels aroused and intrigued, stimulated by her resistance to both his authority at work and his seductive charms at play. The strong emotions both feel during their clashing of wills feed their attraction to each other” (pg. 82). In this statement, Sterk brings up an important dysfunctional belief found in romance novels – the idea that *more bickering and fighting within a relationship only signifies how passionate a relationship is*. Such bickering and fighting is seen to make a relationship

stronger, and seen as an indication of how deeply the individuals love each other. As they say, *what can't break you only makes you stronger*. Never before has the hero had to work so hard to woo a woman. For the heroine, never has she met a man so difficult to handle, so unpredictable. The extent of rage they feel towards one another reveals to everyone just how deep their love is. As fighting is shown to deepen the attraction, the power play between the male and female individuals start to heat up. The question that becomes asked is "who will tame who?" Their continual sparring leads to a balance of power. Whereas before, the man clearly had the upper hand, now some of the control passes to the woman. She is starting to affect him and she knows it.

At this stage, the belief that *the love of a woman can change a man* becomes introduced. After the heroine realizes she wields some control over his life, she doesn't withhold her love anymore. The hero's lust starts to change to love as he sees the heroine as a unique individual rather than one of his conquests. Typically, at this realization, the male hero begins to change his relations with other women in respect of his one true love. This is how his rehabilitation by the woman begins. When he meets her, he clearly controls the situation, but as the story progresses, he comes to care for her deeply. He starts feeling responsible for her, and he seeks to be the only man in her life. Most often, the male lead keeps the depth of his attachment to her a secret in order to protect himself. Such emotions frighten him because he has never before allowed any person to crawl under his skin, and he is not used to feeling vulnerable in any way (Sterk, 1986). Female readers LOVE reading this part of the story because it empowers them.

On the other hand, the heroine's love starts to change to lust. This is where the romance novel heats up and the lovemaking begins, and what lovemaking it is. Romance novels have a tendency to paint out love scenes as passionately perfect. The couple both acknowledges that they are fully in love and fully in lust. Sexual intercourse takes on a dimension in their lives unlike anything they have experienced before. They revel in it, cannot get enough of it. With each other, they find an amazing release. This release validates the sincerity of their love for one another. Their romantic transforming experience brings focus and meaning into their lives. It opens up new vistas, feelings, and provides an experience that makes them both feel more alive, with newly acquired strength and purpose. It is at this stage where the relationship ideal of *sexual perfectionism* becomes prevalent. Now that the woman is the man's equal, she has no more to lose than he does. She is able to indulge in lovemaking that is mutual rather than rapacious (Sterk, 1986). Therefore, the function of step four is to equalize the power play between the man and woman so they are able to further their relationship. In order to achieve this, a reversal of gender roles has to occur where the man reveals his neediness and the woman her strength.

5. Congruence

The fifth stage is Congruence, where the couple finally experiences a moment of content with each other. As Sterk puts it, this contentment is given concrete expression in their experiencing of at least one happy, tension-free day together (Sterk, 1986, pg. 85). This stage has one major indication- that contentment in a relationship comes from tension-free time spent together. Such a step enforces the idea that true love leads to happy

relationships that run smoothly without hardly any effort being put into it. It further supports the dysfunctional believe that *disagreement is destructive*. The key element of this stage is the feeling of complete satisfaction with one another. Women who read these romance novels are presented with the idea that the *love of a man completes/ fulfills you*. Readers may start to believe that romantic love is a necessary component in their lives in order for them to live full and happy lives. In this way, romance novels have been said to teach women how to turn a lonely, insecure, self-conscience life into one full of love, confidence, and contentment.

The culmination of their love is expressed through passionate lovemaking where their union is fully and completed established. The act of love shows that the couple is able to resolve their differences and overcome the complications in their relationship. As a result, they start to trust each other.

6. Betrayal

Once a certain amount of trust has been cultivated, it becomes shattered in stage six through a betrayal of some form. The betrayal comes right after the couples' point of congruence in order to create more drama and action within the story. During this stage, the hero or heroine makes a discovery that threatens to destroy the relationship. The discovery may be a secret past, lies that have been told, or even disappointing behavior of some sort. As soon as the betrayal emerges, events which lead to the separation of the couple are set into motion. The individual who makes the discovery will eventually cut off all lines of communication from their significant other.

In most cases, it is the woman who gets betrayed by her man. Just when she is starting to trust him and believes she wields some power in the relationship, she is proven

wrong by the betrayal. She realizes that she never really had any power in the relationship, and that the man she loved never truly changed. It is at this point of the story that women start to believe that *partners cannot change*. The heroine starts to doubt the validity of her man's love for her. In her mind, if he really loved her, he wouldn't have done what he did, and he should have changed for her.

Ashamed at being played the fool, the woman backs off. She can not deal with the fact that she let a man so far into her heart that he was able to cripple and hurt her. Harshly, she has been shown that his power over her is unlimited while her power over him is so miniscule that it cannot even command his honesty. Again, *traditional sex roles* are depicted in which the man remains dominant and the woman defeated.

7. Crisis

This brings us to the seventh stage, the Crisis, where fate plays a hand in keeping the couple together. After all, they are *true soulmates*. Following the betrayal, the couple must find a way to get over their bump in the road in order to reach that happily-ever-after ending. At this stage, the man realizes how much he needs the heroine in his life. The heroine too comes around to desire the continuation of the relationship through a progression of events. At that moment, fate intervenes in the form of a threat to her safety, allowing the man to rush in on his proverbial white stallion and save the day, and their relationship. The crisis forces the two to confront their feelings for each other and communicate in order to mend the rift in their relationship (Sterk, 1986).

8. Union

The eighth stage is the Union, the happy ending, the marriage. The couple finally admits their need and desire for each other, and trust becomes reestablished between them. This step confirms the fact that they are *soulmates*. Their love is ultimately fulfilling, and culminates in an everlasting marriage. In most romance novels, the marriage itself takes place at some point in the story. *Traditional sex stereotypes* are also portrayed at this stage because the woman joins the man in his life through marriage. He makes a place for her as a housewife, a mother, a caretaker, and she settles into it. This step closes the romance. In the end, she reveals herself as a total woman, he as a total man (Sterk, 1986).

9. Coda

The final stage is the Coda where some final misunderstanding crops up that briefly separates the couple and casts doubts into each other's mind about the validity of their love for one another. This is the last challenge, and if they are able to get through this, they truly are *soulmates*. Of course, since the story is found in a romance novel, the couple always works out their differences, and *love is shown to truly conquer all*. No matter how turbulent the storms, how controversial the issues, or how serious the lack of communication, the love they share triumph every time.

After the reader has walked through the couple's slow, but consistently developing relationship, they usually want some detail about the heroine and hero after they have gotten together. This is where the Epilogue comes in, where the couple is living a lifestyle that makes them happy. This Epilogue depicts the couple as being completely content, and leaves the reader feeling completely content.

How are these beliefs and ideals adopted by readers?

It is important to determine if the themes portrayed in these romance novels are being learned, and even modeled, by women in modern society. It is essential to note that individuals “are not born with attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, or even a repertoire of behaviors”; rather, one must learn them through exposure (Tan, 1986, pg. 243).

Therefore, the question then becomes “how are the dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals found in romance novels adopted by readers?”

Learning by exposure and observation is prevalent in our society because it would be very difficult to learn everything by trial and error in a direct fashion. That is why romance novels provide women with a safe environment to test out the possibilities and outcomes of certain actions and situations. Romance novels present an ideal “model” because they reconstruct social activities and behaviors with reinforcement given to the individuals who enact the behaviors. Due to the repetitive storyline of these novels, it is easy to see how it can facilitate the learning of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors heavily portrayed in romance books.

One way of adoption is through early exposure. Willinsky and Hunniford (1986) were scholars who replicated Radway’s study using 42 Canadian adolescent girls aged 12 to 13 years old. They found that adolescent girls were not able to separate fact from fantasy. From their romance novel reading experience, they believed that they would eventually find their one true love if they adhered to the guidelines set forth in the stories they read. Many of them also believed in a happily-ever-after ending. Willinsky and Hunniford (1986) state quite clearly that “the young reader believes it possible to become

the heroine of the romance.” This bit of information can help to explain the results found in this study. Many of the female participants started reading romance novels when they were young adolescents. It may be possible that the relationship beliefs they harbor were adopted into their relationship views at a very young age when they were more naïve.

Another scholar who has studied the effects of romance novel content on relationship beliefs is M. M. Bakhtin. According to Bakhtin (1986), the repetitive ideologies of romance novels influence the beliefs of readers in two ways: addressivity and assimilation. The concept of addressivity focuses on “the style and language aimed at a particular audience in which the author can relate certain messages to the reader and know that the message will be understood” (Harlan, 2005, pg. 15). Assimilation is the means by which readers “take the material that they have read, adapt it to the way they think, and then apply the information to real life circumstances, thereby helping to establish a strong working identity for themselves. Assimilation also helps women gain control of situations in their lives by adapting how the characters in the novel handle tense situations of their own” (Harlan, 2005, pg. 15). Bakhtin concludes that the dominant themes found in these romance novels may in fact greatly influence ideals and beliefs that readers may have about romantic relationships.

