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DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

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To my chair, committee, professors, teachers, colleagues, family, friends, and everyone
that supported and encouraged me in this life goal and every other that I've set for
myself...I couldn't have done it without you!

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Table of Contents

Chapter One – Introduction	1
Chapter Two – Review of Literature	9
Cultivation	9
Traditional Romantic relationships	25
Advertising	28
Genre Effects	30
Online romantic relationships	32
Chapter Three – Method	41
Study One: Content Analysis	41
Study Two: Survey	50
Chapter Four – Results	66
Television Programming	67
Television Advertising	72
Survey	75
Chapter Five – Discussion	84
Content Analysis	85
Survey	92
Perceptions of Online Romantic Relationships	94
Contributions	96
Limitations	97
Future Directions	99
Conclusion	101

References	103
Appendices	112

List of Tables

Table 1	Frequencies of Survey Participant Demographics	51
Table 2	Factor Analysis and Reliabilities for Survey Scales	55
Table 3	Frequencies of Coded Themes from Television Programming	66
Table 4	Frequencies of Coded Themes from Television Advertising	72
Table 5	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Model for Perceptions of Online Romantic Relationships	77
Table 6	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Model for Perceptions of Serial Monogamy	79
Table 7	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Model for Stigma Attached to Online Romantic Relationships	81
Table 8	Summary of Hierarchical Regression Model for Normalization for Online Romantic Relationships	82

Abstract

Cultivation theory is based upon the idea that television depicts a world that is different from people's social reality. The result is that people who watch a lot of television have an inaccurate and skewed perception of the real world (Gerbner, 1969). The primary focus of Gerbner's work has been on perceptions of societal violence. Cultivation has since explored other areas such as gender stereotyping (Signorielli, 1989, 1990), child socialization (Hawkins and Pingree, 1980), and environmental risks (Dahlstrom, 2010). The purpose of the current study is to assess how the consumption of television media messages predicts people's ideas about online romantic relationships.

The research found that consumption of television media messages predicts attitudes about online romantic relationships. The content analysis showed that there is not necessarily a consistent television message about online romantic relationships; however television advertising predicts attitudes about online romantic relationships. The survey results showed that television advertising predicts lower associations of stigma and higher associations of normalization for online romantic relationships. Most important towards the advance of cultivation theory is the study found that people who watch more television have more positive attitudes about online romantic relationships than people who watch less television. Expanded study of online romantic relationships as they continue to become more common is suggested as this research represents a first look at an important and underresearched area of media theory and interpersonal communication demonstrating a valued addition to the cultivation literature.

Chapter One

Introduction

Cultivation theory was developed by George Gerbner and he published his formative work on the subject in 1969. The theory is based upon the idea that television depicts a world that is different from the real world. The result is that people who watch a lot of television have an inaccurate and skewed perception of the real world. The original focus of Gerbner's work was on perceptions of societal violence. Cultivation research has since moved into other areas such as gender stereotyping (Signorielli, 1989, 1990), child socialization (Hawkins & Pingree, 1980), and environmental risks (Dahlstrom, 2010).

Cultivation began as a theory about violence on television, but it has been applied to other contexts (e.g., Aubrey, Rhea, Olson, & Fine, 2013; Coyne, Nelson, Graham-Kevan, Tew, Meng, & Olsen, 2011). Clearly, violence is the best researched and understood (e.g. Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Shrum & O'Guinn, 1993), followed not so closely by depictions of gender stereotypes (e.g. Shrum, 2001; Signorielli, 1989). Early cultivation focused on total television consumption. However, contemporary cultivation research focuses on specific issues or genres because the prevailing argument is that these cultivated perceptions are stronger (Cohen & Weimann, 2000). More recent literature focuses on a myriad of cultivated perceptions ranging from intercultural issues (Hetsroni, 2010) to the changing role of men in romantic relationships (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). There is already substantial literature on the cultivation of attitudes about romantic relationships as many findings have been made about the cultivated perception of ideas about romantic relationships. Characters on television are portrayed

as unrealistically beautiful with lives full of romance (Zurbriggen, Ramsey, & Jaworski, 2011), for example. This type of misleading television portrayal leads people to perceive their normal relationships as potentially inferior or different from others' relationships (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). These distorted television messages cultivate inaccurate attitudes about relationships in the form of relationship development (Johnson & Holmes, 2009), sexual behavior (Westman, Lynch, Lewandowski, & Hunt-Carter, 2003), conflict (Aubrey et al., 2013), expressions of love (Johnson & Holmes, 2009), family living arrangements (Hetsroni, 2012), and violence in relationships (Coyne et al., 2011). Relationships on television typically develop faster than normal and are overly happy while, conversely, married couples and singles are portrayed as unhappy (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). Conflict in televised romantic relationships is more common and is more likely solved via anti-social behaviors (Aubrey et al., 2013). Violence is more common in television relationships causing increased aggression among viewers (Coyne et al., 2011).

