For Better or Worse? Hallmark Movie Viewership and Unrealistic Relationship Beliefs

Taylor Welch
HALLMARK AND UNREALISTIC RELATIONSHIP BELIEFS

FOR BETTER OR WORSE? HALLMARK MOVIE VIEWERSHIP AND UNREALISTIC RELATIONSHIP BELIEFS

By
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ABSTRACT

TAYLOR NICOLE WELCH: For Better or Worse? Hallmark Movie Viewership and Unrealistic Relationship Beliefs
(Under the direction of Dr. Carrie V. Smith)

Past studies have shown that what we watch on television is linked to what we believe (Gerbner et al., 1982; Lippman et al., 2014). Many studies have discovered a link between unrealistic relationship beliefs and television viewing within specific genres of television viewing, yet no research has been done to examine the association between Hallmark movie viewing on romantic relationship beliefs despite the channel’s increasing popularity. The goal of the present study was to examine the relationship between Hallmark movie viewing and romantic relationship beliefs. Through an online participant recruitment website, self-report data was collected from 302 married participants ranging from ages 23 to 77 years old regarding participants’ demographics, relationship beliefs, and marriage. Nearly 27% percent of participants identified as Hallmark movie viewers. The results of the study showed that there is a relationship between Hallmark movie viewing and stronger endorsement of unrealistic relationship beliefs, implicit destiny beliefs, and believing that “Opposite-Sex Friendships are Problematic”. The implications and direction for future research regarding these findings are examined further in the discussion section.
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Introduction

After a leisurely stroll through the festively decorated town in the Hallmark Channel original movie, *A Merry Christmas Match*, Corey points up at the stars and tells her newfound love interest, Ryder, that the star in the constellation on the left is hers (Helgren, 2019). He points at a shooting star and says, “Hey, that one is mine.” She looks at him questioningly and asks how he knows. “Because it crossed yours,” says Ryder.

Romance movies such as these have been around since the dawning of the film industry, but few movies portray the unrealistic nature of romantic relationships like Hallmark movies (Dirks, 1996). This unrealistic nature of relationships is conveyed by themes that suggest that relationships will always end happily, that problems within a relationship will always be resolved, and that relationships between men and women are always destined for romance. Hallmark began as a greeting card company known for the “heartfelt sentiments” their cards, ornaments, and collectible gifts conveyed (Hallmark, 2020). In 2001, Hallmark expanded their company by taking those heartfelt sentiments from their products and creating a cable network known as the Hallmark Channel (Johnson, 2001). Business Insider reported that the Hallmark Channel had more viewers than CNN over the 2019 Christmas season, (approximately 1.7 million), becoming the most watched cable network by women aged 25-54 in the United States (Choi, 2019; Larson & Nussbaum, 2019). Their viewership reached approximately 72 million last year and continues to be watched through more than just the holiday season for most viewers (Larson & Nussbaum, 2019). The Hallmark company has even created a Hallmark Movies Now
app that allows viewers to watch from a number of devices and recently gained over 1 million subscribers to this streaming service (Tableau, 2020).

With the growing popularity of the Hallmark Movie Channel and its very unique content comes the question of what effects the expression of these themes has on viewers. Do the unrealistic relationship beliefs depicted in these films link to the relationship beliefs of their viewers? Cultivation theory suggests the answer is yes. Cultivation theory posits that the more we consume television, the more we digest the messages it delivers and subsequently become more likely to apply those messages to our lives (Gerbner et al., 2002). Gerbner and his colleagues (1982) defined television as a “centralized system of storytelling” that impacts how we perceive the world. Nearly all Hallmark movies send viewers information about these unrealistic relationship beliefs, but what effect do these beliefs actually have? The purpose of our study is to examine if there is a relationship between Hallmark movie viewership and endorsement of unrealistic relationship beliefs in its viewers.

**Relationship Beliefs and Why They Matter**

Relationship beliefs involve how people perceive what love is, how romantic relationships should develop, and how love should look within their own personal relationships (Knox & Sporakowski, 1968; Hefner & Khan, 2014). These beliefs come from our past experiences in our own relationships and the ones we see around us (Fletcher et al., 1999). Importantly, these beliefs can have negative as well as positive effects on relationship outcomes. Each unrealistic relationship belief associated with the themes seen in Hallmark movies has the potential to do positive things like increase relationship satisfaction, foster the development of new relationships, and strengthen existing relationships further. However, the negative effects of these beliefs are that they have the potential to discourage continuing in a relationship, decrease
relationship satisfaction because of unmet expectations, and encourage remaining in a destructive or abusive relationship that is seen as “destined” to be.

