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The Evolution of Love: The Meaning of Romantic Love in Contemporary Society

Jessica Salas
Linfield College

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The Evolution of Love: The Meaning of Romantic Love in Contemporary Society

Jessica Salas

Linfield College

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

28 May 2020

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Abstract

Romantic love has long acted as a significantly influential social institution. This thesis examined how ideology and practices surrounding romantic love and partnership differ across gender, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. In order to carry out this investigation, a survey was administered to 141 participants between the ages of 18 to 84. Of these participants, approximately 62% were female, 36% were male, and 3% identified as Other. The majority of respondents were White, followed by Latino/Hispanic and Asian/Asian American. Overall, findings indicate that, when not accounting for race or income, men tend to demonstrate increased idealism in their romantic attitudes when compared to women. Further differences in romantic attitudes were observed at the intersection of income and gender in which low-income women displayed increased idealism when compared to high-income women and low-income men demonstrated lower degrees of idealism when compared to high-income men.

Introduction

In its close association with a highly idealized ideology, it can be easy to overlook romantic love as a serious and exceptionally influential social institution. Despite popular conceptualizations of romantic love which tend to confine it to the domain of emotion, individualized experience, and even to a certain degree the realm of mysticism, romantic love as a social institution plays a deeply involved role in the structuring and organization of contemporary western society. While constantly evolving, practices associated with romantic ideology and partnering have been found to underpin the structure of various micro and macro spheres of social life including media, social and economic capital, familial organization, and many others. This thesis will explore how romantic ideology and practices differ at the intersection of gender, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. To carry out this investigation, an analysis was conducted of responses to a survey designed to measure the degree of idealism participants displayed in their attitudes towards romantic love. As deeply rooted as romantic love and partnering are in the structure of contemporary society, sociological examination of the ways in which romantic practices play out in the intersection of these social categorizations is important in order to gain a deeper and more comprehensive insight into how we, as individuals and as a society, relate to one another.

Literature Review

This literature review will provide context to the issue through a brief overview of the history of romantic love, contemporary widespread romantic ideology, and the cultural importance of long-term romantic relationships. A focus will then be placed on the literature

regarding the areas of study more specifically relevant to this investigation, which include differences in romantic attitudes and practices in gender, race and ethnicity, and social class.

Historical Context

As beliefs and practices surrounding romantic love are, and always have been, in constant evolution, an examination of the role of romantic love in contemporary society would be incomplete without some historical context. In *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (2005), Coontz provides a comprehensive history of the evolution of marriage and the role romantic love has played in shaping beliefs and aspirations in relation to romantic partnering. Most important to the current study, Coontz (2005) makes clear that contemporary ideas surrounding the increasing importance of romantic love in marriage, and in life more generally, are relatively new concepts. It wasn't until the early 1800's that love began to gain increasing importance as a prerequisite for marriage in Western Europe and the United States (Coontz, 2005). By the end of the century, marrying for love had evolved into a societal ideal, yet, far from contemporary romantic ideology, sex and romance were considered to exist in very distinct spheres (Coontz, 2005). Not only did popular belief then, and for many decades to come, hold that only men had sexual desires, but strict restriction and suppression of these feelings in both sexes was generally encouraged as they were considered to be deeply shameful. The separation between sex and romance was so distinct that, "many men could not even think about a woman they respected in sexual terms" (Coontz, 2005, p. 189).

Further, as elaborated on by Illouz (1997), it was companionate love, not romantic, that popular ideology of the 19th century promoted as ideal in a marriage. Not only did the widespread aspirations or expectations for romantic love that we see today not exist, but

romantic love in marriage was actively discouraged (Illouz, 1997). The passion associated with romantic love was believed to be short lived, tragic, and likely to result in dangerous and immoral behavior (Illouz, 1997). Companionate love, on the other hand, was thought to inevitably lead to a deep friendship much better suited to foster a long lasting bond (Illouz, 1997). Needless to say, contemporary romantic ideology and expectations of romantic partnership have undergone significant changes and no longer reflect these conceptions of love and marriage. Still, examination of past ideologies is important, especially to this study, as they provide a backdrop for contemporary ideas surrounding romantic love and partnership, as well as demonstrate the ever changing nature of ideology.

Realism vs. Idealism

Today, in the face of evolving societal structures, a certain degree of cultural confusion has come to permeate widespread romantic ideology in the United States. These ideological contradictions are exemplified in Swidler's (2001) extensive interviews with White, middle-class Americans, through which she observed an interesting dichotomy in the way respondents spoke about their beliefs and experiences surrounding romantic love. On one hand, Swidler (2001) notes an increasing "realist discourse" in popular narratives surrounding romantic love, yet somewhat paradoxically, also reports strong attachments to widespread beliefs and misconceptions of idealistic romantic love. These findings are both important and relevant to the current study as they indicate a move away from hyper-romanticized notions of expectations surrounding romantic relationships paired with a seemingly conflicting strong hold on fairly idealistic romantic ideology, suggesting a change in widespread conceptualization of romantic love.

With that said, beliefs in popular romantic ideology have been found to be dependent on degree of experience with romantic relationships. In their study, in which participants were asked to view and rate a series of video clips depicting romantic couples, Aloni and Bernieri (2004) found that participants with current or past involvement in a “lengthy” romantic relationship reported higher levels of confidence in their judgements on love, but tended to be less accurate when compared to participants who had no firsthand experience with serious romantic relationships. Further, through their study of college students, Knox, Schacht, and Zusman (1999) found that those who were currently involved in a romantic relationship were more likely to believe in the idea that love conquers all when compared to students who were not in romantic relationships. What’s more, individuals who displayed stronger romantic beliefs reported higher expectations that their relationships would live up to their beliefs (Vannier & Sullivan, 2016). Yet, regardless of these high expectations, romantic beliefs have not been found to be predictive of the degree to which individuals in relationships actually felt their expectations were being met, but higher levels of endorsement of these romantic beliefs was found to be associated with higher levels of satisfaction and commitment to romantic relationships (Vannier & Sullivan, 2016). In fact, those who received higher romanticism scores tended to report a greater degree of love or like for their partner, fewer number of dates before they felt some degree of love, higher levels of satisfaction with and commitment to their relationships, and experienced love more passionately (Sprecher & Metts, 1999).

