

The Prince Charming Effect: An Analysis of the Effect Unrealistic
Portrayals of Men have on Relationship Satisfaction
within Romantic Relationships

Danielle Render

Mercer University

Introduction

An unfortunate reality in the United States is the remarkably high divorce rate (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2015), from the year 2000 to 2014, the divorce and annulment rate in the United States neared 1 million couples each year. In other words, for every 1,000 couples, anywhere from 3.2 to 4.0 couples divorced every year (CDC, 2015). In addition to these alarming statistics, Kim and McKenry (2002) found that marriage is an important indicator of psychological well-being. With research discussing the importance of marriage in psychological health, there is a need for research to look into why the prevalence rates for divorce are high.

Problem Statement

When it comes to the issue of divorce, as with any other complex issue, there is not a single cause that can be isolated (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). One theory that has been frequently discussed in research is the topic of unrealistic expectations, idealistic expectations, and misconstrued notions about marriage (Demo & Ganong, 1994). Although there have been some conflicting findings, a large number of research studies have found that unrealistic and idealistic expectations lower relationship satisfaction (Holmes, 2007; McNulty & Karney, 2004; Sharp & Ganong, 2000). Even more alarming, is that research suggests that the higher the expectations the steeper the declines in the relationship satisfaction over time (McNulty & Karney, 2004; Lavner, Karney, & Bradbury, 2013).

In a culture that is filled with romantic imagery through multiple media outlets, it is no surprise that an identified potential reason for idealistic expectations is the media. According to Baran and Davis (2003), modeling from the media allows individuals to efficiently learn behaviors and solutions to problems quickly without sustaining harm. With the mass media being filled with idealistic representations of romantic relationships and partners, the viewing of this

romantic media leads to an internalization of these unrealistic beliefs; especially towards one's partner (Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Chernin & Fishbein, 2007; Galloway, Engstrom, & Emmers-Sommer, 2015; Shapiro & Kroeger, 2007). Thus when the research is connected, there are important implications to be studied regarding the media, the media's effect on unrealistic romantic expectations, and how the media's portrayal of romantic relationships and romantic partners may effect romantic relationships in reality.

As Holmes (2007) discussed, the media in the American society is saturated with messages about romance and romantic relationships. This can include the unrealistic and idealized portrayals of men in romantic relationships. As Steinzeig (2012) discusses, the media offers specific expectations for women to hold about their male partners. These unrealistic and idealistic representations have been termed as "Prince Charming" (Steinzeig, 2012).

Purpose of Study

With research demonstrating that unrealistic expectations may lead to lowered satisfaction, and that exposure to the media may encourage such expectations, it is probable that the unrealistic portrayals of men in the media contribute to lessened relationship satisfaction for women. With that in mind, the current study seeks to discover if the idealistic representations of men in the media lead women to hold unrealistic and idealistic beliefs about men in romantic relationships, and if so to discover if these beliefs lead to lessened satisfaction within these relationships. The studying of the relationships between these factors may offer insight into how such unrealistic ideals negatively affect women in romantic relationships. In addition, this insight may be a valuable contribution to the counseling profession in offering a tool to grasp a better understanding of how unrealistic and idealistic romantic beliefs might be detrimental to the individual who holds them. Such a tool of insight could potentially offer self-awareness to the women who hold these expectations and may lead to an ability to create more realistic and

potentially more satisfying expectations.

Research Question

If a study could be conducted to address the stated problem, the results of the study could positively impact many individuals; more specifically the target population, or women. For this study, the research question being posed is as follows: Does the unrealistic and idealistic representation of men in romance media (books, novels, tv shows, movies, etc.) lead women to have unrealistic and idealistic beliefs that lead to lessened satisfaction within romantic relationships? The goal of this study is to answer this question in such a way that adds to the existing literature and offer data that will benefit the counseling profession.