**Romantic Beliefs**

Sprecher and Metts (1989) argue that unrealistic romantic relationship beliefs have the potential to influence the lens through which we see our own relationships. They can be beneficial or problematic, depending on the standard a relationship is being held to. Strong endorsement of romantic beliefs such as “Love Finds a Way” (circumstances cannot keep the relationship from succeeding), “Love at First Sight” (falling in love can occur almost immediately when you first meet), “One and Only” (true love only happens once), and “Partner Idealization” (my partner is nearly perfect) can increase relationship satisfaction and feelings of love for one’s partner which are both associated with these views on relationships (Sprecher & Metts, 1999). Further, higher relationship satisfaction has been found to buffer against every day and life-threatening stress in individuals and is associated with simply being happier in your relationship (Manne et al., 2007). However, endorsement of romantic beliefs has been linked to relationship issues like jealousy and intimate partner violence (Moskowitz et al., 2020).

Individuals who endorse these romantic ideals often experience jealousy and justify this jealousy and violent action by saying it is a sign of their devotion or love toward their partner. Another negative aspect of unrealistic romantic beliefs is that they can create an unreasonable standard for a partner to live up to (Sprecher & Metts, 1989). These standards can lead to disappointment, miscommunication, or even the dissolution of the relationship.

**Implicit Theories of Relationships**

Implicit theories are goals or beliefs an individual holds that can be about themselves or the world around them. These goals or beliefs have the potential to impact behavior. Dweck and
Legget (1989) initially examined implicit theories of intelligence and their link to academic performance in children. They found that children who held “mastery oriented” mindsets versus children with “helpless” mindsets handled academic challenges and failure differently.

“Helpless” children attributed difficulty in solving problems to their own lack of knowledge or understanding which hindered their performance later on whereas, “mastery-oriented” children were more likely to see academic challenges or failures as surmountable with effort. The beliefs held by “mastery-oriented” children have also been referred to as *incremental* or *growth* beliefs. The beliefs seen in the “helpless” mindset children are referred to as *fixed* or *entity* beliefs.

Knee (1998) took these concepts of implicit theories and applied them to relationships. He identified two different implicit theories of relationships held by individuals: destiny (fixed) and growth (incremental) beliefs. An individual that holds destiny beliefs sees relationships as destined to succeed or not (Knee et al., 2003). When problems or conflict come in a relationship, individuals who endorse destiny beliefs tend to see the problem as insurmountable and believe the relationship is not meant to be. These individuals have unrealistic expectations for how their relationship should look by believing things like “disagreement is destructive” or that their partner should “read their mind” (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982). These expectations and initial beliefs have the power to foster or end a new relationship because they can become the standard for a satisfying or “good” relationship in the individual’s mind. Knee describes destiny beliefs as having the power to destroy or foster a relationship immediately because of these expectations set up for the relationship beforehand. These expectations are not inherently negative, but they are often unrealistic which can result in negative downstream consequences in relationship behaviors. One online study of adults found that people who strongly endorsed destiny beliefs were more likely to ghost or ignore a romantic partner because they see no reason to continue
investing in a relationship they believe is not meant to be (Freedman et al., 2018). In another online study of 143 adults, researchers found that individuals who strongly endorsed destiny beliefs and believed their partner was a good fit for them were more likely to remain in a relationship where they experienced intimate partner violence compared to those that did not endorse destiny beliefs as highly (Franiuk et al., 2012).

Growth beliefs view a relationship as something that takes time and energy to become what individuals desire it to be. When individuals who endorse growth beliefs encounter a problem in their relationship, they see the problem as surmountable with effort. Growth beliefs can foster the development of a potential relationship or discourage leaving an abusive one because individuals believe they can work through the problem. Knee (1998) found in a sample of undergraduate students that individuals higher in endorsing growth beliefs are more likely to use coping strategies during relationship conflict than those holding strong destiny beliefs. These coping strategies, such as actively dealing with the issues in the relationship or seeking to look at the relationship in a different way, have been linked to positive relationship outcomes such as greater relationship satisfaction, relationship quality, and commitment (Canary & Stafford, 1992; Leung et al., 2011). When examining ghosting behavior in individuals who hold growth beliefs, researchers found that individuals who held these growth beliefs were less likely to ghost a romantic partner than individuals who held destiny beliefs (Freedman et al., 2018).