These findings address some of the many distorted depictions of romantic relationships in television media. Martins, Williams, Harrison, and Ratan's (2009) study, for example, used the frame of the 150 top-selling video games in the United States to explore female body representation. Their specific finding is that women in video games are typically taller and thinner than average American women and that these depictions are more dramatic in games aimed at children. Content frames, such as the one for violent video games, are more difficult and arguably impossible for cultivation of television messages because of the diversity of channels. There is not a

definable frame for television programming in the same way that there is for something like video game or movie content.

Cultivation theory research historically has been conducted via a three prong approach. Gerbner's first prong deals with content analysis of media messages, while his second prong explores the purpose and construction of media messages. Content analysis in the present television era with hundreds of channels is not as practical as Gerbner originally proposed. There are dozens of available channels on basic cable subscription services and hundreds available if satellite television with international packages is considered. The concern for this issue may have changed somewhat in the present due to prevalence of DVR and more recently broadband streaming television programming via subscription services. These services give television consumers more choice over their television viewing. Viewers can watch programming whenever and wherever they choose. People have more choice in their programming now than they did even when Potter (1993) was first questioning the validity of television content analysis in the early 1990's. The types of content analysis that are being conducted in today's cultivation research are different than the type used to assess overall television media consumption in the initial Gerbner cultivation studies.

As previously mentioned, Gerbner's cultivation research method has been applied to many different romantic relationship contexts. One area of romantic relationships that remains generally understudied in the interpersonal literature and specifically understudied in the cultivation literature is online romantic relationships. There are differences between traditional and online dating both in how the relationships begin and the nature or quality of the relationships that follow. For

example, self-disclosure occurs more rapidly in online romantic relationships (Gibbs, Ellison, & Lai, 2011; Rosen, Cheever, Cummings, & Felt, 2008) and the qualities that online daters seek in a partner are different from traditional daters (Alterovitz & Mendelsohn, 2011; Sidelinger, Ayash, Godorhazy, & Tibbles, 2008; Wu & Chiou, 2009). Romantic relationships are important to understanding people's collective and individual well-being (Sidelinger et al., 2008; Young & Caplan, 2010). Studying romantic relationships is important because people's overall mental and physical health is often tied to having stable romantic relationships (Sidelinger et al., 2008). Romantic relationships are important to social well-being in society (Young & Caplan, 2010). Online dating sites are becoming a bigger part of today's internet usage and a more common way for singles to find a partner (Rosen et al., 2008). Online dating continues to become more commonplace and the stigma attached to the process continues to diminish (Rosen et al., 2008). Studying attitudes about online dating will help researchers better understand an under-researched aspect of romantic relationships. Online dating is still misunderstood by younger dating singles and foreign to many older dating singles (Stephure, Boon, MacKinnon, & Deveau, 2009). How singles choose potential partners is somewhat misunderstood, so it is important to work towards a better understanding of societal ideas about the online dating process (Wu & Chiou, 2009). Many aspects of online dating, including societal perceptions, remain areas for additional consideration in the literature.

As previously stated, prior research has shown some important differences between traditional and online dating. The qualities that singles look for in a mate are different (Alterovitz & Mendelsohn, 2011). Online daters tend to be more focused on