Research Hypothesis

Creating a hypothesis to respond to the research question involves a discussion about a new term that this study is proposing be added to the literature. The term being discussed is called the “Prince Charming Effect”. If the research provides data that offers an affirmative answer to the research question, then the data would provide evidence of a Prince Charming Effect. More simply put, this effect states that unrealistic and idealistic representations of men in romantic media lead to similar unrealistic and idealistic beliefs in women that lead to lessened relationship satisfaction. Although this term is being offered, the author’s hypothesis is oppositely a negative response to the question being posed. For this study, the hypothesis being offered is that the unrealistic representation of men in the media does not lead to unrealistic or idealistic beliefs; thus offering no reason for relationship satisfaction to be lessened. The hopes for this study is that data will offer evidence of a Prince Charming Effect or otherwise offer no evidence of such an effect.

Conclusion

With many marriages ending in divorce in the United States, it is no surprise that research

is filled with studies seeking to find contributing factors to this alarming issue (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). This study seeks to discover if the Prince Charming Effect may be a contributing factor to the lessened satisfaction in relationships for American women and ultimately affect the divorce statistic. Although the issue of divorce is complex and is not linear, the study being proposed may contribute to the growing research on reasons for why this difficult life situation is so prevalent in the American society.

Review of the Literature

Research has found that marital satisfaction is significant factor in a person's well-being (Galloway, Engstrom, & Emmers-Sommer, 2015; Kim & McKenry, 2002). With this finding, research has sought to discover what factors might lead to a decrease in marital satisfaction. Although some research contradicts these findings, many studies have indicated that a powerful contributor to a decrease in marital satisfaction is the holding of unrealistic expectations (Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Kim & McKenry, 2002; McNulty & Karney, 2004; Sharp & Ganong, 2000; Hamamci, 2005; Bredow, 2015; Shapiro & Kroeger, 2007; Galician, 2003; Barrece, 1993). Research suggests that these unrealistic or idealistic expectations may be attributed to the unrealistic romantic ideals that are presented in the media (Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Chernin & Fishbein, 2007; Galloway et al., 2015; Shapiro & Kroeger, 2007; Holmes, 2007; Galician, 2003). With recent findings linking unrealistic expectations with the media's portrayals of romantic relationships, there is a need to further research how romantic portrayals within the media effect individuals and their relationship satisfaction.

This literature is divided into five sections. In these sections, there will be research providing information and findings on the multifaceted relationships between the portrayals of men in the relationship media and the how they ultimately effect women's satisfaction within romantic relationships. To present this information in a comprehensive manner, part one will

introduce research that discusses how unrealistic romantic portrayals in the media lead to unrealistic expectations. Part two will specify how the media portrays men in romantic relationships in an unrealistic manner. Following part two will be part three which will examine what research says about the impact that unrealistic expectations have on romantic relationships; particularly on relationship satisfaction. Part four will include a synthesis of the research provided, a critique of the research discussed, and a discussion on the gaps of the research provided. Part five will include a section that will conclude the provided literature review.

Part One: Romantic Portrayals in the Media and Unrealistic Expectations

The media is saturated with messages about romantic relationships (Homes, 2007). These messages are often utilized by individuals, specifically young people, to learn about romantic relationships and what they entail (Holmes, 2007; Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Bachen & Illouz, 1996). Where learning and modeling from the mass media can be an efficient way of learning a range of behaviors and solutions to problems, the media does not depict romantic or marital relationships accurately (Baran & Davis, 2003; Galloway et al., 2015). With the media inaccurately depicting romantic relationships, this makes real life comparisons to media portrayals unsuitable and harmful (Galloway et al., 2015).

Although romantic media is not inherently harmful, part of the issue about the portrayals of romance in the media is that these portrayals promote unrealistic expectations about sex, love, and romance (Galician, 2003). According to Galician (2003), what is considered unrealistic is associated with fantasy or an illusion and involves an unattainable perfection. This definition of unrealistic can also be substituted with idealistic; a term which will be used interchangeably with unrealistic throughout this literature review (Galician, 2003). With research finding that the media is used as a tool to learn about romantic relationships and with a prevalence of unrealistic portrayals in the media, it is not surprising that exposure to the media may lead individuals to

adopt unrealistic beliefs and expectations.