Researchers have found that it can be beneficial to hold both of these types of beliefs. Franiuk and colleagues (2004) further emphasized this point while examining the effect of “work-it-out” and “soulmate” beliefs and added that it may be better if individuals hold both viewpoints because both contain beneficial relationship ideas at different points in time. They point out that it is sometimes good to hold “work-it-out” or growth beliefs because they allow
individuals to look at their relationship in a realistic way that makes it easier for the individual to decide if the relationship is worth continuing or if it needs to be ended; however, those beliefs can also hinder relationship satisfaction when individuals look at their relationship strictly in a “work-it-out” manner. On the other hand, those with “soulmate” or destiny beliefs regarding relationships are more likely to judge their partner’s faults less harshly if they believe they are their one true love which can lead to fewer arguments. The flip-side of this coin is that “soulmate” beliefs can keep someone in a non-ideal relationship because they refuse to look at the relationship in a way that shows its positive as well as negative sides. This is why Franiuk and colleagues see a mix of both views as possibly being advantageous in relationships, but more research is needed on the subject.

**Opposite-Sex Friendship Beliefs**

Minimal research has explored the benefits and consequences that come with opposite-sex friendships. Opposite-sex friendship is defined by O’Meara (1989) in his overview of the defining factors of opposite-sex friendship as a “non-romantic, non-familial, personal relationship between a man and a woman” (p. 526). This was the definition used for the creation of the Opposite-Sex Friendship Beliefs Scale for the present study. O’Meara argues that the “non-romantic” aspect of opposite-sex friendships does not mean a lack of attraction is present between the male and female. Attraction can be defined in a variety of emotional or physical ways in opposite-sex friendships because the definitions and schemas for such relationships are so blurry within cultures.

Some evolutionary psychologists theorize that opposite-sex friendship preferences are closely linked to mate preferences (Lewis et al, 2011). Lewis and colleagues performed a study among college students where they asked participants to determine which traits they valued most
in opposite-sex friendships and same-sex friendships through a budget allocation task. Participants were given a set amount of “friend dollars” and told to place those dollars with the traits they would most like their same-sex and opposite-sex friends to possess. The results showed that men valued physical attractiveness in their opposite-sex friendships while women valued physical strength and economic resources in their opposite-sex friendships. This leads researchers to theorize that opposite-sex friends are often chosen because of the advantageous qualities they possess. These desirable attributes are different than the traits desired in same-sex friendships, which entailed assistance in hunting for men and group childcare for women. Opposite-sex friends provide the evolutionary mating benefits that same-sex friendships could not offer such as providing protection, caring for children, or controlling economic resources. This research reveals that opposite-sex friendship preferences could have evolved to be viewed as potential mates if ever-needed based on these linked desirable traits.

Other research has looked at these friendships from a more sociological perspective. When examining the costs and benefits of having opposite-sex friends while in a romantic relationship, many participants reported sexual attraction as a cost of these friendships as well as jealousy from their significant other. Benefits reported included sharing activities, receiving social support, and conversation (Bleske-Rechek et al., 2012). Bleske-Rechek and colleagues study shows that opposite-sex friendships of today have positive functions just as opposite-sex friendships that focused on evolutionary and adaptive traits did in the past. However, this study also shows that people do view opposite-sex friendships as potentially harmful to their own relationships, which could support evolutionary psychologists theory regarding opposite-sex friends as being potential mating sources. Our research hopes to examine if the beliefs of
individual’s support the ideas present in these theories regarding the possible threat or support opposite-sex friendships can offer to those in romantic relationships.

What does this mean for opposites-sex friendships today? It could mean that people in relationships could view opposite-sex friendships as threatening to their romantic relationships due to their evolutionary function in the past. Specifically, people may see their partner’s opposite-sex friendships as alternative mates. These friends are already well liked and in communication with their significant other, which could make them more threatening to their relationship. Due to the way opposite-sex friendships are often portrayed as dangerous in the media, individuals could see the friendship easily turning into something romantic.