attractiveness while traditional daters are more interested in personality. Specific partner qualities are more important to online daters, while the state of the relationship is more valued for traditional daters (Alterovitz & Mendelsohn, 2011). Online daters deal with relationship conflict differently than traditional daters (Engelhart, 2013). Online daters view the perfect partner as the ideal, while traditional daters are more interested in developing the best relationship (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010). These characteristics have led to a process termed 'relationshopping,' which is considered unique to online dating (Heino et al., 2010). Relationshopping is characterized by the *pursuit* of the ideal relationship in contrast to *developing* the ideal relationship. Online daters believe that there is a perfect romantic partner that should be sought at the expense of developing the perfect romantic relationship (Heino et al., 2010). Online daters are more likely to be serial daters or engage in multiple romantic relationships (Pauley & Emmers-Sommer, 2007). Online daters manage issues of self-disclosure with their partner differently than traditional daters (Gibbs, Ellison, & Lai, 2010; Heino et al., 2010; Young & Caplan, 2010). Online daters typically reveal more breadth and depth of information at the beginning of a romantic relationship, while traditional daters are more likely to reveal information more gradually. Self-disclosure is often more idealized among online daters compared with traditional daters (Young & Caplan, 2010).

Attitudes about online dating have been shown to be dependent upon age (Stephure et al., 2009). Research has shown there are clear differences between online and traditional dating as well as the relationships that result. Despite these differences, there are similarities between online and traditional dating. Online and traditional

daters have similar conceptions of the importance of relationship chemistry (Rosen et al., 2008), for example.

This study focuses on a type of romantic relationship that is becoming progressively more common. However, there is still a stigma attached to online relationships (Stephure et al., 2009). The stigma is different for younger adults compared with older adults. Online dating is not completely dissimilar from the social media use that younger daters have grown up with, but their peers may not understand why they are using online dating services when there are so many available singles. Older daters are less familiar with social media so online dating is more foreign, but their peers are more likely to understand the appeals of online dating when they too are heavily involved in their careers, maintaining a house, or possibly already raising children. One way that advertisers for online dating sites are normalizing and destigmatizing online dating is through television advertising (Stephure et al., 2009). This is clearly aimed at showing consumers online dating is a good way to meet potential partners. However, as online romantic relationships have continued to become more common, some have found problems with the types of relationships that form. Online romantic relationships develop faster and are more transient than relationships developed via traditional means (Heino et al., 2010; Pauley & Emmers-Sommer, 2007; Rosen et al., 2008). It is important to examine how society perceives these relationships, because online dating is largely unstudied despite its increasingly popularity among adult daters. One way of looking at these perceptions is through the lens of cultivation theory. Understanding how consumption of television media predicts

our perceptions of a new and important type of relationship is a critical question that remains mostly unanswered in the communication literature.

This study represents an initial look at how consumption of television programming and commercials may affect perceptions of online romantic relationships. This is an extension of the existing cultivation literature on romantic relationships. However, the context of online romantic relationships is unique in that the topic is not a common theme in television programming, but advertising for online romantic relationships is prevalent, as will be presented in the content analysis. Influence is still likely to come from programming as well as advertising. The programming may offer positive and negative perceptions of online romantic relationships while the advertising is clearly going to portray online romantic relationships positively. These issues make this study a good addition to the literature on cultivation theory, online romantic relationships, and television advertising.

There is limited literature on online romantic relationships (Rosen et al., 2008) and no study has been found focusing on the possibility of a cultivated perception of attitudes about online romantic relationships. Therefore, many aspects of online dating remain unknown (Alterovitz & Mendelsohn, 2011). This study expands on current cultivation of romantic relationship literature into the area of online romantic relationships as others have expanded the original violence cultivation literature into other areas. This research is concerned with providing a more comprehensive understanding of the cultivated perception of specifically online initiated romantic relationships. I will be assessing media perceptions that occurred prior to the study rather than attitudes that will be cultivated within the context of the study. The next

chapters will outline the literature relevant to the study, present the method to investigate the hypothesis and research questions that will promote a greater understanding, and discuss the study's findings.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Cultivation

This section will introduce cultivation theory as a lens that will be used to explore perceptions and attitudes about online romantic relationships. The theory suggests that television media is responsible for distorted perceptions of issues depicted on television (Gerbner, 1969). For this reason, cultivation theory is presented, including a description of the theory, the theory's major tenets, and a review of some of the major cultivation research. A survey and content analysis methodology for exploring cultivation theory are discussed. Advances and objections to the theory are presented.