CULTIVATION THEORY

This thesis focuses on how messages in romance novel culture may influence individuals’ beliefs about relationships, on whether consumption of the medium influences individual’s relationship satisfaction, and on whether relationship beliefs mediate this potential connection. One focus of the research deals with people’s

relationship beliefs and expectations, and their implication for how people experience their romantic lives. One of the theories used to explain how romance novel readers adopt certain relationship beliefs, ideals and expectations is the Cultivation Theory.

The cultivation theory has been one of the more elaborately explained and meticulously explored approaches to mass communication effects. The theory was formulized in 1969 during Gerbner's Cultural Indicators Project (Potter, 1993). It was advocated by him and his associates of the Annenberg School for Communication. According to Signorelli and Morgan (1990), the cultivation theory proposes that "heavy viewers of television will be more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect the most stable and recurrent patters of portrayals in the television world" (pg. 9-10). In other words, the theory claims that central messages of television become accepted views of reality among heavy viewers.

Gerbner & Gross (1981) believed that the relationship between media messages and individuals' beliefs and attitudes about their social environment is moderated by overall television consumption. Since much of our knowledge about the world is attained indirectly, we learn more often through observing other people's experiences rather than our own. The more people watch television, the closer their perceptions will conform to TV's dominant cultural representations. Therefore, viewers *cultivate* what they see on television into their perceptions of reality. When applied to this current study, Cultivation Theory suggests that women who are consistently exposed to romance novels will start to perceive reality in ways that reflect what they visualize in their books. According to these romance novels, a loving, romantic, stable and sexually rewarding relationship is a key

indicator of a successful relationship, and the attainment of such an ideal acts as a sign of personal success for the individual. This presents many problems because some of the dominant themes found in romance novels are extremely ideal, making them unrealistic.

Such cultivation of ideas only occurs through repetitive, consistent, and long-term exposure to the medium. Constant exposure to the dominant themes and ideologies presented in these novels may influence individuals' cognitions of the world in such a way that the symbolic world portrayed is perceived as a plausible and authentic take on reality. My thesis proposes that such a relationship can occur between romance novels and individuals' beliefs and attitudes about relationships. Readers cultivate the dominant relationship beliefs and ideals through constant exposure of the materials.

We have already established that one major reason for why women read romance novels is because they desire a happy and successful relationship. It almost becomes a basic need in their lives that must be met in order to live a fulfilling life. However, it is very unlikely that every one will get that "perfect" relationship, or that each person will eventually find their *soulmate*, if such a thing exists. Research has shown that the standards and expectations that people bring with them into a relationship have been shown to play a key role in how they relate to a partner and interpret the quality of the relationship. Going into a relationship, individuals will have specific standards regarding the ideal attributes of a romantic partner and the preferred qualities of the romantic relationship. If an individual goes into romantic relationship holding unrealistic ideals, beliefs and expectations, he/she stands the chance of being disappointed because their standards are too high. This does not mean that one should not have high standards.

There is nothing wrong with having high standards as long as prior beliefs and unrealistic standards do not hinder the development of that relationship.

Scholar Bjarne Holmes (2004) believes that the source of such unrealistically high standards and dysfunctional beliefs about relationships in general is popular mass media. Using Gerber and Gross's Cultivation Theory, Holmes believes that popular media helps to cultivate relationship beliefs or serves to confirm social stereotypes. Due to media's presentation of ideal "happy" relationships, individuals who adopt such beliefs and standards may encounter trouble developing and maintaining healthy relationships. The current work explores this by studying the connection between people's romance novel consumption habits and their relationship beliefs and ideals.

In understanding relationship ideals, this current study will be using Fletcher & Simpson's (2001) Ideals Standards Model. There are four key points to this model:

- 1) that individuals evaluate romantic partners and relationships by contrasting them against their ideal standards
- 2) that preexisting ideal standards may causally influence important judgments and decisions regarding romantic partners and relationships
- 3) that the greater the discrepancy between one's ideals and perceived reality in a relationship, the less satisfied one will be
- 4) that flexibility and willingness to compromise standards serve as important moderators in relation to ideals and satisfaction.

The Ideals Standards Model shows how relationship ideals and standards may lead to relationship dissatisfaction through an increase of relationship distress and destructive problem-solving responses. Research has shown that both men and women endorse these unrealistic relationship beliefs to the same degree (Holmes, 2004).

Dysfunctional Relationship Beliefs and Romantic Ideals

For this thesis, the dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals have been derived from the content found in romance novels. Five of the dysfunctional relationship beliefs have been adopted from Eidelson & Epstein's (1981) Relationship Beliefs Inventory. The study will focus on ten major relationship beliefs and ideals:

Eidelson & Epstein's Dysfunctional Relationship Beliefs:

- 1) Sexual perfectionism
- 2) Disagreement is destructive, but if a couple is able to get through it, it only makes a relationship stronger
- 3) Mindreading is required in a successful relationship
- 4) The Sexes are different
- 5) Partners cannot change

Romantic Ideals:

- 6) Soulmates
- 7) Love can conquer anything
- 8) Love at first sight
- 9) Traditional sex stereotypes
- 10) Love of a woman can change a man

Although cultivation theory is one theory used to explain *how* readers adopt certain relationship beliefs and ideals, the theory leaves itself open to questions of cause and effect. It is known that lots of women read lots of romance novels, but do they have such beliefs because they read novels? Or do they read romance novels because they already hold such beliefs about relationships? In this way, romance novels may act as confirmation and reinforcement for their beliefs.

HYPOTHESES

This study examines the associations between partner/relationship ideals, discrepancies between ideals and actual partner/relationship, and dysfunctional beliefs and romantic

ideals in relation to romance novel consumption habits. The following aspects will be studied: individuals' romance novel reading habits, their romance genre preferences, their actual and ideal relationships characteristics, their dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals, and the level of satisfaction they feel in their relationship(s).

According to the research reviewed above, the following hypotheses are postulated::

Hypothesis 1: The more romance novel consumption participants report, the more idealized their partner and relationship ideals will be.

Hypothesis 1 claims that the more exposure participants have to romance novels, the more idealized their partner and relationship ideals will be. In order to determine the validity of this hypothesis, an *ideal characteristics score* will be found for each participant. This ideal characteristics score will be the sum of their ratings for the Relationship Characteristics part of the study. This ideal characteristics score will be compared to the *ideal characteristics max score*, which is fixed at 294. Therefore, according to this hypothesis, a participant who reads more books a week than another participant will have higher ideals and expectations in their relationship

Hypothesis 2: The more romance novel consumption participants report, the greater the discrepancy between their *ideal* partner/relationship characteristics and their perception of their *actual* partner/relationship characteristics will be.

In this hypothesis, it is assumed that exposure to romantic content will lead to more idealized relationship perceptions and expectations. The main goal of Hypothesis 2 is to test whether or not relationship satisfaction correlates with the amount of exposure

participants have to romance novels *and* the perceptions and expectations they have for their relationship(s). In order to do so, I will measure each participants' *actual characteristics score* (the sum of their actual relationship characteristics ratings) to their *individual ideal characteristics score* (the sum of their ideal relationship characteristics ratings). Each participant will have both a different actual characteristics score and an individual ideal characteristics score. By using these two variables, I will be able to find the degree in which a participant's actual relationship matches up to their individual view of an ideal relationship. The greater the discrepancy between these two variables, the less satisfied they will report being with their actual partner/relationship. Therefore, a participant who has an actual characteristics score that differs greatly from their personal individual ideal characteristics score will have a low relationship satisfaction percentage.

Hypothesis 3: The more romance novel consumption participants report, the more they will report unrealistic and dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals.

Hypothesis 3 claims that more exposure to romance novels will lead to greater dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals. As stated before, this study focuses on 10 main dysfunctional beliefs and romantic ideals. There will be a certain number of questions allotted to each type of belief or ideal. In order to test the validity of this hypothesis, a *belief score* (the sum of all belief ratings) will be found for each participant. This belief score will be compared to the *max belief score*, which is fixed at 182. By using these variables, I will be able to find the degree in which each participant holds dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals. Therefore, if a participant's

belief score is high, the percentage in which they hold dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals will be high also.

Hypothesis 4: Participant's choice of romance genre for what they would like to read will reflect the dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals they currently hold.

The main point of Hypothesis 4 is to test whether or not participants are drawn to romance novel genres that confirm or reaffirm the dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals they already hold. In this study, each dysfunctional relationship belief and romantic ideal will be assigned to a romance novel genre. Therefore, the romantic ideal of "soulmates" will have its own back-cover story, and the dysfunctional belief of "sexual perfectionism" will have a different story. These stories were taken from famous romance novels in the industry, and manipulated in order to further enhance a specific dysfunctional belief or romantic ideal. In testing this hypothesis, an *individual belief score* (the sum of all ratings for one particular dysfunctional belief or romantic ideal) will be found for each participant in relation to their choice of genre for what they would most likely read. This individual belief score will be compared to the *max individual belief score* (the max sum for all ratings for one particular dysfunctional belief or romantic ideal) in order to determine the degree in which a participant holds the specific belief. Therefore, if a participant chooses a story that focuses on the romantic ideal "love at first sight" for what they would most like read, an individual belief score will be created by finding the sum of all questions dealing with this particular belief. This individual belief score will be compared to the max individual belief score in order to find the percentage in which the participants hold the belief of "love at first sight".