Despite variations in endorsement of romanticism and romantic ideology, contemporary expectations surrounding romantic partnership tend to revolve much more significantly around love, emotional satisfaction, passion, excitement, and personal happiness and fulfillment

(Campbell & Wright, 2010). Increasing societal acceptance of premarital sex, cohabitation, childbearing and childrearing outside of marriage (Campbell & Wright, 2010; Tillman, Brewster, & Holway, 2019) suggests a decline in the social relevance of previous functions of marriage. In place of these highly practical social functions, marriage ideals today point to a much more emotional role. Campbell and Wright (2010) report that 81% of newlyweds acknowledge love as the primary reason in their decision to marry, while only 5% claimed religion, 3% reported childbearing and rearing, and 2% stated social reasons as the primary purpose behind their marriage. What's more, as Simpson, Campbell, and Berscheid (1986) found in their study on college student's romantic attitudes in 1976 and then again in 1984, the vast majority of respondents considered romantic love not only a fundamental prerequisite for marriage, but also an integral component to maintaining a satisfying, long-term relationship. These findings were particularly notable as a similar study performed around ten years prior found that only two-thirds of men and less than one-fourth of women reported that they would not marry if they were not in love, even if their partner had all other "desired qualities" (Kephart, 1967).

It is unsurprising that these changing trends are largely driven by young people. Campbell and Wright (2010) report age to influence views of romantic partnering in that "older individuals are more likely to hold affirmative and traditional views about marriage" (p. 333), while younger people tend to hold more liberal views and are less convinced that marriage is necessary for child rearing or that couples should stay together even if they are unhappy in their marriage. Further, younger people also tend to hold rather high expectations of marriage as passionate and exciting, exemplified in Knox, Schacht, and Zusman's (1999) findings that

students younger than 19 years old were much more likely to believe in love at first sight and that love conquers all when compared to older students.

Cultural Importance of Marriage and Long-Term Romantic Relationships

With that said, in spite of these evolving societal trends, expectations, norms, and ideologies, data indicates that the majority of Americans continue to place significant value on marriage and long-term partnerships. Not only do 80-90% of young people expect to eventually marry, but 70-80% believe marriage to be highly important (Meier, Hull, & Ortyl, 2009). What's more, 94% of adults in the United States expect to marry an "ideal partner" or soulmate (Campbell & Wright, 2010). Interestingly, beliefs surrounding marriage more specifically have remained fairly consistent over the last several decades. A longitudinal study on marital attitudes between 1976 and 1994 found no significant changes in widespread beliefs that marriage is important, people who are married are happier, and that a high-quality marriage should be a life goal (Campbell & Wright, 2010). These findings are of particular interest considering survey data that reports 72% of newlyweds to believe in some possibility of divorce, 50% of marriages to actually end in divorce, and 20% to end through divorce within the first five years (Campbell & Wright, 2010).

Ideological contradictions are again exemplified here in that while 97% of American's find infidelity to be largely impermissible, data from the survey mentioned above finds 50% of the newlywed participants to believe that there was a chance of experiencing infidelity in their relationship (Campbell & Wright, 2010). Further, research indicates that around 32% of men and 21% of women will engage in some form of infidelity at some point in their marriages (Campbell & Wright, 2010). Here, it is important to note that, "infidelity estimates are conservative due to

socially desirable responding” (Campbell & Wright, 2010, p. 334). While Campbell and Wright (2010) propose the incorporation of extremely high expectations into the romantic ideology (discussed above) as a leading cause in high divorce rates, decreased marital happiness, and an increase in reported conflicts within relationships, Vannier and Sullivan (2016) dispute this point writing, “... participants who endorsed high levels of romantic beliefs were no more likely to report that their current relationship did not live up to their expectations as compared to those who reported low levels of romantic beliefs. This is contrary to the arguments which suggest that romantic beliefs create unrealistic and therefore un-obtainable expectations” (p. 249).

Gender

While it is clear that romantic love and partnering hold widespread cultural significance in contemporary society, beliefs and ideologies surrounding romantic love and partnership vary greatly at the intersections of gender, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. As romantic partnership is inherently a major area of gender relations, gender plays a particularly significant role in perceptions and behaviors related to romantic love. While western culture has deemed romanticism a female characteristic, research indicates that it is, in fact men, who tend to report higher adherence to romantic ideologies (Kimmel, 2017) and are also more likely than women to perceive marriage as an attractive option (Illouz, 2012). Compared to women, while men have been found to be more cynical about romantic relationships, they are also more likely to believe in love at first sight, enter into relationships out of a desire to fall in love (Kimmel, 2017), be the first to tell their partner they love them (Harrison & Shortall, 2011), and display higher levels of romanticism in “high-involved” relationships (Sprecher & Metts, 1999). Women, on the other hand, are more likely to like the men they love and commit more slowly to their romantic

relationships, but, once in love, experience it more intensely (Kimmel, 2017). As reported by Kimmel (2017), after four dates, men were twice as likely to define the relationship as love. Yet, after the 21st date, 43% of women reported feelings of love, while only 30% of men agreed. With that said, there is no surprise in findings that indicate that men tend to fall in and out of love more quickly (Kimmel, 2017).

Moreover, women are more likely to initiate a breakup and have an easier time accepting an ex as a friend, whereas men, after a breakup or divorce, report more feelings of loneliness, depression, and sleeplessness than women (Kimmel, 2017). In fact, when compared to single or divorced men, married men tend to live longer and more physically and emotionally healthy lives (Kimmel, 2017). Antithetically, the same is true for single women when compared to married women. Despite traditional views that link female aspirations to marriages, Gerson (2015) reports that women tend to prefer self-reliance over entering into a traditional marriage in which a more egalitarian relationship was not likely. Further, women are more likely to say they “must have” a partner with a similar level of education, be of the same religion, have a successful career, and have a sense of humor (Kimmel, 2017). In contrast, men rely more heavily on their romantic relationships for emotional intimacy and social support than women tend to (Monin & Clark, 2011). As explained by Sprecher and Metts (1999),

To the extent that women still assume a greater role in homemaking and childcare and men still assume a greater role in providing economic security... courtship may function differently for women and men. For women, it provides an opportunity to assess the dependability and economic potential of a prospective mate. For men, it is the opportunity to assess the ‘personal and emotional qualities’ of a prospective mate. Thus,

men can afford to be more romantic (less realistic and pragmatic) in their dating relationships than women. (p. 848)

Women, when compared to men, also tend to report greater disparities between the level of importance they associate with certain standards and expectations in their relationships and the degree to which they felt those standards were being met (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997). Similarly, married men also report higher levels of satisfaction with their wives than wives tend to report of their husbands (Kimmel, 2000).