Gerbner (1998) argues that television is a unique medium as far as influence is concerned. Cultivation theory is unique as a result because it is narrow in scope of study as it only focuses upon the role of television as an influence. However, it is broad in that its effects are far reaching. Gerbner describes cultivation as different from the 'effects' that most media scholars discuss. Rather, it is a symbolic influence between the television medium and society. The question of which comes first – medium or effect – is not relevant to the concept of cultivation, even though this is typically used as an objection to cultivation research. Framing and other media effects theories deal with specific and particular perceptions and attitudes, while cultivation theory addresses more global social reality issues (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, 1994). Cultivation effects are more global and affect the social construction of the way people view the world they live in. Gerbner uses the term 'cultivation differential' to describe the margin of difference in social reality between light and heavy viewers of television

media. Further, Gerbner argues that specific channels or programming do not create the messages that cause the influence. Rather, there is a coherent system that works to mainstream our culture. The messages work to influence people in a way that creates a unifying effect of sorts. Overall, he views television less as entertainment and more as a form of socialization (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Eeley, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, & Signorielli, 1977; Gerbner, 1998).

Media effects theories concern themselves with specific change. Framing theory, for example, looks at how various depictions of the same idea or event by different media sources may affect attitudes about the idea or event (Scheufele, 1999). Agenda setting argues that media tells consumers what issues to think about rather than more specifically how to think about those issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1993). These contrast with cultivation theory, which applies to the way people conceive of their world. Children are introduced to television in infancy so there is no ‘before’ or ‘after’ condition as there is with other media effects theories (Gerbner, 1998). Gerbner suggests people are socialized through their use of television media in a way that does not happen via other media (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Television combines video, audio as well as other elements into a single medium. Television serves entertainment, news, and advertising in a way that no other media does. Television is free, always available, and does not require literacy. In many ways, the most influential part of television is that it comes directly into homes in a way that is unmatched by other media (Roberts, 2013).

Television viewers are aware that television is not reality. People know that doctors and lawyers on television are not doctors and lawyers in real life. However,

viewers use these portrayals as a way to form their views of reality (Gerbner, 1998; Shrum, Lee, Burroughs, & Rindfleisch, 2010). Gerbner and Gross (1976) noted that people who watch many television crime shows have distorted views about the law enforcement process. Oftentimes, television media show viewers parts of their world they do not normally have access to. Viewers consume programming that tells them stories they cannot normally see in their day to day lives. In these cases, viewers have little to compare to television messages so it becomes their notion of reality. Therefore, viewers know what they are seeing is not real, but it suffices for reality when there is no alternative conception (Shrum et al., 2010).

Cultivation theory explores people's perceptions of reality in general, rather than attitudes about a specific issue (Gerbner, 1969; Potter, 1993). Cultivation is not an assessment of attitude or perception changes based upon limited, short-term exposure to television media. One time exposure to specific television media shows media effects theories such as framing, but this type of experimentation does not address television media's effect on overall perception of social reality (Gerbner, 1998). It is a basic assumption of cultivation theory that limited, single exposure to television media will not affect the more globally cultivated television messages. Long term, consistent, and repeated exposure to programming with the themes common to television and the depictions of life and society create the cultivated perceptions. These findings are important because they illustrate that cultivation cannot be explored via more conventional media effects methods. Cultivation research cannot look at a before-and-after perception because there is no pre-condition to watching television. Television

media creates differences in people's ideas about the real world based upon depictions in the television world (Gerbner, 1969).

People who have studied cultivation theory have defined cultivation's psychological processes in terms of first- and second-order effects. The first-order effect is the connection between media viewing and the distorted beliefs about the world that result from it (Shrum & O'Guinn, 1993). For example, people's view of how much violence occurs in the real world is connected to the amount of violence people see in the television world. Beliefs form the first-order of effects, which deal with what people think about their world. The second-order effect is the connection between media viewing and more specific attitudes (Shrum, 1996). People's attitudes about the way violence should be handled by the legal system are an example of cultivation's second-order effects. In the context of attitudes about romantic relationships, first-order effects would be an ideal depicted in the media and then the belief within the audience of the medium. A second-order effect might be ideas about how much conflict is expected in romantic relationships based upon what is depicted in television media. Shrum describes first-order effects as a type of heuristic processing. People who are asked to describe the world use the most accessible description, which is the television-world answer in some cases. People provide the television-world answer as their conception of what they perceive the world to be. Second-order effects usually involve a more detailed assessment of the media messages.