Hypothesis 5: Participant's choice of romance genre for both their actual relationship and ideal relationship will correlate with relationship satisfaction. If their choice of genre for their actual relationship is unlike their preferred choice of genre for their ideal relationship, the greater the dissatisfaction in the relationship will be.

Hypothesis 5 basically states that if a participant's choice of genre for their actual relationship differs from their choice for their ideal relationship, then their relationship satisfaction percentage will be low. This means that if a participant has not achieved their ideal relationship, they will be less satisfied in their current relationship. In order to test this hypothesis, two different groups will be created. In one group are individuals who have chosen the same genre for both their actual relationship and ideal relationship, in the second group will be participants who had different genres. For each group, I will compare participants' relationship satisfaction percentages. If this hypothesis is valid, then the individuals in the second group should have lower percentage rates than the individuals in the first group.

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

The best way in which romance novel effects could be quantitatively measured was through a survey questionnaire; therefore, in order to make such a survey accessible to the greater public, an online survey database was used to formulate and collect results (www.surveymonkey.com). Once the survey was created and opened, the website URL (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=521023564950>) was sent out via email to all the professors of the Boston College Communications Department. The professors were asked to distribute the survey among their Communications classes. The survey asked for

female students who had had exposure to romance novels. Female students who took the survey received credit for their classes for their participation. In addition, the URL was sent out to various romance literature forums such as *All About Romance* (www.allaboutromance.com) in order to attract more female participants. A one week period was allotted for participants to take the online survey, and more time was allowed incase result expectations were not met. Luckily, there were enough participants that took the survey during the one week collection period.

The Survey

There are six different parts of the online survey. See *Appendix A* for the complete online survey questions.

The first part is a brief summary about what the survey is all about. This allows participants to understand why they are taking the study, and also assures them that their participation is well appreciated.

The second part deals with Romance Genres. There are only three questions in this section. The first question asks what genre the participant would most like read, the second asks the participant to choose a genre that most represents her actual relationship, and the third asks the participant to choose a genre that most represents her ideal relationship. There are ten genres in all since there are ten main beliefs and ideals in this study. Each genre is assigned a letter A-J, and has its own heading and back cover preview. See *Appendix B* for the full list of headings and story previews. Participants are able to click on the different story links and read the full story preview if they are so inclined.

The third part consists of Basic Questions about their relationship and romance novel background such as when they started reading romance novels, how many books did they read, how many hours a week did they usually read, and when they had their first boyfriend.

The fourth part dealt with Relationship Characteristics. There are 42 of them in all, in which three need reverse coding. Participants are asked to rate their actual and their ideal relationship in accordance to a specific relational trait. The characteristics are rated on a 7-point Likert scale in which “1” is “Terrible” and “7” is “Great”.

The fifth part of the survey deals with Dysfunctional Relationship Beliefs and Romantic Ideals. There are 26 questions in all, and each of the ten main beliefs and ideals are addressed in this section. Participants are asked to rate the beliefs on a 7-point Likert scale where “1” is “Strongly Disagree” and “7” is “Strongly Agree”.

The sixth part is Demographics where participants are asked what their gender, age, sexual orientation and relationship status are.

Subjects

There were 196 anonymous participants in this study. For the purposes of this study, 38 participant results were removed due to varying demographics: 14 survey results were removed because they were not completed, 19 were removed because the participants had no exposure to romance novels, 1 was removed because it was a male participant, and 4 were removed due to sexual orientation. Since many of the romance novel genres were geared toward male-female relationships, it was deemed more valid to question participants of a heterosexual sexual orientation. Therefore, the 158 participants used in this study were all female and heterosexual.

Since the majority of the participants were female students at Boston College, demographic results showed that participants were either single, dating or in a relationship. There were no participants that were engaged, married or divorced. Approximately 45.6% of the respondents were single, but had had relationship experience, next came participants that were currently in a relationship at 36.7%, followed by participants who were currently dating at 17.7%. All of the female participants were from 18-22 years old, further showing that many of the respondents were in college. 38% were 20 years old, 19.6% were 21 years old, and 17.1% were 19 years old followed by 22 year olds and 18 year olds at 12.7% each ($m= 20.03$, $sd=1.17$).

Many of these females started reading romance novels at a very young age. About 34.2% started reading at the age of 14, 23.4% started reading at 16, and 18.4% starting reading at 15 ($m= 15.83$, $sd= 2.23$). For a full summary of this data, please refer to *Table 1*. Only 35.4% of these females started reading romance novels before they started dating. Data showed that most girls started dating around the same time they started participating in romantic relationships. While a good percentage of these female participants started reading around age 14, they also started dating around age 14. For the majority of the females, many of them started dating around age 13-16 years old. 21.5% started dating at 13, 20.3% started dating at 14, 17.1% of them at 16, and 13.3% of them at 15 years old ($m= 15.74$, $sd= 2.70$). For a full summary of this data, refer to *Table 2*.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In order to conduct a deep analysis of the data received from the surveys, an Excel Spreadsheet was created that included all aspects of the study. For the complete, detailed look into the analysis, open the attached *Main Data Sheet* Excel file. Microsoft Excel was

used to prevent human calculation errors, and to determine percentages and scores through the use of formulas.

In order to analyze the data according to amount of exposure to see if any correlations could be found, participants were broken up into five groups depending on how many books they read. Each group was further broken down into two categories- participants who read less than one hour a week, and participants who read more than one hour a week. Only two categories were created for each group because there were so few participants that spent more than 1 hour a week reading romance novels. The following chart below describes the breakup of the groups.

GROUP	Amt. of Books read	SUB-CATEGORY 1	SUB-CATEGORY 2
A	1/ year	A1 = 0-1 hour/ week	A2 = more than 1 hour/ week
B	1/ 9 months	B1= 0-1 hour/ week	B2= more tan 1 hour/ week
C	1/ 6 months	C1= 0-1 hour/ week	C2- more than 1 hour/ week
D	1/ 3 months	D1= 0-1 hour/ week	D2- more than 1 hour/ week
E	1/ month	E1= 0-1 hour/ week	E2- more than 1 hour/ week

Unfortunately, many of the participants of this study did not report great amounts of exposure to romance novels. Majority-wise, participants read one book a year and spent 0-1 hours a week reading. In analyzing the data for the amount of books that participants read in one year, figures showed that about 45% of them read one book a year, 18% read one book every 6 months, 14% read one book every 3 months, 12% read one book every month, and 11% read one book every 9 months ($m = 1 \text{ bk} / 9 \text{ mo.}$, $sd = 1.55$). For the number of hours that participants spent reading, 77.8% read from 0-1 hour a week, 13.3% read from 2-3 hours a week, and 5.06% read from 4-5 hours a week ($m = 1-2 \text{ hrs} / \text{ week}$, $sd = 1.79$). For a full account of participants' hours, refer to *Table 3*. In

general, many of the participants reported minimal amounts of exposure to romance novels.

Further analysis of the data showed that each group was pretty balanced in relation to participants' relationship status. All though each group had a small amount of participants who were currently dating, the amount of participants who were single or where in a relationship were pretty much equal. The following list shows the breakup of each group:

Group A – 30 Singles, 30 Relationship, 10 Dating
Group B – 7 Singles, 7 Relationship, 4 Dating
Group C – 13 Singles, 10 Relationship, 6 Dating
Group D – 12 Single, 8 Relationship, 2 Dating
Group E – 10 Single, 4 Relationship, 5 Dating

Hypothesis 1:

Hypothesis 1 stated that participants would have greater relationship ideals and beliefs as the amount of exposure to romance novels increased. In the study, participants were asked to rate the characteristics of their Ideal Relationship on a 7-point Likert scale in which “1” is “Terrible” and “7” is “Great”. For each participant, an Ideal Characteristics Score was found and compared to the Ideal Characteristics Max Score to determine the percentage in which individuals held high beliefs.

To test the validity of Hypothesis 1 in relation to these subgroups, percentages were compiled for each group and subcategory.

GROUPS	IDEAL SCORE (out of 100)
A	87
A1	87
A2	89
B	86
B1	87
B2	84
C	82
C1	85
C2	89
D	88
D1	88
D2	87
E	87
E1	85
E2	88

NOTES

more exposure to romance novels led to slightly higher Ideal Score

more exposure to romance novels led to slightly lower Ideal Score

more exposure to romance novels led to slightly higher Ideal Score

more exposure to romance novels led to slightly lower Ideal Score

more exposure to romance novels led to slightly higher Ideal Score

This average Ideal Score for all participants was 87 out of 100. This average shows that many participants had very relationship characteristics ideals. About 80% of all characteristic traits showed a rating of “Great” for Ideal Relationship.

Hypothesis 2:

Hypothesis 2 deals with scores for the Relationship Characteristics of the Actual Relationship and the Ideal Relationship in relation to exposure. Along with rating the characteristics of their Ideal Relationship, participants were asked to rate the characteristics of their Actual (or most current) relationship on a 7-point Likert scale in which “1” is “Terrible” and “7” is “Great”.