Although research has not found a direct causal link between media exposure and unrealistic marriage beliefs, a vast amount of research has found a correlation between these two factors (Lippman, Ward, & Seabrook, 2014; Segrin & Nabi, 2002). Specifically, where general television and media viewing may not lead to unrealistic beliefs about romance and marriage, the viewing of romantic genre media has been correlated with unrealistic romantic perceptions (Straub, 2006; Segrin & Nabi, 2002). A positive correlation was found between viewing romantic media and holding idealistic expectations about marriage (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). The reason for this is that romantic media romanticizes romance and marriage in such a way that it leads to idealistic expectations (Straub, 2006).

Additionally, there are theories of media effects that explain the possibility of such a causation occurring (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). One such theory is the well-cited cultivation theory (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). The cultivation theory posits that conceptions about reality are cultivated by the exposure to media, specifically television viewing, over a long period of time (Gerbner et al., 1994). This theory proposes that those who are heavy television viewers are more likely to further this cultivation and perceive the world in ways that mirror the reality presented on television (Gerbner et al., 1994). This claim has been supported by research in findings indicating that greater exposure to romantic media is associated with individuals holding unrealistic beliefs about romantic relationships (Chernin & Fishbein, 2007; Shapiro & Kroeger, 2007; Lippman et al., 2014). More specifically, exposure to romantic media can lead individuals to believe that love conquers all, one's partner should be able to sense one's needs and feelings, have greater expectations for intimacy, and idealize their partner (Galloway et al., 2015; Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Chernin & Fisbein, 2007).

When unrealistic or idealistic expectations are held about romantic relationships, research

indicates that these beliefs shape an individual's intentions in marrying and within romantic relationships (Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Hefner & Wilson, 2013). The hazard in this is that holding these unrealistic expectations can lead individuals to become intolerant of conflict, tedious routines, and other features that characterize real romantic relationships (Galloway et al., 2015). These reactions to unrealistic expectations can cause disturbances within marriages, dysfunctional emotions within individuals, and lead to myth endorsement; all of which can lead to marital dissatisfaction and potentially divorce (Galloway et al., 2015).

When considering research that has been done specifically on how women are effected by the viewing of romantic media, one study offers significant implications. In a study conducted by Shapiro and Kroeger (2007), a hypothesis was offered that participants who endorse unrealistic beliefs about romantic relationships report more exposure to romantic media than subjects who do not. Additionally, Shapiro and Kroeger (2007) also examined the relationship between an individual's relationship satisfaction and their exposure to media. For the purpose of their study, 109 adult participants were involved (Shapiro & Kroeger, 2007). At the completion of their study, findings suggest that not only do unrealistic beliefs correlate to a higher exposure of romantic media but also that women who are more exposed to such media tend to be less satisfied in their romantic relationships (Shapiro & Kroeger, 2007). With the study being proposed involving female participants, these findings are of great significance.

Part Two: The Unrealistic Portrayal of Men in Romance Media

As discussed previously, the media is saturated with unrealistic portrayals of romantic relationships (Straub, 2006). Regarding the portrayals of the individuals within the romantic relationships in romantic media, the media utilizes stereotypes to make a point quickly (Galician, 2003). Stereotypes can be explained as characterizations, either positive or negative, about a group of people which depend on expectations or assumptions (Galician, 2003). Although

stereotypes might be useful in communicating a story in a quick manner, these stereotypes may also be harmful and inaccurate (Galician, 2003).

For the purpose of the research being proposed, the portrayal of men is an important aspect of the romantic media to be discussed. Although research on the unrealistic portrayals of men in the media has been limited, what has been conducted presents significant findings. According to Galician (2003), the media presents men in an unrealistic and fantastical way that ordinary men may be unable to live up to. Steinzeig (2012) furthers this discussion in claiming that men may be portrayed as perfect; or as Prince Charming. The portrayals of Prince Charming present a male who is strong, chivalrous, independent, responsible, brave, comforting, and motivated (Steinzeig, 2012). Additionally, he may be “tall dark and handsome”, a “knight in shining armor”, and will give you everything (Steinzeig, 2012, p. 30-32). Put simply, Prince Charming has been defined as a “stereotypical perfect male composed of qualities taken from books, movies, and fairy tales”; a term that will be utilized further in the study being proposed (Steinzeig, 2012, p. 30).