Genre. Television clearly affects the way people view themselves, but there is support for the argument that the effect may not be as uniform as Gerbner suggests (Cohen & Weimann, 2000; Hawkins & Pingree, 1981). The types of effects and how

those effects vary depending upon the characteristics of the programming consumed and the viewer are worth noting. The impact of the type of programming people watch is a major concern when conducting cultivation research. Gerbner (1998) argues that people watch television in a ritualistic manner. People watch at specific times and in a patterned way. Viewership is stable and typically does not depend upon what is showing on the television. This may have changed somewhat in the present due to prevalence of DVR and more recently broadband streaming television programming via subscription services. Gerbner (1998), however, argued that innovations such as proliferation of channels and television recording technologies have not impacted the diversity of what people view on television. Gerbner compares television viewing to attending church service, except that people are more drawn to their televisions. People watch 'television' rather than watching 'specific shows' (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Gerbner suggests that television's need to attract advertising means that the most popular types of programming with the same consistent messages continue to be mass-reproduced for public consumption. Gerbner argues that understanding the effect of cultivation should not involve examining specific programming or types of programming (Gerbner, 1998). Rather, understanding media effects should involve a more global analysis that sees television viewing as a whole, rather than more audience and genre specific (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Eleeey, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, & Signorielli, 1977). Others suggest that understanding the cultivation effect means examining how it is different based upon the more specific television shows being viewed. Hawkins and Pingree (1981) disagree with Gerbner's assumptions about the habitual and ritualized viewing public. They found differences in the

programming between networks and times of day and the difference in perceptions was more related to the different times of day than the networks they watched. They explored how people conceive of the television they are watching either as something that is realistic or something that is an idealized story (Hawkins & Pingree, 1981).

Television audiences are not homogeneous. Television programming as a result is also not homogenous. Different genres of television have different norms for content and focus on different aspects of social reality (Cohen & Weimann, 2000).

Understanding cultivation means considering the content viewed as well as the amount of total television consumption (Cho, Wilson, & Choi, 2011; Lee & Niederdeppe, 2011). Studying genre is a way of distinguishing content without looking at the effects of specific shows. Viewers of different genres have been shown to experience different effects (Cohen & Weimann, 2000). This is not to argue that different genres portray reality differently, but more that different genres show a different aspect of the television world that becomes a part of people's social reality. Of course, this somewhat depends upon the programming because some television does not claim to be realistic, such as cartoons and science-fiction programming. Television that is perceived to be more realistic has been shown to have a greater impact on audiences (Aubrey et al., 2013). It is important to know if people see their television as a depiction of reality or more a source of entertainment (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994; Shrum, Lee, Burroughs, & Rindfleisch, 2011). Cohen and Weimann (2000) found a fairly dramatic genre and group effect for television viewing. They found certain cultivated perceptions are found to be more dramatic among people that preferred particular genres. For example, older female viewers of soap operas were more likely

to have their perceptions of trustworthiness of others increased while older male viewers of sports programming were more likely to have their perception of the likelihood of being a victim of a crime increased by the consumption of television media.

Context. There is also the question of how to describe certain cultivation effects such as violence in sports. Some people would view televised sports as violent in nature while others consider it athletic competition. Contact sports such as boxing and football may be considered more violent than sports such as baseball or basketball. There is an overall effect the television world has on the way people view their world. The effect of violence in sports may not be uniform and some television media may have opposing effects on consumers. Some programming, for example, depicts the hyper-violent world that may make people think the world is overly violent, while other programming paints a fairy tale world where nothing goes wrong for the characters involved. Some would view the news programming on CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC as opposing influential forces because their content is viewed as politically contradictory (Coe et al., 2008). There is clear evidence of a cultivation effect from television, but it is not always clear how television predicts viewer perceptions.

The purpose of cultivation research is to understand how television's images and depictions translate into distorted viewer perceptions. There is clear evidence here are differences between the television world and the real world. Older people tend to be under-represented in the television world, for example. The population in the United States continues to get older, but heavy viewers of television tend to view the elderly as a smaller segment of the population (Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan, 1980).

The television world also focuses more upon violent behavior and the legal process. Over half of television characters are involved in violent activity compared with less than one percent of Americans being involved in violence annually (Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan, 1980). These depictions contribute to the cultivated hyper-violent perception of the world. The underrepresentation of women in society means that the television worldview of women has a limited range of roles and activities (Signorielli, 1989). Television is geared to appeal to wide audiences so it works to avoid offending potential viewers. This means programming focuses on non-polarizing themes and results in television audiences that are more likely to characterize themselves as politically moderate (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1982). This contributes to the mainstreaming effect that Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli, (1994) describe. Mainstreaming means that heavy television viewers are more likely to have similar attitudes while lighter television viewers are more likely to have diverse attitudes (Shrum, & Bischak, 2001). These are some of the differences between the television world and real world presented in the cultivation literature.