To analyze the data for this hypothesis, the same groups and sub-categories will be used in along with the actual characteristics scores, and the individual ideal characteristics scores. The actual characteristics score will be compared to the individual ideal characteristics score in order to determine the percentage in which the actual

relationship lives up to the ideal relationship. This percentage is also indicative of relationship satisfaction. It is hypothesized that the more exposure a participant has to romance novels, the less satisfied they will be in their relationship due to the adoption high ideals and expectations.

GROUPS	Relationship Satisfaction	NOTES
A	80%	more exposure to romance novels did result in a slightly lower relationship satisfaction percentage
A1	81%	
A2	75%	
B	85%	more exposure to romance novels did result in a slightly lower relationship satisfaction percentage
B1	86%	
B2	81%	
C	83%	more exposure to romance novels resulted in a slightly higher relationship satisfaction percentage
C1	82%	
C2	85%	
D	82%	more exposure to romance novels did result in a slightly lower relationship satisfaction percentage
D1	85%	
D2	77%	
E	78%	more exposure to romance novels did result in a slightly lower relationship satisfaction percentage
E1	85%	
E2	76%	

As a group, the average relationship satisfaction percentage was 81%. This is a very high percentage and shows that most of the female participants in this study were very satisfied with their relationship experiences even with high ideals and expectations. In addition, “contentment ratings” showed that 70% of the participants had a content rating of 5 or more. Also, conflict scores were computed according to relationship characteristics that dealt with argumentation or conflict, and only 9% of the scores were over 70%.

Hypothesis 3:

Hypothesis 3 believes that there is a correlation between the amount of exposure to romance novels and the adoption of dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals. In the study, participants are asked to rate dysfunctional relationship belief and romantic ideal statements on a 7-point Likert scale where “1” is “Strongly Disagree” and “7” is “Strongly Agree”. Average ratings and standard deviation for each characteristic can be found on *Table 4*. It is hypothesized that greater amount of exposure to romance novels will lead to a greater adoption of such beliefs and ideals. In order to test the validity of such a claim, a belief score was found for each individual. This belief score will be compared to the max belief score, which is fixed at 182 unless participants have chosen N/A for some of their responses. For these participants, the max belief score is configured in order to truly be their individual max belief score. The percentage that results from such a comparison indicates the degree in which the participant holds dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals.

GROUPS	BELIEF PERCENTAGE
A	56%
A1	56%
A2	57%
B	57%
B1	57%
B2	55%
C	55%
C1	55%
C2	57%
D	60%
D1	60%
D2	59%
E	57%
E1	54%
E2	59%

NOTES

more exposure to romance novels did result in a slightly higher belief percentage

more exposure to romance novels resulted in a slightly lower belief percentage

more exposure to romance novels did result in a slightly higher belief percentage

more exposure to romance novels resulted in a slightly lower belief percentage

more exposure to romance novels did result in a slightly higher belief percentage

The average belief percentage for all the participants was 57%. This is not a very high percentage, and shows that many female participants did not have high amounts of dysfunctional relationship beliefs or romantic ideals.

Hypothesis 4:

Hypothesis 4 focuses on participant's personal beliefs and ideals. In the survey, participants are asked to choose a genre (story) they would most likely read. Since each genre enhances one of the ten main dysfunctional relationship beliefs or romantic ideals used in this study, the participant's response can be correlated with their personal belief scores for that specific belief or ideal. Therefore, if Participant 1 chose Genre A (Soulmates) for what they would most likely read, then the ratings found for questions pertaining to Genre A's belief would be addressed in order to test whether or not the participant chose the genre because it related to the beliefs and ideals they already had.

To test this hypothesis, the participants were separated into 10 groups depending on the genre they chose. For all questions pertaining to the featured dysfunctional belief or romantic ideal enhanced in the genre, an individual belief score was calculated in relation to the participant's max individual belief score. This percentage is indicative of the degree in which the participant concurred with the belief found in their choice of genre. If the belief score was high, then the person did hold such a belief making the hypothesis true. The following list matches the Genre Belief to a Genre Story:

- A. Soulmates
- B. The Sexes are Different
- C. Love Can Conquer Anything

- D. Love at First Sight
- E. Partners Cannot Change
- F. Love of a Woman Can Change A Man
- G. Sexual Perfectionism
- H. Disagreement is Destructive
- I. Traditional Sex Stereotypes
- J. Mindreading is Required

The following table reveals the amount of individuals who choose each genre, and the percentage in which each group held the featured belief.

GENRE	No. of Individuals in Group	No. of Individuals in Group (Percentage)	AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL BELIEF PERCENTAGES	AVERAGE BELIEF PERCENTAGES (for all other participants)
A	38	24%	64%	62%
B	19	12%	64%	60%
C	20	13%	60%	56%
D	16	10%	68%	60%
E	7	4%	54%	53%
F	8	5%	59%	54%
G	31	20%	60%	59%
H	9	6%	50%	54%
I	5	3%	59%	53%
J	5	3%	63%	57%

The results of the table show that choice of genre did not correlate with individual beliefs and ideals. Individual Belief Percentages were very low in all categories revealing that participants probably did not make a choice according to their currently held perceptions and beliefs.

One possible reason for why the individual belief percentages were not that high could be due to the fact that the belief percentages were not that high in general.

Therefore, the individual belief percentages were matched up to the belief percentages for all the other participants to see whether or not individuals who choose a certain genre had a higher belief percentage than individuals who did not. The results showed that the individuals who choose a certain genre had a slightly higher belief percentage in that

specific belief compared to others participants in the survey. This was true for all Beliefs except for Genre H (Disagreement is Destructive).

It is interesting to note that there were definite genre trends in this study. As seen in this chart, there were a couple genres that were more popular than others. This trend remains true for all three questions in the second part of the survey. For the first question- Which story would you be more likely to read- the chart reveals that 24% of the participants chose Genre A (Soulmates), 20% of the participants chose Genre G (Sexual Perfectionism), and 13% chose Genre C (Love Can Conquer Anything). When it came to results for the second question – Which story most represents your actual or most current relationship- 17% chose Genre F (Love of a Woman Can Change a Man), 16% chose Genre E (Partners Cannot Change), and 15% chose Genre I (Traditional Sex Stereotypes). For the third question- Which story would you desire your relationship to be like- 48% chose Genre A (Soulmates), 24% chose Genre C (Love Can Conquer Anything), and 13% chose Genre D (Love at First Sight).

Hypothesis 5:

Hypothesis 5 basically deals with choice of genre (second and third question in the part two of the survey) in relation to the amount of satisfaction found in the relationship. The hypothesis postulates that if the choice of genre for the actual relationship differs from the choice of genre for the ideal, then the relationship satisfaction percentage will be low.

In order to test this hypothesis, the participants were broken into two groups. One group had differing choices of genres for their actual and ideal relationships, and the

other had identical choices of genres. According to the data, only 16 participants had identical choices comprising 10% of the number of participants. This means that 90% of the participants had differing choices of genre. The next step was to take a look at each group's average relationship satisfaction percentage. The group with the identical choices had an average relationship satisfaction percentage of 90%, while the group with differing choices had an average relationship satisfaction percentage of 81%. Although they are very close percentages, this 9% difference has been one of the biggest discrepancies found in this study so far. Further analysis into the details of the study showed that many of the participants that had identical choices, had relationship satisfaction percentages over 90%. Some even had 100%, a percentage not found in the other group! In fact, 56% of the "identical choice" group had relationship satisfaction percentages that were higher than 90%. Only 18% of the "differing choice" group had relationship satisfaction percentages over 90%. This is a really big difference, and helps to prove that participants who had not yet attained their ideal type of relationship were a lot less satisfied in their relationships than participants who had.

DISCUSSION

For many of the hypotheses, analysis showed that there were a number of possible influential factors that may have affected the results.

Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 1 was not supported by the results of this study. The Ideal Characteristics Scores found for the different groups and categories were barely different, and the changes between the numbers were too slight to be considered significant. If the hypothesis was true, then the Ideal Characteristics Scores found for each group should

have significantly increased as more exposure to romance novels was reported. Instead, the scores slightly dipped and then minimally increased as exposure to romance novels became greater in this study. Therefore, there was no correlation found between romance novel exposure and relationship ideals and expectations.

A possible reason for such slight differences can be attributed to overall participant exposure to romance novels. Data shows that the majority of the participants in this survey did not spend much time reading romance novels. This could be due to the fact that almost all of the participants, if not all, were college-aged students and may not have had the time or resources for leisurely reading.

Nonetheless, all Ideal Characteristics Scores were high in general showing that participants did have high expectations and ideals for their relationships. Although these high ideals and expectations may not be sustained by romance novels, there are other forms of media prevalent in society that may help to enforce or cause individuals to have such high ideals for their relationships. As Eidelson & Epstein's (1981) believed, high relationship ideals and expectations were enforced through a number of mediums, television being one of the biggest ones. In today's society, romantic plotlines are found virtually everywhere- in action films, horrors, mysteries, etc. Individuals are continually exposed to such romance/relationship content. Therefore, although romance novels may not have influenced participants to have high relationship ideals and expectations, other forms of media in our culture may have.

Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 2 was also not supported by the results of this study. Similar to the results for the first Hypothesis, the relationship satisfaction percentages did not change dramatically enough to be considered valid proof of a correlation between actual

and ideal characteristic ratings and relationship satisfaction. The biggest drop was a 9% drop in Group E, followed by an 8% drop in Group D, but these percentages are still not considered valid enough to support this hypothesis. If this hypothesis was true, then group relationship satisfaction percentages should have significantly decreased as the amount of exposure increased. Instead, data revealed that relationship satisfaction percentages only decreased by 3% from Group A to Group E.

A unique aspect about the data for Hypothesis 2 is that each person had a different perception of their ideal relationship. In the first hypothesis, the ideal characteristics max score was fixed at 294, but for some participants, their ideal characteristics max score could be as low as 217.

In general, relationship satisfaction scores were very high. About 97% of the participants had scores over 60%, in which 39% had had scores over 80%! It is interesting to see that many of these participants were satisfied in their relationships whether they single, dating, or currently in a relationship, yet they had such high relationship ideals and expectations. One would think that they would be less satisfied since their actual relationship had not yet lived up to their ideal relationship. It could be true that the small amount of exposure to romance novels reported has not been great enough to allow for further adoption of certain relationship ideals and expectations, nonetheless, there seems to be “realism” factor at play. Many of these participants may have high relationship ideals and expectations, but understand that reality does not function according to such ideals. They may understand that such expectations are not easily achieved, thus become satisfied with the progress they have made in their

relationship thus far. This clear sense of reality prevents them from openly adopting certain dysfunctional relationship beliefs and ideals as presented in the mass media.

Hypothesis 3. Hypothesis 3 was not supported by this study. In general, participants did not have high belief scores. About 97.5% of the participants had belief scores under 70%. In relation to the different groups and subcategories, group belief scores fluctuated up and down as the amount of exposure to romance novels increased. If this hypothesis was proven true, then the group belief scores should have significantly increased as exposure did. Therefore, there was no correlation found between amount of exposure to romance novels and dysfunctional relationship beliefs and ideals.

The low belief scores could be attributed to the fact that many participants seemed to have a firmly grounded in reality rather than in the fictional worlds found in romance novels. These participants spent considerably more time in the reality of their own lives than with their nose stuck in a book. It also could be postulated that participants were not exposed to romance novel literature *enough* to fully feel the effects of such exposure. All in all, participants' low belief scores offer additional support for why their relationship satisfaction percentages are so high. The less dysfunctional beliefs and romantic ideals individual harbor, the more satisfied they should be in their relationship because they understand that successful relationships are ones in which both individuals are working hard towards.

Hypothesis 4. Hypothesis 4 was also proven wrong. Individual belief scores were not high at all for this section. Barely any of the scores were over 70%. It was postulated by Janice Radway (1999) that romance novel readers were drawn to stories that confirmed

or reaffirmed the beliefs that they currently held. As a result, this study tested to see whether participants chose certain genres to read because they related to the beliefs and ideals already held by the individual. In the end, data revealed that the individual belief scores may have been slightly higher than the group belief scores for that specific belief, but the difference was not significant enough to be an indication of proof for this hypothesis. Radway's beliefs were not supported in this case. There was no correlation between choice of genre and specific relationship belief and ideals.

It also has to be kept in mind that belief scores were not high in general for the majority of the participants in this study; therefore, it may come to no surprise that individual belief scores would not be that high also. In addition, the analysis for this hypothesis has revealed a number of interesting facts, the first being that the top three genre picks for question #1 in the second section were Soulmates, Sexual Perfectionism, and Love Can Conquer Anything. The fact that over 50% of the participants chose one of these three genres is interesting because these genres tend to be the main three aspects found in any romantic content in mass media. If one looked at any soap opera on television, or any romantic film in the movies, these three elements are always present. Couples may fight and bicker until their tongues fall out, but in the end, they always work out their differences (making their relationship stronger) because they are destined to be together, and they always have a great and extremely passionate sex life.

It is also interesting to see that the top three genre picks for the second question all deal with power play found in Sterk's (1986) nine event plotline. The top genre picks in this section all deal with the elements of change and struggle, and the fight for control between the man and the woman. Through this fighting and the desire for change (and

therefore peace), certain gender aspects are accentuated to reveal why women and men seem to be from different planets sometimes. For the third question, the top genre picks here tend to be ones dealing with a happy ending, an ideal solution to a problematic relationship. Almost 50% of the participants chose Soulmates, indicating that they would like to believe that the person they are with or will end up with is truly their Soulmate. This idea acts as a form of reaffirmation that a female is where she needs to be. She has to continue to fight through the relationship struggles because her relationship is destined to happen and last for a long time. For individual who did not believe in the idea of soulmates, the romantic ideal that “love can conquer anything” was chosen. This choice indicates that individuals want to know that they will get through whatever struggles they face in their actual relationship on the strong foundation of their mutual love. For individuals who want the way out, they chose the genre associated with “love at first sight” indicating their desire to have a perfect, strong and loving relationship from the start. It is quite interesting to note that two of the choices from the first question was also among the top picks for the third question (a person’s ideal relationship).

This information puts a spin on Radway’s theory that romance novel readers are drawn to stories that reaffirm currently held beliefs. It could be that the participants in this study chose certain genres to read because it related to their personal beliefs of an ideal relationship. For many of the participants in this study who indicated that some form of tension could be found in their relationship, romance novels could provide them with the opportunity to see what it would feel like to get past such struggles and find a happy solution. In this way, their choice of genre for what they would like to read may actually correlate with the hopes and aspirations they have for their own relationship(s).

In addition, further analysis into the data revealed that participants may have had low belief scores due to the way in which certain statements were phrased. For the romantic ideal of soulmates, it was found that many participants believed that such an ideal was possible, but fate alone could not keep couples from separating. For the belief that the sexes were different, most participants believed that men and women weren't supposed to be different due to biological reasons, but many admitted that there was a difference in the level of emotional need. For the romantic ideal of love conquers all, half the participants believed it did and half of them didn't. For love at first sight, almost all participants believed that such a situation was possible and occurred sometimes. For the dysfunctional relationship belief of partners cannot change, some participants believed they could, and some believed they couldn't, but almost all of them believed that change was not mandatory just because of mutual love.

For the idea that the love of a woman could change a man, about half of the participants agreed and the other half disagreed. In dealing with Sexual Perfectionism, many of the participants did get upset when they could not satisfy their partners, but did not believe it was a problem. For the dysfunctional belief that disagreement was destructive, the majority of the participants got upset when such disagreements occurred, but did not believe it would lead to the end of a relationship. Last, but not least, for traditional sex stereotypes, slightly more participants disagreed with the idea that the man could not be shorter, weaker, young, or poorer. For many of these dysfunctional beliefs and romantic ideals, participants seemed to agree for one aspect but disagree with another even if both statements dealt with the same belief. By conducting more detail research, it

was possible to find reasons why participants tended to agree with one thing, but not the other.

Hypothesis 5. Hypothesis 5 was slightly supported by the results in this study. Although the decrease in relationship satisfaction percentage was only 9%, the details of each group revealed that there were much higher relationship satisfaction percentages in the “identical choice” group than in the “differing choice” group. Overall, almost every individual in the first group had percentages over 85%, while any participants in the other group had percentages ranging from 47%-98%. Therefore, a slight correlation could be found between different genre choices and relationship satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Although most of the hypotheses postulated in this study were not supported by the results, there were many interesting aspects that were found through the compilation of data. It was interesting to note the trends that occurred in relation to genre selections.

Using Gerbner and Gross' (1981) Cultivation Theory, Hypothesis 1 claimed that more exposure to romance novel content would lead to greater ideals and expectations in relationships. Although many of the participants had high ideal scores, they did not report themselves as being heavy readers of romance novels. Therefore, the cultivation theory was not able to be fully tested in this study. Scholar Bjarne Holmes (2004), an advocate of the Cultivation theory in relation to unrealistic relationship standards and expectations, believed that readers could cultivate such unrealistic ideals from all different types of mediums. In this case, her beliefs were not supported. While readers may have adopted

high relationship standards and expectations, the study showed that such unrealistic standards were not cultivated through heavy exposure to the medium of romance novels.

Hypothesis 2 addressed amount of exposure to romance novels as being correlated to relationship satisfaction. According to Fletcher and Simpson's (2001) Ideals Standards Model, individuals evaluate their romantic partners and relationships by contrasting them against their ideal standards. As Gerbner and Gross (1981) state, these ideal standards evolve from popular culture as portrayed by mass media. When the actual relationship does not measure up to the ideal, then individuals become less satisfied with their relationship. This idea was partially supported in Hypothesis 5.

Also included in Fletcher and Simpson's Ideals Standards Model was the idea that flexibility and willingness to compromise standards served as important moderators in relation to ideals and satisfaction. Although Hypothesis 2 was not supported in the fact that greater amounts of exposure did not lead to less relationship satisfaction, Fletcher and Simpson did provide a possible reason for why participants were quite satisfied in their relationship. Following the Ideals Standards Model, participants who had high Ideal Scores may have been able to compromise their standards in order to achieve greater relationship satisfaction.