These disparities are exemplified in data gathered from interviews in which researchers asked couples prior to marriage how they knew they loved and were loved by their partners. Interestingly, responses lined up symmetrically in that men reported that they knew they loved their partners because of the lengths to which they were willing to go and the sacrifices they were willing to make for their partners, while women reported that they knew they were loved precisely because their partners would go to these lengths (Kimmel, 2017). Similarly, women knew they were in love because they wanted to care for, nurture, and support their partners, while men knew they were loved because of the care and support they received (Kimmel, 2017). Researchers then asked couples who had been married for ten years if they still loved their spouse. Again, responses were fairly symmetrical, although much less positive, in that women reported little to no doubt they still loved their husbands, but were unsure if their husbands still loved them, where men reported almost no doubt that they were loved by their wives, but expressed significant uncertainty as to whether they still loved their wives (Kimmel, 2017). While these findings may speak to gender differences in approaches to love, it is more likely a reflection on the way contemporary marital structures influence the way romantic love is

expressed and felt. Once established and routinized, marriage favors and enhances expression through domestic care, but allows little opportunity, or at least requires much greater effort, for grand displays of love and affection (Kimmel, 2017). As this research indicates, in studies of romantic ideologies it is important to not overlook institutional and structural influences on perceptions and behavior.

While men and women may perceive a difference in the way their counterparts express their love, these conceptions are likely influenced by cultural narratives and institutional structures, as there is actually little empirical evidence to suggest that relational behavior associated with romantic love does, in fact, differ between men and women (Shoenfeld, Bredow, & Huston, 2012). While gender mythology associates emotional expression of love with women, men and women have been found to be generally equally emotionally expressive (Kimmel, 2017). In their study of couples in their first marriage, Shoenfeld, Bredow, and Huston (2012) find husbands to be just as likely as wives to express their love through warm, affectionate, and intimate behaviors. While husbands deeper in love were more likely to initiate sex and involve their wives in leisure time activities and household tasks, love was not found to be related to an increase in the degree of household tasks completed in men or women. Instead, it was the companionate nature of performing tasks together that was connected to deeper feelings of love than the performance of the task itself (Shoenfeld, Bredow, & Huston, 2012). Further, men were found to be four times as likely to view sex as an act of love than women (Shoenfeld, Bredow, & Huston, 2012). Here, it is important to note that, due to the correlational nature of this data, it cannot definitively be asserted that feelings were the cause of the observed behavior (Shoenfeld, Bredow, & Huston, 2012). It is very possible that the inverse is true, where certain

behaviors promote increased feelings of marital love or that feelings of love serve as both a cause and a result of the ways in which spouses act towards each other (Shoenfield, Bredow, & Huston, 2012).

Race and Ethnicity

In addition to gender, variation in ideology and practice of romantic love along racial lines is an important area of study as deeper understanding of these differences can speak to the current state of race relations across the country, as well as offer another angle through which to examine institutional structures and practices of non-White communities. To begin, data on various levels indicate a clear difference between Whites and Blacks in both expectations and behavior related to romantic relationships. In a study comparing attitudes towards dating and marriage of Black and White adolescents, Crissey (2005) finds young Black girls to report a mean desired age of marriage a year and a half older than White girls. Further, compared to other racial and ethnic groups, White adolescents were much more likely to have experience with a serious romantic relationship (Crissey, 2005). This difference was most significant when compared to Black adolescents (Crissey, 2005). In addition, Black adolescents were three times more likely than White adolescents to report an expectation of no chance of marriage by the age of 25 and were the “only racial/ethnic group to report a younger mean desired age of first birth than age of marriage, suggesting variation in norms about life transitions” (Crissey, 2005, p. 698).

In practice, Whites do generally marry earlier and at higher rates than African Americans (Crissey, 2005). In addition to a difference in marital age, Black couples also display more arguing and relationship dissatisfaction, lower marital quality, and higher rates of domestic abuse

and divorce (Simons, Simons, Lei, & Landor, 2012). While the age gap in marriage is often attributed to a gender imbalance in the Black community where Black men experience significantly higher rates of mortality and incarceration when compared to White men (Crissey, 2005), leaving a significantly unbalanced ratio of available men to women, difference in marital age and relationship satisfaction is also likely related to variations in attachment styles (Simons, Simons, Lei, & Landor, 2012). Not only are African Americans 20% more likely than European Americans to display insecure attachment styles, but Black adolescents are more likely to exhibit a hostile attribution bias (a relational schema in which individuals hold a cynical and distrustful view of others, often induced by childhood experiences within and outside of the family), which very often leads to troubled romantic relationships (Simons, Simons, Lei, & Landor, 2012). In other words, African Americans are more likely to view their romantic partners as inconsiderate and untrustworthy, believe they possess malevolent motives, and engage in coercive and controlling actions (Simons, Simons, Lei, & Landor, 2012).

Simons, Simons, Lei, & Landor (2012) relate this overrepresentation of insecure attachment styles and hostile attribution bias among African Americans to high rates of racial discrimination, neighborhood crime, and financial struggles in the Black population, all of which often lead and/or contribute to family instability. As they write,

Rather than being cultural meanings that are passed along from adults to children, our data support a model where antagonistic romantic relationships and a reluctance to marry are recreated in each new generation as adverse race-related circumstances foster distrustful relational schemas. These schemas increase the probability of being in a

conflicted romantic relationship which, in turn, is associated with adoption of a more cynical view of marriage. (Simons, Simons, Lei, & Landor, 2012, p. 93)

In addition, these effects were found to be especially influential among Black males whose path from both financial hardship and racial discrimination to distrustful views of relationships was significantly more likely than for Black females (Simons, Simons, Lei, & Landor, 2012). These findings are consistent with data indicating that Black men have historically been, and continue to be, victims of negative stereotypes and racial discrimination at notably higher rates than Black females, which in turn likely has a deeper impact on their relational schemas (Simons, Simons, Lei, & Landor, 2012) and understandably act as a significant stressor on their romantic relationships. These findings are both important and relevant to the current study as they demonstrate the impact of larger societal patterns and institutions on the formation of romantic ideology and the practice of romantic relationships.

In contrast, where African American adolescents report expectations of completing romantic milestones later in life (Crissey, 2005), Hispanic youth, especially girls, tend to express interest in much earlier transitions into sexual activity, marriage, and pregnancy (Williams & Hickle, 2010). Moreover, Mexican Americans adolescents are much more likely than their White counterparts to plan their pregnancies (Williams & Hickle, 2010) and tend to rate the importance of marriage and having children much more highly than both Blacks and Whites (Burke, 2005). This particularly high importance placed on romantic relationships and family formation observed among Latinos is often attributed to a culture that exhibits a high degree of familism (Tyrell, et. al., 2016). In fact, research finds a greater adherence to traditional cultural values in Mexican Americans to be positively correlated to a greater likelihood in romantic relationship

involvement, greater degree of intimacy in the relationship, higher levels of attachment to a partner, and overall healthier romantic relationships (Moosmann & Roosa, 2015; Tyrell, et. al., 2016).