Distorted images. Cultivation theory has been used to explore many different social issues. Potter (1993) references many of these issues, including racist attitudes (Allen & Hatchett, 1986), feelings of alienation (Gerbner et al., 1978), ideas about the elderly (Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli & Morgan, 1980), American stereotypes (Tan, 1979), quality of life (Morgan, 1984), values (Potter, 1990), and divorce (Carveth & Alexander, 1985). One of these issues fairly well-covered in the literature is television media's cultivation of gender roles. Signorielli (1989) among others examined the issue that men tend to have more prominent roles in television programming than women. To

begin with, there are overall fewer women in television than men (Signorielli, 1990). While this does not mean people think there are disproportionately fewer women in the world, it does mean, however, that there is a limited range of roles for women in the television world. As a result, they are often seen as complementing the men in the television world (Signorielli, 1990, 1991). Signorielli (1990) found when women are featured they fall into rather traditionalized gender roles. Men also follow traditional gender roles, but their roles tend to be less limiting (Signorielli, 1990). Men's occupations are more prominently featured in programming, while women are more likely not to have a career or the role of the career is diminished in the programming. Women are more likely to participate in traditionally female gendered occupations such as secretaries, nurses, and teachers (Signorielli, 1990). The age of male and female characters is atypical in that women tend to be younger while men tend to be older (Signorielli, 1989). Women tend to be married more frequently than men and the role of that marriage is often more pronounced for women even when men are married. Women's roles in television programming more often involve a family and romantic role (Signorielli, 1991). Women in television programming are more likely to have a family and be attached to a partner than male characters (Signorielli, 1991). This emphasis on female characters playing a complementary role in television media is related to television viewers expressing more likelihood of getting married and having children (Signorielli, 1991). There is evidence these media depictions have affected audiences in specific ways. People who consume more media depictions have distorted perceptions of their social reality. Children learn about jobs and work settings from television and, more specifically, the gender those workers should be. These effects are

particularly strong among professions more commonly seen on television (Signorielli, 1990).

It has been clearly shown from the beginning of Gerbner's work that high television viewers have a more violent perception of the world. There has been evidence to show other factors affect the cultivation of television messages. Some of these factors include use of other forms of media such as magazine or newspaper, level of education, age, and gender (Shrum, 2001). It is important that cultivation research examine the various factors that influence the cultivation of media messages. Of course, heavy viewers are still more affected than light viewers across all of these groups, but these factors as well as others serve as moderators to the cultivation effect.

It follows there would be other characteristics that affect the way television media-cultivated perceptions occur. More educated people are typically less affected by the influence of television (Shrum, 1999; Shrum, Lee, Burroughs, & Rindfleisch, 2011). A major cultivation effect that occurs is a homogenization of world view (Shrum, 2001). Low television viewers are more likely to have divergent world views, while high television viewers are more likely to have similar world views across all demographics, including education and gender (Cohen & Weimann, 2000). Effective cultivation research should take into account other variables and personal characteristics, such as the ones previously mentioned, in order to fully understand the phenomenon. The proposed study will have to be meticulous in how it manages the factors that are examined in explaining how television media consumption predicts perceptions of online romantic relationships. Personal characteristics such as the viewers' education level, gender, and age will have to be factored into the equation.

Television characteristics, such as time of broadcast, genre, and the nature of the programming, will also play a role in understanding television's effect on perceptions of online romantic relationships.

Many researchers have examined how children have been affected by television and media consumption (e.g. Coyne et al., 2011; Signorielli, 1991). Hawkins and Pingree (1980) found that television media influences were more dramatic among elementary school age children than they were among older middle and high school age young adults. This is important for many reasons. Children's socializations tend to be more malleable in that influences can have a more dramatic effect on younger populations than older populations. Younger children do not have prior socialization to balance out more immediate media effects (Hawkins & Pingree, 1980). This is a time when socializations tend to be formed rather than changed. Although, it is important to remember as the researchers note that effects on children are sometimes not as dramatic because cultivated perceptions are subtle and global in nature. Age will be used as a control variable, although there is likely to be minimal variation in age among the study's participants.