The Role of Media in Relationship Beliefs

Consistent with cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 2002), research has found links between what we watch and what we believe. For example, Gerbner and his colleagues (1982) found that people who watch around four or more hours of television a day reported having beliefs about the government, politics, and culture that aligned with the messages they were watching on television. Although cultivation theory originally intended to examine the effects of general television viewing, researchers have explored the possible expansion of Gerbner’s theory by examining genre-specific viewing and beliefs.

A study of adults (aged 18-64) found that general movie and television viewing was associated with belief in a one true love as well as a “love conquers all” ideal (Kretz, 2019). Additionally, Hefner and Wilson (2013) examined the content of 52 of the most popular romantic comedies and found that 65% of the films’ themes convey the belief that “love conquers all”. Hefner and Wilson found that the more college students watched these films, the more strongly they endorsed the belief in an ideal partner. Further, teenagers who watch more romantic-themed
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television were more likely to agree with stereotypical dating roles in relationships (Rivadeneyra & Lebo, 2008). In a study of 625 college students, Lippman et al. (2014) found that marriage-themed reality television viewing was associated with the belief in love at first sight, while a negative association was present between sitcom viewing and belief in a one and only true love. Both Lippman et al. (2014) and Kretz (2019) theorize people in long-term, committed relationships may be less susceptible to the relationship messages delivered by the media because they are likely to have a greater experience with relationships in a variety of situations.

Associations between television viewing and beliefs like partner idealization and love conquers all have been further supported by experimental studies. Hefner and Kahn (2014) created several online dating profiles and asked college-aged participants to rate the character and likableness of each individual’s profile. Media viewing and romantic belief endorsement were also assessed. Results showed that romantic media liking predicted greater acceptance of unrealistic relationship beliefs compared to participants that watched romantic media less consistently. This greater endorsement of unrealistic relationship beliefs was associated with the behavior of participants as well. The participants that reported greater acceptance of unrealistic relationship beliefs rated all of the online dating profiles more positively compared to those did not report liking romantic media or endorsing unrealistic relationship beliefs. The results of this study support cultivation theory’s main idea that the more you take in media, the more your views are influenced by your media of choice. This study took cultivation theory a step further and experimentally showed that unrealistic relationship beliefs are linked to behaviors that support those beliefs.

The Current Study
Given the portrayal of unrealistic relationship beliefs, Implicit Theories of Relationships beliefs, and opposite-sex friendship beliefs in Hallmark original movies and the impact of media on relationship beliefs demonstrated in past studies, the current study examined Hallmark original movie viewership in connection to multiple relationship beliefs in a nationwide sample of married adults.

We proposed the following hypotheses and research question:

Hypothesis 1a-1d: Increased Hallmark original movie viewership will predict greater endorsement of unrealistic relationship beliefs, including Partner Idealization (H1a), Love at First Sight (H1b), One and Only true love (H1c), and Love Finds a Way (H1d).

Hypothesis 2: Increased Hallmark original movie viewership will predict higher endorsement of destiny beliefs of relationships.

Hypothesis 3: Increased Hallmark original movie viewership will negatively predict growth beliefs of relationships.

Given the limited research pertaining to beliefs about opposite sex friendships, we chose to examine these beliefs in Hallmark viewers in an exploratory manner:

Research Question 1: Is there a relationship between Hallmark movie viewership and endorsing specific opposite-sex friendship beliefs?

Method

Participants and Procedure
Ethics approval was received from the University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board for all aspects of the study. A sample of 302 American adults (158 males; 144 females) from 45 different states and the District of Columbia were recruited by an online participant recruitment site known as Prolific (www.prolific.co). To be eligible, participants needed to be in a heterosexual marriage and over the age of 18. No other constraint was placed on qualification for participation. Age ranged from 23 to 77 years of age ($M = 41.31, SD = 11.46$). Marriage relationship length varied from less than 1 year to 53 years ($M = 11.72, SD = 10.61$). Nearly three-fourths of the study population identified as Caucasian (75.5%), with significant numbers of other participants identifying as Black/African American (6.6%), Hispanic (3.3%), Asian (8.6%), and multiracial (6%). Divorced participants made up 14.6% of the sample and 1.3% were widowed at some point in time.