Further, when compared to White youth, Mexican American adolescents placed a much higher degree of importance on intimacy components of romantic love while White adolescents were much more likely to include unconditional acceptance in their definitions of romantic love (Williams & Hickle, 2010). Williams and Hickle (2010) suggest that, “Mexican cultural values may serve to protect adolescents from a greater need for external validation of acceptance” (Williams & Hickle, 2010, p. 595). Mexican Americans also tend to place much higher value on commitment than non-Mexican Americans, as well as display higher levels of commitment and investment in their relationships when compared to European Americans (Moosmann & Roosa, 2015; Williams & Hickle, 2010). Latinas especially tend to have longer lasting relationships than their male counterparts, as well as are more likely to date someone older than them (Tyrell, et. al., 2016). Additionally, while research in general indicates that adolescents in romantic relationships display lower levels of social anxiety, this is especially true among Hispanic youth (Moosmann & Roosa, 2015).

Lastly, while the majority of Latino youth do date within their ethnic group, compared to White and African American adolescents, Latinos are more likely to enter into interracial relationships. Still, through in-depth interviews with Latinas between the ages of 20 - 25, Muro and Martinez (2018) observed a disconnect in conceptualization of their own racialized preferences. Most respondents clearly recognized, and many expressed firsthand experience with, greater issues of structural racism, yet this knowledge was rarely applied to their own

romantic preferences (Muro & Martinez, 2018). As Muro and Martinez (2018), write, "... despite a stated willingness to date interracially, their racialized preferences came through in their responses, demonstrating their internalization of dominant racial ideology about Black and Asian men, and also about themselves" (Muro & Martinez, 2018, p. 536). With that said, it is young Latino men who are more likely to date interracially, likely having to do with lesser degree of restrictions Hispanic families place on their men compared to women (Tyrell, Wheeler, Gonzales, Dumka, & Millsap, 2016).

As demonstrated here, while it is clear that conception and practice of romantic relationships differ greatly across race and ethnicity, interracial relationships, marriages, and attitudes towards these partnerships is another area of importance in the study of race and romance. Tentatively used as a measure of "social distance" and degree of progressive attitudes towards race relations (Buggs, 2017, p. 2), data on interracial and interethnic relationships indicate increased commonality of these partnerships (Buggs, 2017). Data also, however, points to the continued presence of highly racialized mate preferences largely in favor of Whites and to the particular disadvantage of African Americans (Muro & Martinez, 2018; Buggs, 2017). Although men, and especially Black men, have been found to be more approving of interracial relationships, Black men and women with low levels of education have been shown to be very unlikely to interracially marry (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013). Moreover, European Americans have been found to be significantly less likely to interracially date than other racial and ethnic groups while individuals living in the South, those with lower levels of education and older people tend to demonstrate the most disapproving attitudes towards interracial romantic partnerships (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013). Similarly, White southerners, rural residents,

Republicans, the lower educated, more religious, and older people are more likely than their counterparts to disapprove of a friend or family member marrying an African American individual (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013). Interestingly, in their study comparing attitudes towards interracial relationships between students at historically Black universities (HBU) and predominantly White universities (PWU), Fields, Kimuna, and Straus (2013) found attitudes to be significantly less positive at HBU's. Further, Black students were more likely to disapprove of interracial relationships but reported higher approval of White and Asian couples than Black and White (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013). In contrast, White students reported more often that they believed their parents would be disapproving towards Black and White couples (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013).

Somewhat contradictory, a study of same-sex online daters found lesbians of color to be the most open in their dating preferences regarding race while White daters were the most likely to reject partners across racial lines (Buggs, 2017). The same study also found Asian women and Black men to have the greatest tendency to participate in interracial hook-ups (Buggs, 2017), which Buggs (2017) relates to widespread cultural fetishization of these particular racial groups, especially among White people. Still, research indicates a romantic preference for light skin to be prevalent among Whites and non-Whites alike (Buggs, 2017). This holds especially true for multiracial individuals mixed with White who were least likely to show interest in non-White partners, and were especially against getting involved with Asian, Hispanic, or Black individuals (Buggs, 2017). Paradoxically, multiracial individuals display higher levels of comfort in interracial relationships than monoracial Whites and minorities (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013). With that said, perceptions of multiracial individuals as to whether their relationships were

interracial has been found to be highly dependent on the degree to which they considered race to be a social construct (Buggs, 2017).

Despite continued racial prejudice in attitudes regarding interracial romantic relationships, the United States has seen a 28% increase in interracial/interethnic heterosexual married couples between the years 2000 and 2010 (Buggs, 2017). Still, interracial marriages do have a higher likelihood of ending in divorce (Field, Kimuna, & Straus, 2013) and the majority of interracial couples are unmarried (Buggs, 2017). As of 2012, only 10% of heterosexual marriages were interracial, while 18% of heterosexual and 21% of same sex unmarried couples were interracial (Buggs, 2017).

Social Class

Lastly, romantic aspirations and practices across social class have unsurprisingly been shown to differ dramatically, likely influenced by varying environmental factors and familial experiences.¹ While Americans across the board continue to overwhelmingly exhibit a belief that married people are happier, regard marriage as an important institution, and express desires to eventually be married (Gibson-Davis, Edin, & McLanahan, 2005), the specifics of these expectations and behaviors surrounding romantic relationships are much more nuanced and fairly dependent on socioeconomic status. For example, in their examination of young women's (ages 18-22) perceptions of being single, Bay-Cheng and Goodkind (2016) find distinct differences in the way these women conceptualized the importance of romantic relationships, or lack thereof. Broken into three groups (affluent undergraduates, low-SES undergraduates, and low-SES women not attending college), Bay-Cheng and Goodkind (2016) report that none of the

¹ Examination of the upper class will be excluded from this investigation as this group is relatively small in the United States, especially when compared to the lower and middle classes.

groups displayed overwhelming negativity towards being single, but instead spoke about their experience in terms of advantages. Among the affluent young women, being single was perceived as a “self-enhancing” quality in that remaining unattached to a romantic partner allowed them to pursue their own ambitions and interests freely (Bay-Cheng & Goodkind, 2016). Where concern over issues of heartbreak, pregnancy, and STI’s was commonly mentioned among the lower class women, these issues were notably absent in the responses of the upper class women (Bay-Cheng & Goodkind, 2016). The affluent group also tended to downplay the importance of romantic relationships and were especially critical of the traditional views and practices commonly expressed by their lower-income counterparts (Bay-Cheng & Goodkind, 2016).