In addition to understanding viewers and content, cultivation research should examine why people watch television (Shrum, 2001). It is important for understanding cultivation to know why people consume television media, because there is debate within the cultivation literature surrounding the reason people view the television that they do. Gerbner (1994) argues people watch television in a ritualistic manner. Viewers consume media at specific times or during specific occasions regardless of the programming. He suggests this translates into uniform effects and non-selective

television consumption (Gerbner, 1998). Perhaps people watch television because it fills free time, accompanies other activities, or aids socialization with friends. Other times, television may be viewed purposively for specific shows or programming. Therefore, people watch television for many different reasons, so not all television viewing can be interpreted the same way (Hawkins & Pingree, 1981).

There are factors outside of television programming that change the cultivation of television media images. Gerbner (1977) showed that people living around criminal activity found the violence on television more realistic and believable. Events affecting viewers personally can impact the perception of accuracy in television. Viewers are more affected by the television world when it is similar to their reality. Romer, Jamieson, and Aday (2003) found that fear of crime increased proportionally to how much it was reported on in the television news. Fear of crime in cities where crime is publicized increased more than in suburbs, where it is less pronounced. Conversely, fear of crime is not as strongly correlated to instances of crime. Fear of crime is more directly related to the reporting of crimes than crime itself. This is important as a viewer's perception of crime is more related to messages cultivated from television viewing than crime incidence. These findings were more pronounced in areas where the crime was perceived to be happening even though the local news was reporting it across in the city.

Gerbner (1994) used the term resonance to describe the finding that viewers are more affected by television media that appears similar to the world around them. This is shown when television news appears more realistic if it reflects what is going on around the viewer. People who get robbed or have a significant other cheat on them in

real life may find a robbery or a hyper-sexualized nature of society more believable in the television world (Shrum, 2001). It makes sense that peoples' individual experiences affect their perception of realism in the television world. Resonance is another factor that should be considered for understanding cultivated messages. It is important to understand that what is happening in a viewer's personal romantic life may affect their perceptions of what is being depicted in television media. Cultivation researchers should understand the participants' world in order to better understand how the television world may affect it. Resonance is important in the cultivation of ideas about romantic relationships for people who are actively seeking a potential romantic partner. Viewers may look towards television media to help understand romantic relationship norms.

Online romantic relationships are becoming more prevalent among dating adults (Smith & Duggan, 2013). The concept of resonance suggests television messages about online romantic relationships should be more meaningful to people who themselves or their peers are engaging in online romantic relationships. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: People who know someone who has used online dating services will have more positive attitudes about online romantic relationships.

Objections. Since Gerbner's (1969) introduction of cultivation theory, there have been many additions, extensions, and objections to the theory. This study, for example, is an extension into understanding the cultivation of messages about online romantic relationships. This study adds to previous literature on the cultivation of attitudes about romantic relationships. Each addition to the literature contributes to a

further and more in-depth understanding of cultivation theory. Gerbner's original findings have been confirmed, challenged, and nuanced by more recent cultivation research. This section will discuss some of these objections and the relevance to the design of the current study.

Potter (1993) makes an objection related to concerns about the validity of cultivation theory. He suggests it may be difficult to show that cultivated television messages are impacting viewers' perceptions of their world (Potter, 1993). Suggesting that television consumption with a consistent message related to violence, gender norms, or other concerns truly impacts the way people view social issues may not necessarily be possible because there is no before-and-after condition to compare. This objection is based on the idea that cultivation research cannot necessarily determine whether television viewers already have specific views, that television impacts their views, or perhaps a combination of the two issues. It is possible to overcome internal validity objections by doing a longitudinal study with repeated measures. A longitudinal cultivation study may make a stronger argument for the inherently global and long-term nature of cultivation effects. This type of study would have to span many years to make effective time-ordered cause and effect cultivation arguments.

Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, and Eron (2003) assessed violent television consumption and tendencies among a group of children and then reassessed the same group 15 years later as they were young adults. Those who had watched more violent television were more likely to have violent tendencies, have problems with criminal behavior, and even have more minor traffic offenses. There were similar effects for men and women. This finding is significant within the literature on television violence

effects because it shows a clear longitudinal connection between viewing violent television media and violent tendencies. While this study shows it is not impossible, given enough time and resources, to make time-ordered cause and effect arguments for a cultivation effect, it is impractical for most researchers and especially for the context of this research. Objections to the internal validity of cultivation research are difficult to overcome without a longitudinal study model. As such, this study will focus on predictive rather than causal relationships.