Eligible participants saw an invitation to participate in a study in which they would be asked questions regarding their marriage, relationship beliefs, and demographic information prior to choosing to participate in the study. Those who chose to participate confirmed they were at least 18 years old and completed an informed consent form regarding the survey. Participants then entered their Prolific ID number which kept their identity anonymous for purposes of the study but allowed them to receive compensation. Participants responded to the measures by answering items regarding their relationship beliefs followed by questions about their movie watching preferences and demographics. The time it took participants to complete the survey averaged 20 minutes. Several attention checks were placed throughout the survey to ensure data quality. If participants failed two or more attention checks, they were excluded from the data and were not compensated. Upon completion of the survey, participants were thanked and given more information regarding the purpose of the study. Participants were compensated $3.34
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(equivalent to an hourly wage of $10.02 per hour and rated as a “good” rate of payment by Prolific).

Measures

Implicit Theories of Relationships Scale (ITR)

The Implicit Theories of Relationships Scale created by Knee (1998) was used to measure destiny and growth beliefs regarding relationships among participants. The scale is composed of 22 total items with 11 destiny belief items (e.g., “The success of a potential relationship is destined from the beginning”) and 11 growth belief items (e.g., “the ideal relationship develops gradually over time”). Each item is responded to using a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Romantic Beliefs Scale (RBS)

The 15-item Romantic Beliefs Scale was used to assess romantic beliefs (Sprecher & Metts, 1989). The scale is grouped into four domains consisting of the beliefs that Love Finds a Way with 6 items (“I believe if another person and I love each other we can overcome any differences and problems that may arise”), One and Only with 3 items (“There will be only one real love for me”), Love at First Sight with 3 items (“When I find my ‘true love’ I will probably know it soon after we meet”), and Idealization with 3 items (“The person I love will make a perfect romantic partner; for example, he/she will be completely accepting, loving, and understanding”). Items in the survey were slightly reworded and changed to second person instead of first person to reflect participants' general beliefs regarding the statements listed. Participants responded to each of the items using a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Opposite-Sex Friendship Beliefs Scale (OSF)
Given the minimal research completed on cross-sex friendship beliefs, a new measure labeled the Opposite-Sex Friendship Beliefs Scale was created to assess the general beliefs regarding these friendships in heterosexual individuals. The questions were derived primarily from literature looking at the costs and benefits of opposite-sex friendships for those in committed relationships (Bleske-Rechek et al., 2012) as well as literature examining opposite sex and same sex friendship preference based on evolutionary theories (Lewis et. al, 2011). The measure contained 28 statements that participants scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) regarding their own beliefs.

A primary factor analysis was performed on the original 28 item measure. Those items that loaded on multiple factors were removed from the measure. The remaining items that loaded on one factor were factor analyzed again. The final results of this analysis lead to a measure consisting of 11 items with 2 factors. Factor 1 consisted of nine items and was labeled “Opposite Sex Friendships are Problematic” (e.g., “Opposite-sex friendships can easily lead to emotional infidelity”) Factor 2 consisted of two items and was labeled “Opposite Sex Friendships Should Be Accepted (e.g., “People should be okay with their romantic partners having opposite-sex friends”).

Hallmark Movie Viewership

Participants were asked two separate questions to establish an understanding of the frequency or pattern of their original Hallmark movie viewership. Original movies were conceptualized as movies made specifically by and for the Hallmark Channel. Participants were asked an open-ended question numbering how many days of the month they watched Hallmark original movies. Possible scores ranged from 0 to 30 days. This continuous variable was used as the predictor variable labeled Hallmark original movie viewership. Differing networks and
channels were listed besides Hallmark alone to ensure that participants were unaware of the exact purposes of the study while taking the survey.

**Control Variables**

**Demographics.** Participant age was measured using an open-ended question. Marriage length was also measured by an open-ended question asking the number of years participants had been married.

**Experiences in Close Relationships Revised Scale (ECR-R).** Attachment style was measured in this survey by the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised Scale (Fraley et al., 2000). The scale consisted of 36 items with two subscales that measured adult attachment on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree). Both the attachment-related anxiety subscale (“I worry a lot about my relationships”) and the attachment-related avoidance subscale (“I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down”) consisted of 18 items.
Results

Descriptive statistics for outcome variables are listed in Table 1. All measures showed good to excellent reliability. Hallmark viewers made up 26.81% of participants \((n = 81)\). In the non-Hallmark viewer group, 16.29% of participants identified as being divorced and remarried \((n = 36)\). In the Hallmark viewers group, 9.90% of participants identified as being divorced and remarried \((n = 8)\).