Similar to Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 3 postulated that greater amounts of exposure to romance novels led to a greater adoption of dysfunctional relationship beliefs and romantic ideals. According to M. M. Bakhtin's (1986) concept of Assimilation, romance novel readers take the material that they have read and adapt it to the way they think. The results of this study did not support Bakhtin's idea. Although all participants had

experience reading romance novels, many of them did not hold many dysfunctional beliefs and romantic ideals.

Hypothesis 4 postulates that women choose romance novels that support the beliefs and values they currently hold. Prior research studies such as the ones done by Janice Radway show that women are drawn to stories that confirm or reaffirm the beliefs they already hold. Although Radway's (1991) study supported this idea, this study did not. Choice of romance novel genre was not shown to correlate to reader's already held beliefs. In fact, it was further postulated that choice of genre actually correlated with reader's hopes and aspirations for their actual relationships.

A big setback in this study was that many of the participants did not report high amounts of exposure to romance novels, and this affected many of the hypotheses. In fact, the demographics of this study did not at all match the demographics found in Harlequin's reader reports. According to Harlequin, the average age of the romance novel reader was 41 years old. In this study, the average age was 20 years old. As one can see, there is a big difference. This could be one reason for why many of the hypotheses were supported- participants simply did not have enough exposure for any effects to truly develop. Nonetheless, this study contains some valuable and unique information about college students and their romance novel reading habits. Many studies in the past have only been focused on reading groups, or young adolescents, but this study is only one of few to really examine the effects of romance novels on female college students and their relationships. It is my hope that such information will prove valuable in the conduction of future studies in the romance novel industry.

Some sources of error found in this study is human and rater error in processing some of the calculations. There is always the chance that an average was a bit off or a number was missed. In addition, the aspect of “desirability” could also have been present in this study. Participants who wanted to paint a better picture of themselves could have started rating their beliefs and ideals more “realistically” once they realized how dysfunctional or ideal their beliefs actually were. In this way, they were proving to themselves that their own individual beliefs and ideals were actually very healthy and not at all dysfunctional or unrealistic in any way. Also, the way in which the questions were ordered could have made participants more defensive about their views, and thus prevent them from answering honestly.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

It would be very interesting to see if results would be different if the participants had greater amounts of exposure to romance novel content. It would be great to find a number of heavy romance novel readers to truly test whether or not Cultivation could occur in relation to romance novels. Unfortunately, this study only dealt with quantitative data, and was also anonymous, preventing any control in the area of choosing or pinpointing heavy romance novel readers.

Other aspects of this study that could be further researched and developed would be the factor of “realism” in the formulation of relationship beliefs and ideals. Since many participants had high ideal scores, it was interesting to see that many of them also had high relationship satisfaction percentages. A deeper analysis into this phenomenon could reveal reasons why individuals were still happy in their relationship even when their actual relationship did not live up to their ideal. This notion plays into the idea that

there is nothing wrong with having high standards as long as prior beliefs and unrealistic standards do not hinder the development of the relationship. In addition, it also could be tested whether or not individual were satisfied because their partners were actually trying to live up to their ideals.

Another area of causality that could use future research would be the correlation between the initial reading age and the initial dating age. In this study, initial reading age and dating age were very close, but there was no real way to measure whether one aspect lead to another or vice versa, or even if they helped to influence each other around the same time. If this was true, it would explain why so many participants started relationships around the time they began being exposed to romantic literature.

A final area of this study that could be further developed is the implications of relationship status on relationship beliefs and ideals. Relationship status was barely touched in this study, but it would be interesting to see whether or not participants, at different points of their relationship, experienced different levels of relationship satisfaction, and the adoption or loss of certain beliefs and ideals.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY

Appendix A. The online survey. (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=521023564950>)

The Effects of Romance Novels

Thanks for your help!

We really appreciate your assistance!

You are being asked to participate in a survey conducted by a Boston College Honors Student, J. Bun, for her Senior Thesis. This project is supervised by Dr. Jonathan Bowman, Assistant Professor of Communication at Boston College. The purpose of the study is to examine your experience with reading romance novels, as well as your general life and relationship experiences. No funding has been received for this study, and neither Professor Bowman nor the Communication Department will benefit financially from the study.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You will be asked to complete a short survey measuring your attitudes and opinions. The whole procedure should take less than 15 minutes. Although participation in this study is not expected to produce discomfort or stress, please note that you may refuse to answer certain questions or withdraw from the survey at any time without penalty.

All information you provide will be kept completely confidential. Your identity will in no way be associated with the answers you give on the survey questionnaire. The questionnaires are anonymous, and will be kept on a password-protected computer hard drive in a locked office for two years before being destroyed, only to be viewed by the principle investigator and research assistants. If you participate in the study, your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. By clicking this button, you indicate your voluntary agreement to participate in the study.

Contact Professor Bowman at bowmanjb@bc.edu if you have any questions or concerns regarding this study. He can also answer any questions you may have about the study to help you decide whether or not to participate.

If you have read the description of the research procedures feel that the procedures have been explained to your satisfaction, please indicate your voluntary participation by clicking the button. If you are under age 18, please review this statement with your parents or legal guardian before continuing and encourage them to preview the survey before continuing.

Basic Questions:

1. At what age did you start reading romance novels?
2. How many books do you read?
3. How many hours do you spend reading per week?
4. How old were you when you out with your first boyfriend/girlfriend?

Romance Genre Questions :

There are many different types of romance novels. Below are 10 different themes. If you want, you may read an example of each theme by clicking the title of the link, which is a clue as to what the romance novel is about. Click on each link in order to read the whole story preview.

1. Out of these different novel previews, which story would you be more likely to read?
2. What story most represents your current (most current) relationship?
3. What story would you desire your relationship to be like?

Relationship Characteristics:

There are many different types of relationships, and certain characteristics may or may not apply to your hopes and experiences. For the following characteristics, please rate the level in which each characteristic is portrayed for both your **ACTUAL RELATIONSHIP** (or most current) and your **IDEAL RELATIONSHIP** by clicking on the appropriate square.

- 1) Level of understanding
- 2) Level of support
- 3) Consideration
- 4) Honesty and Trust
- 5) Sensitivity to each other's needs
- 6) Demonstration of Affection
- 7) Romance
- 8) Generosity
- 9) Communication
- 10) Friendship
- 11) Level of Criticism towards each other (reverse coding)
- 12) Being in love with each other
- 13) Reliability
- 14) Respect
- 15) Equality
- 16) Level of Desired Change
- 17) Commitment
- 18) Spontaneity
- 19) Independence
- 20) Excitement
- 21) Sex Relations/Passion
- 22) Similarity in personalities
- 23) Stability
- 24) Intellectual equality
- 25) Being soulmates
- 26) Level of fun had with each other
- 27) Similarity of interests
- 28) Conventiality (correct of proper behavior)

- 29) Ability to compromise
- 30) Loyalty towards one another
- 31) Philosophy of life
- 32) Amount of time spent together
- 33) Physical attraction
- 34) Distribution of power
- 35) Level of emotional security
- 36) Confiding in each other
- 37) Familiarity of each other's thoughts and needs
- 38) Contentment
- 39) Similar priorities
- 40) Working together/Making big decisions
- 41) Quarreling (Disagreement/Fighting) (reverse coding)
- 42) Confrontation of conflict (reverse coding)

Relationship Beliefs and Ideals:

For the following statements, please rate your agreement or disagreement on the same 7-point scale with "1" being "strongly DISAGREE" and "7" being "strongly AGREE".

A. Soulmates

- There is such a thing as "soul mates"
- The right mate "completes you" – filling your needs and making your dreams come true
- Your perfect partner is cosmically predestined, so nothing/nobody can ultimately separate you

B. The Sexes are Different

- One of the major causes of marital problems is men and women have different emotional needs
- Misunderstandings between partners generally are due to inborn differences in psychological makeups of men and women

C. Love Can Conquer Anything

- Love is all it takes to keep a relationship together
- Love can conquer anything
- What can't break a relationship will only make it stronger

D. Love at First Sight

- There is such a thing as "love at first sight"
- It is possible for to fall in love the first time you see/meet someone

E. Partners Cannot Change

- My partner does not seem capable of behaving other than s/he does now
- If my partner loves me as much as I love him, s/he will change for me
- I do not expect my partner to be able to change

F. Love of a Woman Can Change A Man

- The love of a good and faithful true woman can change a man from bad to good

G. Sexual Perfectionism

- I get upset if I think I have not completely satisfied my partner sexually
- If I cannot perform well sexually whenever my partner is in the mood, I would consider that I have a problem

H. Disagreement is Destructive

- I get very upset when my partner and I cannot see things the same way
- When my partner and I disagree, I feel like our relationship is falling apart
- Bickering and fighting a lot means that a man and a woman really love each other passionately

I. Traditional Sex Stereotypes

- The man should NOT be Shorter, Weaker, Younger or Poorer than the woman

J. Mindreading is Required

- I get very upset if my partner does not recognize how I am feeling and I have to tell him/her.
- People who have a close relationship can sense each other's needs as if they could reach each other's minds

Demographics:

- 1) What is your gender?
- 2) How old are you?
- 3) What is your sexual orientation?
- 4) What is your relationship status?