Part Three: The Impact of Unrealistic Expectations

As stated previously, the holding of unrealistic expectations in a romantic relationship can have serious negative consequences on the holder of such expectations (Crosby, 1991; Galician, 2003). Sharp and Ganong (2000) define unrealistic relationship beliefs as predispositions that lead to biases within individuals to interpret romantic relationship events irrationally. The interpreting of relationship events in an irrational manner and relationship expectations going unmet can lead to negative cognitive and affective reactions to marital problems (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). Such indications found in research may lead to important implications about relationship satisfaction from the perspective of an individual who has unrealistic beliefs and expectations.

Research implies that with higher endorsement of unrealistic beliefs come lower levels of marital satisfaction (Sharp & Ganong, 2000). According to Johnson (2015), marital satisfaction is defined as the perceived contentment and happiness an individual has within his or her marriage (Johnson, 2015). Research conducted on marital satisfaction has been extensive and suggests that a multiple factors interact and influence each other to determine marital satisfaction (Johnson, 2015). These factors include characteristics of the relationship, behavior of the spouses, and characteristics specific to the individuals within the relationship; which can include relationship expectations (Johnson, 2015).

Although expectations are not the only factor determining relationship satisfaction, Demo and Ganong (1994) describe unrealistic, idealistic, and romanticized notions about marriage as the most insidious factors in lessening marital satisfaction. Research has found a consistent correlation between marital satisfaction and the fulfillment of marital expectations (Johnson, 2015). With many individuals going into marital relationships believing that their social, financial, and sexual needs will be met, finding these needs are not met leads to lesser degree of satisfaction within a romantic relationship than an individual might have hoped for. In fact, this lessened satisfaction might be severe enough to cause disappointment and misery (Galician, 2003).

Although unrealistic expectations have been denoted as a factor that undermines relationship satisfaction for all individuals, research has found this relationship to be particularly alarming when pertaining to women. Multiple studies have indicated that the holding of unrealistic expectations in romantic relationships can lead to distressing consequences for women (Lavner, Karney, & Bradbury, 2013). In fact, Barrece (1993) suggests that the holding of static myths in romantic relationships may prompt women to be unhappy. Lavner et al. (2013) confirmed this hypothesis in their alarming finding which indicated that the women in their study

who hold the most optimistic and unrealistic beliefs about their relationship's future had lower self-esteem, higher levels of stress, and ultimately ended up with the steepest declines in marital satisfaction.

In a study conducted by Faubert (2008), their research found that there were some common unrealistic beliefs held by women that led to dissatisfaction within romantic relationships. These unrealistic beliefs that were commonly held were 1) that getting married would bring them happiness and 2) that they would have someone constant in their life who would support them and always be there for them (Faubert, 2008). In addition to these findings, Faubert (2008) found that the most helpful belief held by individuals in marriage is opposite of unrealistic beliefs in that this belief is that the individual will never have perfection within their relationship (Faubert, 2008). These findings support the notion that the holding of unrealistic expectations in relationships can lessen an individual's relationship satisfaction and harm their overall well-being.

In addition to lessened marital satisfaction, there have been other findings related to unrealistic expectations and negative effects in romantic relationships. Although it is not a variable being discussed in the study being proposed, it is important to note that in some studies unrealistic expectations have been found to not only lead to lessened satisfaction in romantic relationships but also hinder an individual from becoming invested in a relationship (Bredow, 2015). Shapiro and Kroeger (2007) elaborate on this concept in signifying that individuals who hold unrealistic standards in romantic relationships report being less psychologically invested in getting married than individuals with more attainable goals. Whereas these findings are not immediately pertinent to the variables being discussed in this study, they are important to be aware of in gaining a fuller understanding about the effects of unrealistic expectations.

Part Four: Synthesis, Critique, and Gaps in the Literature

Synthesis

With marital satisfaction being a strong indicator of psychological well-being, the alarming divorce rate signifies that an important aspect to be studied are factors that contribute to dissatisfaction in marriages (Kim & McKenry, 2002; Segrin & Nabi, 2002). As found in the literature, a powerful contributing factor to the dissatisfaction in marriages are the holding of unrealistic expectations about romantic relationships (Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Sharp & Ganong, 2000; Demo & Ganong, 1994). The reason for this is that these expectations lead to a greater intolerance for aspects of real relationships and leave individuals with their expectations unmet (Galloway et al., 2015; Johnson, 2015). Research has specifically noted how these unrealistic expectations can be harmful towards women and lower their marital satisfaction (Faubert, 2008).