Primary Analyses

Correlational analyses were performed between each outcome variable and age, marriage length, and attachment avoidance, and attachment anxiety to determine whether these variables were significantly correlated and needed to be controlled for in subsequent analyses (see Table 2). Age, marriage length and attachment style were controlled for when examining variables from the Romantic Beliefs Scale. Relationship length and attachment style were controlled for when examining variables from the Implicit Theories of Relationships measure. Attachment was controlled for when examining variables from Opposite-Sex Friendship Beliefs Scale. A series of linear regression analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses and research questions. Beta coefficients for predictors in each model can be found in Table 3.

Hypothesis 1a

Our first hypothesis stated that Hallmark Movie Channel viewership will predict stronger endorsement of the belief in Partner Idealization. A multiple regression analysis was run with partner idealization as the outcome variable and Hallmark viewership, age, marriage length, and
attachment anxiety and avoidance entered as predictors. Twelve percent of the variance in partner idealization was described by the predictor variables and the entire model was significant \(F(5, 275) = 8.33, \ p = 0.001, \ R^2_{\text{Adj}} = .12\]. Our hypothesis was supported by the results; Hallmark viewership was a significant positive predictor of partner idealization, even when controlling for the other variables.

**Hypothesis 1b**

This hypothesis posited that Hallmark Movie Channel viewership will predict stronger endorsement of the Love at First Sight belief. A multiple regression analysis was run with Love at First Sight as the outcome variable and Hallmark viewership, age, marriage length, attachment anxiety and avoidance entered as predictors. Five percent of the variance in the Love at First Sight belief was explained by the model and the entire model was significant \(F(5, 275) = 3.93, \ p = .03, \ R^2_{\text{Adj}} = .05\]. Our hypothesis was supported by the results; Hallmark viewership was a significant positive predictor of Love at First Sight, even when controlling for the other variables.

**Hypothesis 1c**

Hypothesis 1c stated that Hallmark Movie Channel viewership would predict stronger endorsement of the One and Only true love belief. A multiple regression analysis was performed with the One and Only belief as the outcome variable. Age, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, marriage length, and Hallmark viewership were entered as predictors. The predictor variables explained 14% of the variance in the One and Only belief and the entire model was found to be statistically significant \(F(5, 275) = 9.751, \ p = 0.001, \ R^2_{\text{Adj}} = .14\]. Our hypothesis was supported by the results; Hallmark viewership was a significant positive predictor of the One and Only true love belief, even when controlling for other variables.
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**Hypothesis 1d**

The final hypothesis linked to the Romantic Beliefs Scale stated that Hallmark movie viewership will predict stronger endorsement of the belief in Love Finds a Way. A multiple regression analysis was run with age, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, marriage length, and Hallmark viewership as the predictor variables and Love Finds a Way as the outcome variable. The predictor variables explained 16% of the variance in Love Finds a Way, but the entire model was not found to be statistically significant \[ F(5, 275) = 11.54, p = .065, R^2_{Adj} = .16 \]. Hallmark viewership was not a significant positive predictor of this belief, which did not support our hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 2**

The second hypothesis posited that Hallmark Movie Channel viewership will predict stronger endorsement of destiny mindset beliefs. A multiple regression analysis was run with marriage length, attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety, and Hallmark viewership as the predictor variables and destiny beliefs as the outcome variable. The predictor variables explained five percent of the variance in destiny beliefs and the model was found to be statistically significant \[ F(4, 278) = 4.38, p = .024, R^2_{Adj} = .05 \]. Our hypothesis was supported by the results; Hallmark viewership was a significant positive predictor of destiny beliefs, even when controlling for other variables.

**Hypothesis 3**

Our final hypothesis stated that Hallmark Movie Channel viewership will negatively predict endorsement of growth beliefs in relationships. A multiple regression analysis was run with growth beliefs as the outcome variable and Hallmark viewership, marriage length, attachment avoidance, and attachment anxiety entered as predictors. The model was not
statistically significant and eight percent of the variance in growth beliefs were explained for by the predictor variables $F(4, 278) = 7.25, p = 0.45, R^2_{Adj} = .08$. Our hypothesis was not supported by the results; Hallmark viewership was not a significant negative predictor of growth beliefs.