In the low-income undergraduate group, responses indicated a less “carefree” attitude than the affluent group and a desire to wait for the “right” person and appropriate circumstance before entering into a serious relationship (Bay-Cheng & Goodkind, 2016). Lastly, the women of low income who were not attending college took a much more defensive attitude, reporting a desire to avoid interpersonal conflicts, emotional struggles, depletion of resources, and other relationship related risks (Bay-Cheng & Goodkind, 2016). With that said, lower-SES women, in general, tend to enter into long-term relationships earlier and are more likely to view marriage as a marker of personal success (Bay-Cheng & Goodkind, 2016). With lower chances of receiving secondary education, being involved in fulfilling careers, or other means of upward social mobility, for low-income women, success in a romantic relationship may serve as a means through which to gain symbolic capital, as well as conserve and augment their limited financial resources (Bay-Cheng & Goodkind, 2016).

Yet, the United States has seen a decline in marriage rates among lower-class individuals (Emery & Le, 2014). This is an interesting trend considering that low-income respondents are just as likely to agree with the statement that “a happy, healthy marriage is one of the most important things in life” as middle-and-upper-class respondents (Karney & Bradbury, 2005). In addition, unmarried low-income respondents were significantly more likely to report that they would like to eventually marry when compared with middle-and-high-income respondents (Karney & Bradbury, 2005). With that said, lower-class populations have not been shown to endorse romantic ideals at higher rates than other social classes (Trail & Karney, 2012).

Despite these aspirations, low-income women are half as likely to be married, twice as likely to divorce once married, and significantly more likely to bear children out of wedlock when compared to upper-class women (Karney & Bradbury, 2005). Further, while low-income respondents clearly believed two-parent households were ideal for a child’s wellbeing, they were more likely than their upper-class counterparts to agree with the statement that, “most mothers living alone can bring up their children as well as married couples” and more likely than middle-class respondents to agree with the statement that, “when parents are arguing, it is better for the children if they divorce” (Trail & Karney, 2012). These findings suggest that, while low-income populations may idealize marriage to the same degree as other classes, they tend to take a more realistic view recognizing that these aspirations may not be possible in practice (Trail & Karney, 2012). It is also true that low-income populations have more firsthand experience with single-parent households and the “consequences of family dissolution” (Trail & Karney, 2012, p. 422). They also tend to report significantly lower levels of relationship satisfaction and marital quality

(Emery & Le, 2014), experiences which are likely to foster a more realistic view about the trajectory of their relationships.

While our cultural narrative tends to blame individual interpersonal behavior for relationship difficulties, lower-class populations do not seem to display any more problematic behavior than upper classes (Emery & Le, 2014). In fact, it is among the upper classes that personality incompatibility, communication issues, and conflicting values are more commonly stated as problems within the relationship and leading causes for divorce (Karney & Bradbury, 2005; Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012). In comparison, among low-income populations, substance abuse, infidelity, physical and emotional abuse, and external financial stressors were more commonly listed as severe issues in their romantic relationships (Karney & Bradbury, 2005; Kraus, et. al., 2012). What's more, low-income and minority women tend to express high levels of doubt in the marriageability of their partner (Gibson-Davis, Edin, & McLanahan, 2005). As Emery and Le (2014) write, "The low relationship satisfaction observed among lower-class couples does not appear to be due to a lack of effort in the relationship; instead, it is a lack of expectation for future ability to make material investments that prevents current satisfaction with their relationships, which extends into lower global quality of life" (Emery & Le, 2014, p. 658-659). In other words, despite the high value placed on marriage, external pressures have significantly negative effects on relationship quality and often contribute to hesitations as to whether to enter into marriage (Emery & Le, 2014). Further, financial struggles and uncertainties undoubtedly serve as a significant stressor on low-income relationships and commonly serve as a barrier to marriage (Emery & Le, 2014). That is to say, it

is likely that low-income individuals tend to be less satisfied in their relationships due to little prospects of being able to contribute tangibly to the relationship (Emery & Le, 2014).

The literature clearly demonstrates differences in romantic ideology and practices at the intersection of gender, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. While there is extensive research on romantic differences between men and women, considerably less literature has focused on the influence of social class and race and ethnicity on gendered attitudes towards romantic love. The current investigation hopes to further sociological understanding of romantic love through a focus on the influence of intersectionality on romantic attitudes.

Theory

As discussed above, the literature indicates a tendency for women to adopt a much more practical approach to romantic love than men (Kimmel, 2017). In keeping with these trends, it is predicted that the results of the current study will further demonstrate that where women are more likely to display realistic attitudes towards romantic love and mate selection, men will generally display a more idealistic view of these intimate relationships. Previous research has suggested that these gender differences can be explained through the differential functions romantic love plays for men and women, in which women rely more on romantic relationships to fulfill instrumental needs due to their increased structural dependency on men (Sprecher and Metts, 1999). Following these findings, it is further predicted that not only will these gender differences continue across race and income, but that minority and low-income groups will display lower degrees of romantic idealism than their counterparts due to decreased levels of societal privilege.

Gender

To begin, men have historically held, and to a significant extent continue to hold, a privileged position in society in which institutional structures afford them not only more power than women, but often power over women (Connell, 1995). Since women continue to hold this subordinate role in society, it is likely that, when compared to men, women perceive a greater risk to various aspects of their lives when becoming romantically involved. Where men are often encouraged to engage in, and are praised for, sexual encounters, women are much more likely to experience high degrees of stigmatization for their sexual activity. Further, while a significant number of men have suffered sexual and domestic abuse, women experience exploitation, rape, and other emotional and physical abuse at the hands of their romantic partners at much higher rates than men (Planty, 2014; Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). Moreover, whether planned or not, it is women who bear the greater burden and stress of pregnancy and childbirth. From a financial standpoint, women often rely on their husbands economically, or at least hold certain expectations that their romantic partner will, to some extent, be able to provide for them financially (Sprecher and Metts, 1999). After all, not only are men rarely questioned in their decision to pursue and spend more time on academic and career aspirations over intimate relationships, but it is often expected that their partners will understand this hierarchy of values. Women, on the other hand, are rarely afforded this option and may feel expected or obligated to sacrifice one in favor of the other. It is fairly clear then, that romantic relationships have the increased potential to have deep influence in the lives of women far outside the realm of emotion and feeling. This may lead to the increased tendency of women to conceptualize romantic love in much more instrumental and pragmatic ways.