With romantic media portraying romantic relationships in unrealistic and idealistic ways, findings have indicated that these portrayals may be a factor that leads individuals to adopt these harmful unrealistic expectations (Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Galician, 2003; Straub, 2006). Included in these unrealistic portrayals, are the unrealistic presentations of men which have been termed as the Prince Charming stereotype (Steinzeig, 2012). The consequences women might endure due to the portrayals of men in romance media are in question.

Critique

Although there are many merits to the research discussed in this review of the literature, there are limitations to these studies. Specifically, the research discussed was primarily conducted with participants who were undergraduate students. With participants of this nature, the mean age of the studies varied little from the early 20's. Additionally, the participant populations in the studies discussed primarily consisted of Caucasian individuals. Where the research findings discussed are of great value, the effect these results may be constrained due to the lack of demographic variance.

Identified Gaps in the Research

In the literature, a large amount of research has been conducted on: 1) the correlation between unrealistic portrayals in romance media and unrealistic expectations and 2) the effects unrealistic expectations have on relationship satisfaction. Because the literature discusses these effects broadly, they are limited to discussing generalities. Thus, there is a lack of literature discussing the specifics involving women and their relationship satisfaction or relationship beliefs, along with a lack of research discussing the unrealistic portrayals of men. Further research is needed in these areas.

In the research study being proposed, the research will narrow the scope of previous research and discuss the specifics of how the relationship satisfaction of women in particular is effected when unrealistic expectations are involved. Furthermore, the study will discuss how the portrayals of the unrealistic Prince Charming stereotype in romantic media may contribute to the lessening of satisfaction for women. This research aims to bridge the gaps in research by adding specific research to the literature about how the portrayals of Prince Charming effect women. This study aims to add to the existing counseling literature by providing insight into the relationships between women, romantic media, unrealistic expectations, and romantic satisfaction. Finally, in regards to the demographic limitations discussed previously, the research being proposed aims to broaden the demographic scope than previous research with specific regard for age and racial demographics.

Part Five: Conclusion

This review of the literature presented research that is relevant to how romantic portrayals in the media, specifically portrayals of men, might lead women to obtain unrealistic expectations about romantic relationships that could compromise their relationship satisfaction. This literature review included discussions on a) the unrealistic portrayals in romance media, and

how these portrayals may lead to unrealistic expectations within romantic relationships; b) the unrealistic portrayals of men in the media, or otherwise known as the Prince Charming stereotype; and c) how unrealistic expectations negatively effect relationship satisfaction, especially for women. The research being proposed aims to build upon the research discussed by adding to the existing literature and ultimately contribute to the counseling profession.

Methodology

As discussed previously, the purpose of this study is to a) determine if the unrealistic representations of men in the romance media lead women to conversely hold unrealistic and idealistic beliefs about men in relationships, and if so to discover if b) these unrealistic expectations lead to lessened satisfaction within relationships. To adequately discuss how the methodology of the future study will address these questions, the remainder of this chapter will include discussions about: the research design, the population and sampling, the instrumentation that will be used, the procedures, and the limitations. The research design section will discuss the type of design chosen for the proposed study. The population and sampling section will introduce the criteria for the participants that will be included in the study. The instrumentation section will identify the instruments that will be used for this study and the reasoning for choosing such instruments. The procedures will further elaborate and explain the method of the data collection. Finally, the limitations section will discuss potential limitations that may result from the chosen methodology.