**Research Question 1**

“**Opposite-Sex Friendships are Problematic**”. A multiple regression analysis was run with the “Opposite-Sex Friendships are Problematic” belief as the outcome variable and Hallmark viewership, attachment avoidance, and attachment anxiety were entered as predictors. The model was found to be statistically significant and the variables explained 23% of the variance in the “Opposite-Sex Friendships are Problematic” belief $[F(3, 280) = 28.85, p = 0.006, R^2_{Adj} = .23]$. Our results revealed that Hallmark viewership was a significant positive predictor of the belief, even when controlling for other variables.

“**Opposite-Sex Friendships are Safe**”. A multiple regression analysis was run with the “Opposite-Sex Friendships are Safe” belief as the outcome variable and Hallmark viewership, attachment avoidance, and attachment anxiety entered as predictors. The model regarding the “Opposite-Sex Friendships are Safe” belief was not statistically significant and less than one percent of the variance was explained by the model $[F(3, 280)= 1.10, p = .14, R^2_{Adj} = .001]$. Hallmark viewership was not a significant predictor of the “Opposite-Sex Friendships are Safe” belief.
Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship, if any, between Hallmark original movie viewing and unrealistic relationship beliefs, Implicit Theory of Relationships beliefs, and opposite-sex friendship beliefs. Regarding Hypotheses 1a-1d examining unrealistic relationship beliefs, we controlled for age, marriage length, attachment avoidance, and attachment anxiety. The results showed that the more participants watched Hallmark movies, the greater their endorsement was of belief in Partner Idealization, Love at First Sight, and a One and Only true love. Greater Hallmark movie viewership did not significantly predict the Love Finds a Way belief, which could be due to married participants’ past relationship experience or because Hallmark movies do not convey this theme. Our results were consistent with the literature regarding media viewing and unrealistic relationship beliefs. Past studies have found that individuals who watch romantically themed media tend to believe that their partner is perfect or that they have found their one true love in both correlational and experimental studies (Hefner & Kahn, 2014; Rivadeneyra & Lebo, 2008).

Increased Hallmark movie viewership was also found to predict greater destiny beliefs while controlling for marriage length, attachment avoidance, and attachment anxiety (Hypothesis 2). Hallmark movies contain themes similar to destiny beliefs, which could be why these beliefs were more prevalent in people who watch more Hallmark. Individuals who hold these destiny beliefs could choose to watch Hallmark movies because they are in line with the destiny beliefs they already hold. Hypothesis 3 posited that greater Hallmark viewership would predict a weaker
endorsement of growth beliefs and this hypothesis was not supported by our results. This could be due to the fact that married individuals, unlike college students and teens, have lengthier experience to support growth beliefs, which may outweigh the information they gather from other sources such as television (Hefner & Wilson, 2013). Alternatively, it could simply be because growth beliefs are not influenced by this type of media.

With this investigation into relationship beliefs, we wanted to test if there was any relationship between Hallmark viewership and beliefs about opposite-sex friendships. Our results found that people who watch more Hallmark tend to view opposite-sex friendships as more of a threat to romantic relationships. This finding could support Bleske-Rechek and colleagues’ (2012) findings that individuals in long-term relationships see greater costs to opposite-sex friendships than they do benefits. It could be that individuals who watch more Hallmark see the theme of opposite-sex friendships always ending romantically in Hallmark movies and it changes how they look at the relationship between opposite-sex friends. The presence of this theme could make the idea of their romantic partner finding an alternative mate more realistic in their mind, which could elicit this belief that opposite-sex friendships are problematic. However, it could also be that individuals who endorse the belief that opposite-sex friendships are problematic watch Hallmark movies because they support what they already believe.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

One significant limitation of this study is its inability to answer questions relating to the potential causal relationship between relationship beliefs and Hallmark movie viewership. Although a relationship was found between viewership and belief endorsement, the direction of that relationship is unclear. Does Hallmark viewing predict stronger endorsement of unrealistic relationship beliefs or do unrealistic relationship beliefs predict Hallmark viewing? It could be
that individuals who hold unrealistic relationship beliefs choose to watch Hallmark movies and not that watching Hallmark movies are contributing to the development of these beliefs. It is also possible that a third variable such as romantic media liking could be the predicting factor in both the endorsement of these relationship beliefs and Hallmark movie viewing.