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

You have successfully completed this survey. Thank you for your participation! Results will be analyzed and put into an Honors Thesis by May 2007. If you are interested in reading the final product, please feel free to email me at bun@bc.edu.

WE APPRECIATE YOUR HELP!!!**FOR BOSTON COLLEGE STUDENTS:**

If you would like to receive research credit for your participation in this survey, please print this page for your records. THEN, be sure to send an e-mail with your name and the name of the professor for whom you are doing this study to bun@bc.edu. Be sure to include this unique ID # in the text of this e-mail: 72389436. Do not give this number to other students or they may receive your credit. Again, e-mail this information to bun@bc.edu

THANK YOU AGAIN!

APPENDIX B: ROMANCE NOVEL GENRES

Appendix B. Romance novel genres- headings and story previews.

SOULMATES

They were destined to be together and nothing could tear them apart...

From the moment they met as children, there was something special between Noah Chase and Gracie Taylor, something that grew and matured right along with them. Despite Gracie's troubled family — and Noah's cold, distant one — they managed to make each other laugh, and keep each other's dreams alive...

But Noah's father already had plans for his golden boy's future—plans that did not include the likes of poor, ordinary Gracie Taylor. And when he succeeded in tearing them apart—on the night before their wedding—it seemed those childhood dreams and teenage passions had been crushed by more grown-up things, like sorrows and secrets and lies...

Now Gracie has returned back home and so has Noah. Over the years, they've wondered if those dreams were just delusions, or if a love like theirs could ever happen again. Years apart had left them in the same place they started – single and yearning for a true love that would complete them... like the love they shared so far in the past. On a journey full of heartache and hope, they come to realize what they had always been to each other...true soulmates.

Bretton, B. (2000). *At Last*. California: The Berkley Publishing Group, Penguin Putnam, Inc.

THE SEXES ARE DIFFERENT

Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus...

Philip Hawkesbury, the earl of Rothermere, obeying his father's dying wish, hies himself to Scotland to offer for one of the daughters of Alexander Kilbracken, the earl of Ruthven. Understanding that he has no patience for feminine frivolity and the like, he hopes that his new wife will be bidable and easy to manage – one that will take care of the manor while he is away and require minimal attention.

Frances Kilbracken, informed of the earl's arrival and his mission, disguises herself as an ugly ducking so she won't be the one selected by the young earl. She wants to marry for love and none other. She wants a husband who will care for her and understand every little aspect about her. But choose her he does, and all for the wrong reasons! Thinking that an ugly ducking won't expect any sort of female attention, Philip believes he has gotten a good deal.

The newly married couple return to England, together but not at all happy. Philip dumps

Frances at Desborough Hall, his ancestral estate, and heads back to his old life and his old habits in London. Frances is outraged at his treatment of her! In her eyes, they were much too different to suit. There was no way a cold-hearted man like Philip could ever understand the delicate sensibilities of a woman, nevermind cater to them.

When the earl returns to his home, driven by guilt, he discovers the woman he married has grossly deceived him. What follows is a battle of the sexes that will have you chuckling, maybe even howling with laughter. Will Phillip and Frances ever be able to understand each other? Or are they destined to a lifetime of misunderstandings and disappointment? Maybe men and women are just too different to cope...you will have to read their story to see what happens!

Coulter, C. (2000). *Midsummer Magic*. New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc.

LOVE CAN CONQUER ANYTHING

Love Conquers All...

This is a story of Delaney Saxton, a man who struck it rich in the California gold rush of 1949 and started to build a great city, and Chauncey Fitzhugh, an heiress from England who travels to San Francisco to avenge her father. She believes Delaney Saxton ruined him and plans to destroy Saxton in the same way he destroyed her father—leaving him betrayed and penniless.

But her prey isn't what she expected. He is charming, too handsome for his own good, rich—and elusive as a wisp of smoke. As for Chauncey, as bright and creative as she is, she can't come up with a plan to ruin him financially until, quite by accident, she is hurt and ends up in his bed and in his care. Naturally, one thing leads to another...

Although Chauncey gains what she wants – Delaney's absolute trust, it wasn't in her scheme to fall in love with him. But soon the tables are turned when Delaney finds out the truth behind Chauncey's actions. Unbearably hurt by the woman he had given his heart to, Delaney does not know what to do. He doesn't know if he can just forgive and forget in order to stay with the woman he loves.

In the journey towards healing, these two strong-willed people must overcome their distrust of each other in order to save their relationship. Is their love strong enough to get them through?

Coulter, C. (1986). *Midnight Star*. New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

It was love at first sight!

As the fires of war raged around him, Lord Alleyne Bedwyn was thrown from his horse and left for dead – only to awaken in the bedchamber of a ladies’ brothel. Suddenly the dark, handsome diplomat has no memory of who he is or how he got there – yet of one thing he is certain: The angel who nurses him back to health is the woman he vows to make his own. From the first time he laid his eyes upon her, he felt a stirring in his heart unlike any other. It had to be love...and he would spend the rest of his lifetime proving it to her and himself. Regardless of what he was in his past lifetime, he knew that he would not be able to live without Rachel York in his future.

But like him, Rachel York is not who she seems. A lovely young woman caught up in desperate circumstances, she must devise a scheme to regain her stolen fortune. She did not have time to ponder over the stirrings in her own heart for the battered man that laid before her in the dirty cot of a brothel. She refused to believe that a sensible woman like her could have fallen in love so easily. Love was an unnecessary frivolity in life, and she just could not afford to let it deter her from her ultimate goal.

Understanding that the dashing soldier she rescued from near death could be the key to her fortune, Rachel agrees to pose as his wife- a masquerade that will embroil them in a sinful scandal, where their love blossoms and binds them together ...does Alleyne succeed in his plan to truly marry Rachel or will she never be able to come to terms with her newfound love?

Balogh, M. (2004). *Slightly Sinful*. New York: Random House, Inc.

PARTNERS CANNOT CHANGE

Old habits die hard...

Sabrina Eversleigh runs away from home after her new brother-in-law attempts to seduce her. She would surely have died in a blizzard if Phillip Mercerault had not rescued her. He nurses her back to health only to find that he is not a hero. Instead, he’s a gentleman who has compromised a lady. Now there is only one thing left for him to do—marry her. Considering himself too young for marriage and too used to his old habits, he hopes that nothing in his life will drastically change from such a decision.

But Sabrina turns him down, leaving him completely baffled. She grossly detests Phillip’s habits and refuses to marry a man who will not respect her own desires and needs. However, things don’t turn out quite the way Sabrina planned, and it is she, then, who must propose, sweetening the pot with a big dowry and an offer of freedom for Phillip. But what’s a husband to do when he knows his bride demands that he change his

ways and expects way too much? And more important, what is the bride to do when she follows her husband to his mistress' lodgings and discovers him on the point of indulging?

Phillip and Sabrina have a long way to go before they can sit amicably at the same table together. It has been said that people don't change overnight, but in Phillip and Sabrina's case, is change even possible? Read on to see if their budding love can help them reach a suitable compromise!

Coulter, C. (1997). *The Offer*. New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc

LOVE OF A WOMAN CAN CHANGE A MAN

She never gave up on him...

Most English girls meet their heart's desire across a crowded ballroom or in a genteel parlor. Letitia Olive Hornsby finds hers when she knocks him into a river. A curly-haired, blue-eyed hellion of only eleven, she decides even then that Richard, the dashing, handsome, and totally disreputable son of the Earl of Downe, is the white knight of her dreams.

Now fully grown and unexpectedly beautiful, Letty is spinning a plan to save Richard from himself...by marrying him, of course. And he soon has the bruises to prove it. The insufferable, albeit unforgettable, chit has come back into his life with a crash –literally falling into his arms. He is struck by her softness, her dizzying scent, and her impossible meddling in his ruinous drinking, gambling, and amorous liaisons. But when fate makes them prisoners of a ring of dangerous smugglers, Richard discovers in his mischievous cellmate a pure, romantic, loving spirit that sparks a flame of love in his own shadowed heart. It his deepest yearning stirs a desire to be the man that Letty pictures him to be – a noble, honest, and faithful gentleman. If only they can escape, a wondrous passion can blaze free...and they can find a lifetime's adventures in each other's arms.

Barnett, J. (1994). *Dreaming*. New York: First Pocket Books, Simon & Schuster, Inc.

SEXUAL PERFECTIONISM

When they were together in bed, everything just felt so right...

High society wedding planner Lauren Remington is determined to prove her family wrong and make a success of her business, but a last minute disaster brings a glorious end to all her grand plans. Desperate for help, her only hope is Max Wilde, a man whose rugged, leather-clad body is almost as dangerous as his sleek black Harley. Max is

everything Lauren's mother warned her about—he was seduction incarnate—but desperate times call for desperate measures...providing she can convince him to take the job.