Research Design

The research design that will be utilized for the future study is a cross-sectional, correlational quasi-experimental design. Cross-sectional designs involve collecting data at one point in time in comparison to the collecting of data across time (Sheperis, Young & Daniels, 2017). The correlational design has been chosen to gain insight into the degree of relationship

between the variables being discussed (Sheperis et al., 2017). A quasi-experimental design will allow the researcher to utilize non-manipulated factors and prevent the use of random assignment (Sheperis et al., 2017). Utilizing such a design allows for equivalence within the groups which then will allow the author to generalize the findings (Sheperis et al., 2017). Conducting a quasi-experimental design will allow the researcher to interpret results and infer possible causation, or deduce if the Prince Charming Effect is present, without the added rigor of a predictive design. The future study will consist of quantitative methods for assessing the relationships between the unrealistic representation in romance media, unrealistic expectations, and relationship satisfaction.

Context, Population and Sampling

For this study, participants will be recruited using convenience sampling, or procuring participants from a source that is most accessible to the author (Sheperis et al., 2017). Convenience sampling is a method that involves nonrandom methods (Sheperis et al., 2017). Included in these nonrandom methods is the method that will be utilized in this study; requesting for individuals to volunteer (Sheperis et al., 2017). The individuals who will be eligible to volunteer in the proposed study will be females over the age of 18 years of age who are currently involved in a romantic relationship.

Once receiving certification from the Mercer University International Review Board (IRB), the author will seek to recruit participants through within the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program in Penfield College who are graduate students or faculty members. These participants will be recruited through 1) a Mercer email inviting individuals to participate, 2) specific courses where consenting professors will invite individuals to participate with the incentive of receiving extra credit, or 3) announcements made by consenting faculty to their courses. These participants will then be able to participate in this study electronically.

According to Sheperis et al. (2017), in order to obtain the most significant results, an author may choose to utilize the smallest sample that reasonably reveals significance and represents the population without being too large to find inaccurate significance. For quasi-experimental studies, it has been proposed that 30 participants or more be utilized (Sheperis et al., 2017). Thus, to have an adequate sample size, the study will require a minimum of 35 participants. Although this is the case, the study will aim for a sample size of 50 to increase the sample's representation of the population while also not being too large.

Instrumentation

To thoroughly research the variables previously discussed, two quantitative instruments were chosen: the Implicit Association Test (IAT) and the Quality Marriage Index (QMI). These measures are quantitative in nature in that they provide numerical values opposed to categorical variables (Sheperis et al., 2017). In addition to these instruments, a demographic questionnaire will be utilized to screen out for potential participants who do not meet the research criteria and obtain participant demographics. In the following sections, each of these instruments will be discussed in further detail.

Demographic Questionnaire

The author will utilize a demographic questionnaire to ensure participant qualification for the study. The questionnaire will be created by the author. This questionnaire will involve a variety of information including age, race, relationship status, and relationship history. The questionnaire will be supplemental to the IAT and the QMI; the main instruments of the study.

Implicit Association Test

According to Greenwald and Banaji (1995), attitudes and stereotypes are important implicit modes of operation which can influence individuals' beliefs and behaviors. Due to this finding, Greenwald and Banaji (1995) created the IAT which is designed to measure such

implicit associations. The IAT assesses the relationship between four associations involving two pairs of opposing concepts (Nosek, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2005). For this study, the concepts will include a) unrealistic and ideal romantic representations of men versus unideal romantic representations of men, and b) words associated with relationship satisfaction versus words that are associated with relationship dissatisfaction.

Although self-report measures have commonly been used in related research, the author has chosen to utilize the IAT to take the research to a different level. In contrast to self-report measures, as a measure of implicit cognition the IAT can measure implicit associations without requiring the participants to participate in self-examination (Nosek et al., 2005). This allows for the IAT to have an increased validity when compared to self-report measures (Greenwald et al., 2009). Additionally, the IAT has been found to discover large effect sizes, be easy to implement, and have decent reliability (Nosek et al., 2005).

The IAT will require the participants to observe presented stimuli, or concepts, and after observing these stimuli press a key that is associated with a concept in the other pair. In other words, the participants will observe 20 images of unrealistic representations of men and 20 images of realistic representations of men. After viewing these images, they will be asked to press a specified key corresponding to words that are related to relationship satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The scores will be recorded as response times. Once obtained, these response times will then be correlated to the stimuli to infer relationships between the variables.