Given that this study is the first to investigate if a relationship is present between Hallmark movie viewing and unrealistic relationship beliefs, our study focused on controlling only for variables such as age, marriage length, attachment avoidance, and attachment anxiety. Future research could examine other possible mediators such as gender to see if Hallmark movies remain a predictor of these beliefs with consideration to those variables. Past research has shown that men tend to endorse unrealistic romantic relationship beliefs more strongly than women do, so gender could play a part in the presence of these beliefs (Sprecher & Metts, 1999). The use of only married participants in this study offers an opportunity for further research into the prevalence of Hallmark viewing and its impact on the beliefs of participants of differing relationship statuses. Performing this study with participants in dating or single relationship statuses could show if these beliefs are more or less prevalent in populations that may not have as much relationship experience compared to married individuals. Married participants are possibly more likely to have employed the different relationship maintenance behaviors that could affirm or disprove unrealistic relationship beliefs. They are also more likely to be older than single or dating participants, which could offer the greater relationship experience discussed.

In regards to future research dealing with opposite-sex friendship beliefs, it could be helpful to further examine the reliability and validity of the measure we created through further testing. There is still some discussion present on what the defining characteristics are of
opposite-sex friendships and our study is the only one we are aware of that has created a measure
to determine what these specific beliefs look like. Much work needs to be done before
researchers can have a full understanding of beliefs regarding opposite-sex friendships and how
these beliefs may be related to media consumption. Secondly, no research has been done to
examine the downstream consequences of opposite-sex friendship beliefs to our knowledge. For
instance, what behavioral implications are there for Hallmark viewers who hold this belief that
opposite-sex friendships are problematic? Future research could study possible downstream
consequences that could emerge from negative views of opposite-sex friendships such as
jealousy or intimate partner violence as related to media consumption.

Implications

The results of our study supported the ideas of cultivation theory, which posits that what
you watch is linked to what you believe. Participants who watched a greater amount of Hallmark
movies agreed more strongly with unrealistic relationship beliefs, destiny beliefs of relationships,
and the belief that “Opposite-Sex Friendships are Problematic”. Although the relationship we
found was correlational and not causal, it still does add supporting evidence to cultivation theory.
Our study also has several implications regarding possible relationship outcomes for the
Hallmark viewers who hold unrealistic relationship beliefs and destiny beliefs. As discussed in
the Introduction, unrealistic relationship beliefs have been linked to a variety of positive
outcomes such as greater relationship satisfaction and feelings of love for one’s partner (Sprecher
& Metts, 1999). However, negative outcomes such as jealousy and intimate partner violence
have been linked to these beliefs too (Moskowitz et al., 2020). Our study also showed that
greater Hallmark viewing is predictive of greater destiny beliefs. Destiny beliefs of relationships
have been associated with experiencing more intimate partner violence when partner fit is high,
HALLMARK AND UNREALISTIC RELATIONSHIP BELIEFS

ghosting of partners, and less usage of coping skills in conflict compared to individuals who hold
growth beliefs (Knee, 1998; Franiuk et al., 2012). Our research cannot definitively say that these
relationship outcomes and behaviors are present in participants that have greater Hallmark
viewership, but it does beg the question if these relationship outcomes are experienced by those
who watch more Hallmark because of the beliefs they hold. Finally, our study showed that
individuals with greater Hallmark viewership tend to see opposite-sex friendships as threats to
romantic relationships. This finding has interesting implications for evolutionary and social
psychologists that seek to understand and define the costs and benefits of opposite-sex
friendships in today’s world. The finding that greater Hallmark viewership results in greater
endorsement of the belief that “Opposite-Sex Friendships are Problematic” could reveal that
what evolutionary psychologists posit about opposite-sex friendship preferences being linked to
mating preferences could be true.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, this study has given us further insight into the relationship
between media viewing and beliefs. Our research contributes to a growing body of literature
seeking to understand the impact a media culture filled with romanticized views of love and
relationships has on consumers. We found that while even controlling for age, marriage length,
attachment avoidance, and attachment anxiety that increased Hallmark viewership predicts
stronger endorsement of unrealistic relationship beliefs, destiny beliefs, and opposite-sex
friendship beliefs. The scope of this study did not specifically look to examine the practical
impact of unrealistic relationship beliefs, but we hope that future researchers will further define
the impact of Hallmark viewership for better or for worse.
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Tables

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Outcome Variables*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
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<th>SD</th>
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<th>Max</th>
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### Table 2

*Correlations Between Outcome Variables and Control Variables*

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<th>Variables</th>
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Note: *p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, ***p ≤ .001.
### Table 3

*Beta Values for Regression Analyses*

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<th>Outcome Variables</th>
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Note: *p ≤ .05.
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