Max isn't sure why he agreed to help save Lauren's shapely derriere, especially when one tilt of her snobby blue-blooded nose is enough to annoy a living saint. There's just something about the way Lauren's curvy body snuggles up against his that feels perfect, and he'd kill to see her out of her Chanel suit and into tight red leather. Although they were worlds apart during the day, when they were alone at night, tangled in the covers of his bed, everything just felt right. It felt as if their bodies were screaming to be together after waiting a lifetime to find a perfect fit. Still, Max knows that his wrong-side-of-the-tracks background could never fit in Lauren's high society world... but somewhere deep in the night, a passion so sensual and exciting blossoms and binds them together in a web of desire and destiny ...leading them to discover a love so fiery, they burned for each other with it. Could the passionate love they shared at night survive throughout the day?

Borg, P. (2001). *Born to Be Wild*. New York: HarperCollinsPublishers.

DISAGREEMENT IS DESTRUCTIVE, BUT IF A COUPLES IS ABLE TO GET THROUGH IT, IT ONLY MAKES A RELATIONSHIP STRONGER

Passion at its worst....and best...

Emily Maitland didn't wish to rush into a match with one of the insipid fops she met in London. But since her parents insisted she choose a suitor immediately, she gave her hand to Major Sheridan Blake. The gallant officer was everything Emily desired in a man: He was charming, dashing – and completely imaginary. Happy to married to a fictitious husband, Emily certainly never expected a counterfeit Major Blake to appear in the flesh and claim her as his bride.

Determined to expose the handsome rogue without revealing her own masquerade, Emily declares war with her Major Blake. Determined to follow through with his mission, her imposter fights fire with fire in a clash of wills. What they both didn't expect was being swept up in the most fascinating intrigue of all: passionate love. The only question was: Could Emily and her Major Blake put aside their differences, their mission, and their pride in order to let their love grow? If not, their love would be doomed to disaster...but if so, their compromise would strengthen the bonds of the passionate love that blossomed between them.

Coulter, C. (1980). *Sweet Seduction*. New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc

MINDREADING IS REQUIRED IN A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP

She couldn't help but be attracted to the way he treated her...

THE SAINT. When her friend dies, leaving four young children motherless, Valeriana MacPherson becomes determined to care for her childhood friend's sons and daughters, despite the disapproval of her mother who believes a prim and proper lady should never live, unattended, in the same household as a widowed man.

THE SINNER. When Ian Patterson gets pinned for his wife's mysterious death, he is overcome with anger and despair at his loss. Although he did not love his wife, he was responsible for her and his children. Trying to solve the mystery of his wife's death along with raising four children, he understands that he can't depend on anyone else besides himself. The minute Valeriana marches into his house, he is ready to send her packing – until he sees the magic she works on his children...and on his own jaded heart. For the first time in his life, his heart stirs for this magnificent woman who has somehow gotten under his skin. Living under the same roof, he can't seem to get her out of his mind – every waking moment is filled with thoughts of her, and even his dreams are haunted by her presence. Most importantly, he is taken aback by the force of his desire to be the man of *her dreams*.

Valeriana, on the other hand, struggles with her own romantic battle. Having been burned by love once, she tries to resist Ian's attentions to protect her vulnerable heart. No man will ever truly come to understand and respect her as an equal. Even knowing that, she can't help but succumb to Ian's gentle, caring, and most importantly, *understanding* attitude towards her. He respects her beliefs, thoughts, and feelings, and listens to her in a way that no man ever has. He knows exactly what she is thinking and feeling, and always seems to find the right words to soothe her worries and chase away her concerns. Sometimes she thinks that he knows her more than she knows herself! How can a woman resist a man who is so attuned to her deepest desires and hopes...who shows his love and care for her in everything he does?

Will Valeriana get over her fear and lower the defenses around her heart? Will Ian's caring love be enough to win Valeriana's trust? Read their story to see if their love can be sustained through care and attention!

Bieber, J. (2000). *In Name Only*. New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group.

TRADITIONAL SEX STEREOTYPES**Prim and proper ladies don't get attracted to rakes!**

Knowing that she alone can protect her sister from the Baron Harwood, their lecherous stepfather, bluestocking Victoria Temple Whiting snatches the family's heirloom necklace, believed to hold the power to bring great happiness or terrible tragedy, to pay for their escape to London. Terrified that the baron will find them, Victoria poses as Tory Temple and finds employment as a servant in the household of handsome Cordell Easton, the scandalous Earl of Brant. Believing that she would never succumb to a seduction of a rake, she fights her own inner battle when she feels the first stirrings of attraction to the tall, strong, and dominating Earl.

There was something about her that caught his eye...

The sisters' arrival couldn't have been more welcome. In need of a new mistress, Cord turns to the young Miss Temple, whose gentle, caring and loving nature intrigue him. Living in a society full of greed and power, he has never met anyone as selfless as Tory. Compared to his own privileged lifestyle, she was practically a martyr! But when the baron discovers the girls' whereabouts, Cord learns Tory's secret- her noble birth. Furious that he has compromised the daughter of a peer, Cord must decide –marry Tory and keep her safe, or allow his stubborn pride to deny his heart. Tory faces a similar decision – marry Cord knowing that the rake may not truly love her as his wife, or allow *her* stubborn pride to deny her heart. Follow them on their journey to discovering that sometimes...love can blossom between two opposites...

Martin, K. (2005). *The Bride's Necklace*. Ontario, Canada: MIRA Books

APPENDIX C: TABLES

Table 1. Percentages for initial reading age for female respondents.

AGE		RESPONSE PERCENT	RESPONSE TOTAL
11 years old		1.27%	2
12 years old		2.53%	4
13 years old		0.63%	1
14 years old		34.20%	54
15 years old		18.40%	29
16 years old		23.40%	73
17 years old		10.10%	16
18 years old		4.40%	7
19 years old		1.90%	3
20 years old		1.30%	2
21 years old		0.60%	1
22 years old		1.30%	2

Table 2. Percentages for the initial dating/relationship age for female respondents.

AGE		RESPONSE PERCENT	RESPONSE TOTAL
12 years old		3.16%	5
13 years old		21.50%	34
14 years old		20.30%	32
15 years old		13.30%	21
16 years old		17.10%	27
17 years old		7.60%	12
18 years old		9.50%	15
19 years old		0.60%	1
20 years old		1.90%	3
21 years old		1.30%	2
22 years old		0.60%	1
Never had a boyfriend, but dating		3.16%	5

Table 3. Percentages for the amount of hours spent reading a week.

AGE		RESPONSE PERCENT	RESPONSE TOTAL
0-1 hours		77.80%	123
2-3 hours		13.30%	21
4-5 hours		5.06%	8
6-7 hours		1.30%	2
8-9 hours		1.30%	2
10-11 hours		0%	0
12-13 hours		0.63%	1
14-15 hours		0.63%	1

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Relationship Characteristic.

	ACTUAL		IDEAL	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Level Of Understanding	4.66	1.219	6.53	0.603
Level Of Support	5.19	1.167	6.66	0.538
Consideration	4.94	1.089	6.58	0.669
Honesty and Trust	4.91	1.473	6.78	0.488
Demonstration of Affection	4.81	1.067	6.51	0.663
Sensitivity to each other's needs	5.33	1.291	6.29	0.79
Romance	4.74	1.325	6.39	0.761
Generosity	5.21	1.15	6.34	0.777
Communication	4.6	1.29	6.63	0.568
Friendship	5.81	1.193	6.69	0.614
Level of Criticism towards each other	4.39	1.128	5.07	1.239
Being in love with each other	5.14	1.418	6.79	0.481
Reliability	5.16	1.344	6.62	0.623
Respect	5.6	1.294	6.7	0.708
Equality	5.36	1.29	6.46	0.808
Level of Desired Change	4.29	1.012	5.04	1.207
Commitment	4.99	1.432	6.6	0.684
Spontaneity	4.6	1.167	6.06	0.947
Independence	4.99	1.133	5.75	0.997
Excitement	5.19	1.281	6.49	0.709
Sex Relations/Passion	5.48	1.213	6.7	0.581
Similarity in personalities	4.95	1.302	5.76	1.043
Stability	4.8	1.495	6.38	0.767
Intellectual equality	5.19	1.301	6.14	0.91
Being soulmates	4.38	1.462	6.18	1.019
Level of fun had with each other	5.98	1.107	6.73	0.603
Similarity of interests	5.04	1.186	6.02	0.914
Conventiality	4.94	1.297	5.8	1.148
Ability to compromise	4.82	1.126	6.33	0.707
Loyalty towards one another	5.38	1.431	6.69	0.585
Philosophy of life	4.88	1.178	6.08	0.949
Amount of time spent together	4.68	1.58	6.06	0.895
Physical Attraction	5.89	1.046	6.56	0.67
dDistribution of power	4.98	1.283	5.96	1.018
Level of emotional security	4.75	1.423	6.41	0.721
Confiding in each other	5.3	1.312	6.53	0.672
Familiarity of each other's thoughts and nee	5.28	1.192	6.45	0.725
Contentment	5.12	1.814	6.43	0.781
Similar priorities	4.78	1.401	6.34	0.719
Working together/Making big decisions	4.67	1.326	6.29	0.844
Quarreling (Disgreement/Fighting)	4.39	1.419	5.39	1.387
Confrontation of conflict	4.38	1.292	5.65	1.15