This male dominance and continued gender polarity is further perpetuated through subtle, yet persistent, gender socialization which inculcates ideas surrounding masculinity and femininity in children from birth (Cancian, 1986). Despite slowly changing norms, to a large extent ideas of ideal masculinity continue to be based on characteristics related to displays of strength, control, and self-reliance, while femininity is taught to encompass a gentle, nurturing, and passive nature (Cancian, 1986). In addition, where emotionality is deemed a female characteristic and largely expected from young girls, young boys are often discouraged from and even penalized for the open expression of any deep emotion other than anger and aggression (Cancian, 1986). Since intimacy and emotionality are generally viewed as feminine traits, men tend to have few outlets in which they feel comfortable expressing these emotions without fear of stigmatization (Cancian, 1986). Where women are much more likely to have larger social networks of friends and family through which they receive emotional support (Monin & Clark, 2011), masculine gender norms often leave men feeling uncomfortable or stigmatized for sharing deeper emotions even with those they feel close to, leaving them with few outlets through which to express these feelings. Intimate romantic relationships then are one of the few arenas in which many men may feel they receive high degrees of emotional support and grow comfortable enough to express emotional intimacy. This phenomenon may be further strengthened by the gender socialization of girls which teaches them to be nurturing and caring of the men in their lives.

Overall, it is predicted that women will display more realistic attitudes towards romantic love due to their subordinated position in society which pushes them to place higher consideration on how a romantic connection to another will influence their aspirations and other

aspects of their daily lives. Conversely, men are predicted to demonstrate more idealistic beliefs towards romantic relationships and be more likely to adhere to contemporary romantic ideology because of a heightened need for the emotional aspects of an intimate relationship paired with a privileged position in the gender hierarchy which affords them more power over their lives.

Race and Socioeconomic Status

In addition to a structural gender hierarchy, race continues to be a domain rife with institutional inequality. Additionally, low income is inherently tied to lower status and decreased societal power. What's more, minority groups are disproportionately overrepresented in low-income groups. Based on the theory presented above, that increased societal privilege leads to increased idealistic romantic attitudes, it is predicted that not only will these gender differences continue to be observed across race and socioeconomic status, but that underprivileged groups will demonstrate less idealism in their attitudes towards romantic love. Specifically, it is predicted that Whites will demonstrate increased idealism when compared to minority groups, and that higher-income groups will display greater idealism when compared to lower-income groups. While minority groups differ from each other considerably, they are to a large extent afforded less privilege and power within society. The same is true for low-income groups. The realities associated with these social inequalities likely influence minority and low-income group's experience with and conceptualizations of romantic love.

African Americans, for example, continue to experience high rates of financial struggles, familial instability, and are more likely to possess insecure attachment styles (Simons, Simons, Lei, & Landor, 2012). African Americans are also more likely to view their romantic partner as untrustworthy and malevolent, report greater relationship dissatisfaction and lower marital

quality, and experience higher rates of domestic abuse and divorce (Simons, Simons, Lei, & Landor, 2012). Very similarly, low-income women are less likely to be married and more likely to divorce once married (Karney & Bradbury, 2005), and low-income populations in general are more likely to report low levels of relationship satisfaction and marital quality (Emery & Le, 2014). Unsurprisingly, financial insecurities tend to place increased stress on low-income relationships and often contribute to doubts surrounding marriage (Emery & Le, 2014). Ultimately, romantic relationships among minority and low-income groups are influenced to a greater degree by negative external pressures and as such, it is predicted that the experiences associated with underprivileged societal positions may lead these groups to adopt a less idealistic conceptualization of romantic love.

Methods

Participant Demographics

In order to carry out this investigation, a survey was developed with the primary aim of measuring the degree to which participants demonstrated more realistic or idealistic attitudes surrounding romantic love. This survey was distributed through a number of social media platforms and yielded responses from a total of 141 participants. Of these respondents, the majority were female, followed by male and a very small group of individuals who identified with terms other than male or female. As this group was too small to generate any meaningful results, analyses focused solely on responses provided by men and women. In regard to race and ethnicity, the majority of respondents were White, followed by Hispanic and Latinos and then Asian and Asian Americans. Further, the majority of respondents reported an annual income of over \$50,000 and varying degrees of college education. Respondents varied greatly in age,

ranging from 19-to-84 years-old, but the majority were in their early twenties or later fifties. Lastly, all but one respondent reported that they had past experience with romantic relationships, about 72% reported that they were currently involved in a romantic relationship, and all but 3 indicated that they were interested in being involved in a long-term relationship such as marriage at some point in their life.

Procedure

Throughout the survey, participants were asked to rate 55 statements on a 4-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). These statements were based on a number of previously conducted studies measuring romantic attitudes (Dean, 1961; Gross, 1944; Hendrick, Hendrick, & Dicke, 2012; Knox, Sporkowski, 1968; Knox, Schacht, Zusman, 1999; Munro & Adams, 1978; Simpson, Campbell, & Berscheid, 1986; Sprecher & Metts, 1989; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2016). See the appendix for a full list of the statements included in the survey. Independent variables included gender, race and ethnicity, and annual income. Dependent variables were the degree of agreement or disagreement participants indicated with the statements regarding romantic love and relationships presented in the survey. Other variables collected were level of education, age, past and current involvement in a romantic relationship, and desire to, at some point, be involved in a long-term romantic relationship.

The Likert scale used here was later converted to a numerical scale in which strongly disagree was coded as a 1 and strongly agree was coded as a 4. A neutral option was intentionally omitted from this scale. A composite score was then calculated for each participant based on the sum of their responses. A higher score indicated increased idealistic tendencies.

TABLE 1. Selected Characteristics of the Sample (N = 141)

	<i>n</i>	(%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	85	(60.3%)
Male	51	(36.2%)
Other	5	(3.5%)
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>		
White/Caucasian	78	(55.3%)
Hispanic/Latino	23	(16.3%)
Asian/Asian American	15	(10.6%)
Black/African American	6	(4.3%)
Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander	2	(1.4%)
Mixed	12	(8.5%)
Other	5	(3.5%)
<i>Income</i>		
Less than \$20,000	14	(9.9%)
\$20,000 to \$34,999	17	(12.1%)
\$35,000 to \$49,999	19	(13.5%)
\$50,000 to \$74,999	24	(17.0%)
\$75,000 to \$99,999	21	(14.9%)
Over \$100,000	45	(31.9%)
<i>Education</i>		
Did not complete high school	1	(.7%)
High school diploma or equivalent (e.g. GED)	9	(6.4%)
Some college, no degree	34	(24.1%)
Associate degree	11	(7.8%)
Bachelor's degree	40	(28.4%)
Master's degree	33	(23.4%)
Professional degree	4	(2.8%)
Doctorate	9	(6.4%)
<i>Age</i>		
19-30	47	(33.1%)
31-40	12	(8.4%)
41-50	23	(16.1%)
51-60	28	(19.7%)
61-70	13	(9.1%)
71-80	1	(.7%)
81-85	2	(1.4%)

Various comparative statistical analyses were then run using this score to compare degrees of romantic idealism between gender, race, and income.