Quality Marriage Index

In addition to the IAT, the QMI measure will be used in this study. The QMI was created by Norton (1983) to measure marital quality. The QMI will be utilized in this study to qualify the results found with the IAT by offering another set of data that measures the participants' levels of relationship satisfaction. Obtaining multiple sets of data in this way will allow for an increased

understanding of the Prince Charming Effect (Sheperis et al., 2017).

Specifically, the QMI is a six-item instrument that measures relationship satisfaction (Graham, Diebels, & Barnow, 2011). The items require participants to respond to the level in which they agree or disagree with statements about their relationship (McNulty & Karney, 2004). The numerical scores are then added together to obtain a score that reflects the level of relationship satisfaction (McNulty & Karney, 2004). Higher scores on the QMI indicate endorsement of higher levels of relationship satisfaction (McNulty & Karney, 2004).

The QMI was chosen for a number of reasons. The first reason is that it has been utilized in several studies in related research including research done by Lavner, Karney and Bradbury (2013) and McNulty and Karney (2004). Additionally, as discussed by McNulty and Karney (2004), many measures used for marital satisfaction involve the reporting of global sentiments, or the participant responds to items about their feelings towards the relationship, and they often measure the level of agreement they and their partner have in problem areas. Such measures can lead to inflated associations with other variables and decrease the level of validity for the current study (McNulty & Karney, 2004). Additionally, Graham, Diebels, and Barnow (2011) found that the reliability for QMI is relatively high. Due to the high levels of validity, reliability, and the frequency of use in previous literature, the QMI was chosen for this study.

Procedures

Prior to administering the measures to the participants, the author will obtain the QMI and create the IAT and Demographic Information Survey. The IAT will be unique to the research and be created through a software program that will allow the author to input specific items. Additionally, the Demographic Information Survey will be created based on the needed demographic information listed above.

After the signing of the informed consent, the participants will receive online access to

complete the research measures. The participants will first complete the computer based Demographic Information Survey. Following the survey, the participants will complete the computer based IAT and QMI. The results of the measures will be downloaded into a secure location. Upon receiving the data, the data will be analyzed.

Limitations

As with any study, with the chosen methodology there are limitations that need to be discussed. The primary limitations that might affect this study are related to convenience sampling, cross-sectional design, and specific limitations with the use of the QMI. The first of these biases is known as a sampling bias. As stated previously, the chosen sampling method is convenience sampling. According to Sheperis et al. (2017), the utilization of convenience sampling can lead to an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of certain members in the population; leaving the results biased. For the future study, the potential for an underrepresentation of diversity within the research sample is a concern that may limit applicability of the results. Additionally, with the recruitment method of seeking voluntary participants, there is a potential for a qualitative difference between those who volunteer for the research and those who do not (Sheperis et al., 2017). These sampling biases may limit the ability of the results to generalize to the researched population.

An additional limitation, is that the study is a cross-sectional study and taken at one point in time. Although cross-sectional designs may be advantageous and provide pertinent information about the participants' current relationship expectations and satisfaction, the utilization of a longitudinal study would offer further insight into the question being proposed (Sheperis et al., 2017). A cross-sectional design in this study will not allow the author to gain insight into how these variables relate over time. Consequently, although the results may offer insight into the research question, the utilization of a cross-sectional design may limit the

significance of the research results.

Lastly, a bias that may hinder the future study involve the use of the QMI. With the QMI being a self-report measure, there is potential for self-report bias. Additionally, specific to the QMI, Graham et al. (2011) discuss a decreased reliability when working with newer romantic couples. This indicates that where the QMI may be a reliable measure for women who are in long-term relationships, the QMI may not be as effective when assessing relationship satisfaction for women who are in new relationships.

Conclusion

For the purpose of the study being proposed, a cross-sectional, correlational quasi-experimental design has been chosen. Quantitative data will be obtained through the 1) IAT measure which will measure the relationship between unrealistic expectations based on representations in the romance media and relationship satisfaction; and 2) the QMI will be used as a supplement to measure relationship satisfaction. Additionally, a Demographic Information Survey will be given to participants to obtain pertinent information. The participants will be recruited through convenient sampling in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling program at Mercer University. After recruited, the participants will complete an informed consent form and respond to the measures electronically.

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