A few additional questions were included at the end of the survey that asked participants to describe romantic love and to rate how idealistic they believed themselves to be on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being very idealistic. Participants were then asked to explain why they rated themselves in this way. These open-ended responses were analyzed qualitatively looking for general narrative patterns and the inclusion of five primary characteristics: idealistic ideology, realistic ideology, affectionate language, passionate language, and mention of physical or sexual attraction. As fewer participants chose to provide responses for these questions and so little variation was seen in race and income, comparative analysis focused solely on differences in discourse between men and women. Of the 117 written responses analyzed, 67% were provided by women.

Results

Idealism at the Intersection of Gender, Race, and Income

Overall, when not accounting for race or income, a slightly negative correlation was found between men and women's degree of idealism, $r = -.190$, $p = .027$, indicating that men demonstrated increased degrees of idealism in regard to their romantic attitudes when compared to women. These findings were largely in keeping with previous literature that suggests that men tend to adhere more closely to idealistic romantic ideology than women (Kimmel, 2017). Further evidence of differences in romantic attitudes were observed when gender was intersected with income. While results were not statistically different, the correlation between income and degree of idealism was approaching significance at a .01 level. A weak positive correlation was observed between female degree of idealism and income, $r = .192$, $p = .081$, and a weak negative correlation was observed between male degree of idealism and income, $r = -.238$, $p = .092$. These

findings imply the possibility of an association between gender, income, and romantic attitudes in that low-income females demonstrate an increased degree of idealism in their romantic attitudes when compared to higher-income women and low-income males display lower degrees of romantic idealism when compared to high-income males. No significant differences were observed between gender, race, and romantic idealism.

Self-Judgement

Concerning how idealistic versus realistic participants believed themselves to be, no significant differences were observed between gender, race, or income. Generally, participants rated themselves only very slightly more idealistic than realistic with a mean score of 6.11 (where 10 would indicate very idealistic). That being said, a negative correlation was observed between self-reported idealism and the degree of idealism calculated through the Likert scale responses, $r=-.203$, $p=.021$, indicating that higher ratings of self-reported idealism were actually associated with lower idealistic scores. In other words, those who tended to rate themselves as more idealistic actually demonstrated lower degrees of idealism in their responses throughout the rest of the survey.

Love Descriptions

In regard to the qualitative analysis of participants' descriptions of romantic love, the only overtly noticeable difference observed between men and women's responses was women's increased tendency to include mention of physical or sexual attraction in their descriptions. Of the responses provided by women, 28% included mention of physical or sexual attraction while only 10% of responses from males included the same. With that said, this descriptor was almost always paired with the idea of an emotional connection or care for the partner. For example, one

woman described romantic love as , “A combination of emotional and physical attraction, understanding, and vulnerability.” Another woman simply wrote, “Love that includes sexual and emotional connection.” Women also invoked the narrative of romantic love as evolving and long lasting slightly more often than men. As one woman wrote, “Partners who are physically attracted to each other, root for and support one another, and want to grow together”; another responded, “Feelings of ‘I will share my life with this person’”. While these few gender differences may suggest larger trends, since the sample analyzed here was not only small, but overwhelmingly female, these findings are not generalizable.

Gender differences aside, the vast majority of respondents described romantic love positively. Even the few descriptions in which less idealistic language was included, the overall feelings of the sentiment were fairly positive. For example, one woman wrote, “[Romantic love is] not sustainable, but it's wonderful while it lasts, and it can often mature into a deeper, more lasting love,” and another responded, “Meh - it's fluff. It's nice when it comes.” Further, no overly strong adherence to either idealistic or realistic romantic ideology was observed. Instead, romantic love was most commonly described using language that elicited feelings of affection, calm, and admiration rather than passion or excitement. Descriptors such as care, admiration, friendship, appreciation, trust, and respect were used much more often than language coded as passionate such as euphoria or obsession.

Summary of Findings

Overall, men generally demonstrated increased idealism in their beliefs surrounding romantic love when compared to women. Further differences in romantic idealism were observed at the intersection of income and gender, in which findings suggest increased idealism

in low-income women when compared to high-income women and lower degrees of idealism in low-income men when compared to high-income men. No significant differences were found at the intersection of gender and race, nor between gender, race, income, and how idealistic respondents believed themselves to be. A correlation was found between self-reported idealism and the idealistic score participants received based on their Likert scale responses, indicating an association between higher idealistic self-judgements and lower idealistic scores. Few gender differences were observed in responses to the open-ended question “How would you describe love?” but most notable was women’s increased tendency to mention physical or sexual attraction in their descriptions. While more research surrounding these results is needed, the findings presented here seem to be fairly reflective of trends exhibited in previous research.

Discussion

As was predicted, gender differences were observed in the degree to which participants demonstrated idealistic attitudes towards romantic love. In keeping with previous findings, when not accounting for race or income, men displayed higher degrees of idealism in their romantic attitudes when compared to women. It is likely that these findings indicate a continued differentiation in norms and expectations between men and women which discourage men from open expressions of emotionality and may inhibit the formation of deeper emotional connection with a wider group of loved ones. Further, these findings paired with lower levels of idealism observed in women’s romantic attitudes may point to the maintenance of a gender hierarchy which promotes structural inequality and the perpetuation of women’s subordination to men. It may be that under this gender system, women perceive greater risk to their wellbeing in entering

into a romantic relationship, as well as greater dependence on whoever they choose as a long-term partner leading them to conceptualize romantic love more pragmatically.

While no significant differences were found at the intersection of race and gender, findings did suggest a difference between income and gender. While again, results were only approaching significance, these findings implied that when compared to higher income, lower income was actually associated with higher degrees of idealism in women and lower degrees of idealism in men. These results were slightly unexpected as previous literature has found unmarried, low-income women to express high levels of doubt in the marriageability of their romantic partners (Gibson-Davis, Edin, & McLanahan, 2005). This is not to say that they idealize marriage any less than other groups, but that they tend to have lower expectations that their partners will be able to contribute to the relationship and family materially (Emery & Le, 2014).

Based on these previous findings, it may be that low-income men not only internalize the expectation to take on the role of primary provider as many men do, but whereas higher-income men are more prepared to take on this role, it is likely that low-income men perceive and share the doubts expressed by their female counterparts in their ability to do so. What's more, low-income communities often provide very few opportunities through which to climb the social ladder, further inhibiting the ability to realize these goals fully and consequently exacerbating the pressures associated with romantic relationships and familial formation. Ultimately, these external pressures may influence the romantic attitudes of low-income men to focus less on the emotional aspects of love and more on the everyday practical needs and realities of maintaining a romantic relationship and providing for a family. These social realities may lead low-income

men to believe less in the idealism often associated with romantic love. Overall, more research is needed into these findings in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of this trend.

Conclusion

To conclude, romantic love continues to play a highly significant role in the structuring of society. Sociological examination of the influence on romantic attitudes of gender, race and ethnicity, social class, and the intersections between them is crucial to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of continually evolving societal norms and trends. This investigation generally supports the literature that indicates that men often demonstrate more idealism in their romantic attitudes when compared to women. While no significant gender differences were observed when race was accounted for, findings at the intersection of gender and income did imply that, when compared to higher-income women, low-income women demonstrated higher degrees of idealism in their romantic attitudes, while low-income men displayed lower degrees of idealism. There is no doubt that these findings require more in-depth research, but it may be that pressure to provide for a relationship more tangibly paired with lower opportunities to do so are reflected in low-income men's romantic attitudes. As romantic attitudes are often reflective of larger societal trends, continued focus in this area of study is important to the deepening of sociological understanding of not only romantic love and intimate relationships, but the structure of society more generally.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

As the sample size analyzed in this investigation was relatively small and majority female, further research into gendered attitudes surrounding romantic love and relationships would benefit from a significantly larger and more representative sample size. While some racial

and economic diversity was observed, increased variation in race and income is necessary in order to examine the intricacies of romantic attitudes at the intersection of gender, race, and socioeconomic class. Further, as this investigation focused solely on participants who identified as male or female, the inclusion of non-binary individuals in future analyses surrounding romantic love would add depth and breadth to sociological understanding of this issue. Lastly, it is recognized that the analytical framework utilized in this study does reflect some degree of heteronormativity. While this is, in part, due to a focus on societal structures that value heterosexual relationships over homosexuality, examination of the influence of sexual orientation on romantic beliefs and attitudes would be an important area of study for future research.

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APPENDIX. Survey Statements

I believe in soulmates.

It is possible to be in love with more than one person at a time.

There are probably only a few people that any one person can fall in love with (Knox & Sporakowski, 1968).

Once in a committed relationship, romantic thoughts about others should disappear.

I believe in love at first sight.

Love at first sight is often the deepest and most enduring type of love (Knox & Sporakowski, 1968).

True love can overcome all obstacles a couple may face.

When in love it is possible to make the relationship work, despite any obstacles (Sprecher and Metts, 1989).

If a couple truly loves each other they will find a way to be together regardless of any opposition to the relationship, physical distance between them, or any other barrier (Sprecher and Metts, 1989).

If a relationship is meant to be, any obstacles (for example, lack of money, physical distance, career conflicts) can be overcome (Sprecher and Metts, 1989).

Finding a romantic partner is important to living a fulfilled life.

There can be no real happiness or success in life for those in a poor love relationship (Munro & Adams, 1978).

There can be no real happiness or success in life for those not in a committed romantic relationship (Munro & Adams, 1978).

It is possible to live a happy and fulfilled life without involvement in a long term romantic relationship.

Love for a romantic partner should be unconditional.

True love is unconditional.

It is unreasonable to expect to be loved unconditionally by a romantic partner.

It is not necessary to know someone for a long period of time in order to fall in love with them (Sprecher and Metts, 1989).

One doesn't simply fall in love, it has to be achieved (Dean, 1961).

It should be easy to tell if you are in love.

It is easy to commit to someone with whom you feel an emotional connection.

One will know they've met their "true love" soon after they meet them (Sprecher and Metts, 1989).

When love hits, you know it (Knox & Sporkowski, 1968).

You can't make yourself love someone, either you feel it or you don't (Knox & Sporkowski, 1968).

You must know a person well to be in love with them.

Love is best described as an exciting thing, rather than a calm thing (Knox & Sporkowski, 1968).

In an ideal relationship, partners can sense all of each other's moods (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2016).

One should feel a magnetic pull towards their romantic partner (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2016).

I believe to be truly in love is to be in love forever (Sprecher and Metts, 1989).

It is reasonable to expect that romantic love will not fade with time in a successful relationship (Sprecher and Metts, 1989).

It is questionable whether there is any love strong enough to overcome the passing of time (Gross, 1944).

It is possible for romantic love to last forever.

Your romantic partner should be your best friend.

Marriage is important.

Married people are happier than single people (Knox, Schacht, & Zusman, 1999).

Marriage is a primary life goal (Knox, Schacht, & Zusman, 1999).

It is reasonable to expect marriage to last a lifetime.

It doesn't matter if you marry after you have known your partner for only a short time as long as you know you're in love (Knox & Sporkowski, 1968).

I would marry someone who had all the qualities I desired in a romantic partner, even if I were not in love with them (Kephart, 1967).

The disappearance of love in a marriage is a sufficient reason for ending the marriage (Simpson, Campbell, & Berscheid, 1986).

Spouses should try to maintain their marriage even if they are no longer in love.

If I were in love with someone, I would commit myself to him or her even if my parents and friends disapproved of the relationship (Sprecher and Metts, 1989).

Regardless of other factors, if you truly love another person, that is enough to marry that person (Knox & Sparakowski, 1968).

It is necessary to be in love with the one you marry to be happy (Knox & Sparakowski, 1968).

Differences in social class and religion are of small importance in selecting a marriage partner as compared with love (Knox & Sparakowski, 1968).

I would find it uncomfortable if my romantic partner's future earnings were significantly less than mine.

I would find it uncomfortable if my romantic partner had a lower level of education than I did.

One consideration in choosing a romantic partner should be how they reflect on one's career (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Dicke, 1998).

If one expects to have children, an important factor in choosing a romantic partner should be whether or not they would be a good parent (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Dicke, 1998).

Quality of sex is an important factor in a romantic relationship.

Physical attractiveness is an important factor in a romantic relationship.

Emotional attachment is the most important factor in committing to a romantic relationship.

It is important to take into account factors other than feelings of attraction and affection when choosing a romantic partner.

Partners in a healthy relationship do not argue or experience conflict (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2016).

Disagreements are destructive to a relationship (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2016).

Maintaining a romantic relationship is more important than a promotion at work.

A decision to marry should come from serious thinking, not just a feeling of love (Munro & Adams, 1978).