Another challenge for cultivation research is collecting data on the population's media exposure. This was less difficult in early cultivation research as there were fewer television channels and cultivation researchers were more simply concerned with how much television consumers viewed. There were essentially three main television networks – ABC, NBC, and CBS. Today, there are literally hundreds of television channels and access is not limited to local or national coverage as international channels add another factor. This makes it difficult to assess the types of television media viewed by a sample or population. Classic cultivation research suggests socialization is a societal process (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994; Potter, 1993). Gerbner (1998) finds that content on the countless television channels is fairly universal due to the common television network concern of appealing to mass audiences. More viewers mean greater advertising revenue, which is the ultimate goal of television media (Gerbner, 1998). Gerbner's cultivation theory is more interested in the overall quantity of television consumed than the specific programming or genre viewers are consuming. The cultivation effect is a process of socialization within viewers. It tells viewers what their world looks like rather than telling them what to think about their world. This

study's design focuses on how prior television viewing predicts perceptions of online romantic relationships. It is difficult to assess people's exposure to television's message about online dating because the topic is featured so infrequently; therefore, I chose to use a purposive sample of specific television media as a frame to assess the television message.

Cultivation began as a theory about the effects of violence in television media (Gerbner, 1969). The theory has been expanded and continued into other areas beyond perceptions of violence. These applications to societal attitudes of violence continue today (e.g., Custers & Van den Bulck, 2013), but there have been many more extensions of the theory into cultivated attitudes other than perceptions of violence. Cultivated perceptions are cumulative, which means they are not influenced by recent changes in media exposure (Gerbner, 1998; Shrum, 1999). Hetsroni (2010) found characteristics of television consumed were less important than overall consumption. This is an important contrast as Gerbner's (1977, 1994) classic cultivation research has consistently maintained that general television consumption is most important towards understanding television's cultivated perceptions while others (e.g. Potter, 1993; Shrum, 1999, 2001) have claimed that assessing other factors (e.g. genre, attitude strength) is important towards understanding television's cultivated perceptions. These findings illustrate the importance of exploring covariates such as the type of television consumed as well as characteristics of the viewer towards making a complete exploration of the cultivated messages and addressing the research questions of the study. Gerbner's original conception of cultivation theory regarded television viewing as universal, but

more recent conceptions of the theory have found characteristics within viewers and television itself that influence the cultivation of television messages.

Traditional Romantic Relationships

Consuming television media has been shown to have small, but varied effects on viewers' perception of romantic relationships (e.g. Aubrey et al., 2013; Martins et al., 2009; Shapiro, & Kroeger, 1991). Some of these effects include individuals' perceptions involving relationship conflict, relationship aggression, and love styles. Identifying these effects means understanding the depictions on television media. A major criticism of romantic television media is that it portrays unrealistically beautiful characters engaged in relationships that are full of romance and intimacy (Zurbriggen et al., 2011). These idealized messages may lead viewers to perceive their normal relationships as something less satisfying than what their peers are experiencing (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). This is seen in the form of behaviors such as earlier initiation of sexual behavior and unhealthy beliefs about their own and peer's sexual activity among individuals that view a lot of television media (Westman et al., 2003).

Men in films are more likely than women to engage in relationship developing gestures including compliments and gift giving (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). This could lead to the distorted perception that the men's role is to make overtures and thus also create exaggerated expectations among women as well as make these types of gestures more important than other more significant relational qualities such as trust and commitment. In television romantic relationships, expressions of love and commitment often occur earlier than is considered normative, coinciding with the exciting, initial stages of romantic relationships. Films show the initial stage of a relationship quickly

becomes a meaningful and significant relationship without showing how or why these developments occur (Johnson & Holmes, 2009).

Thus, people who consume television media have been described as having dysfunctional and unrealistic beliefs about romantic relationships (Shapiro & Kroeger, 1991). All viewers, but women in particular, are less satisfied with their romantic relationships (Shapiro & Kroeger, 1991). Being single is consistently portrayed in movies negatively. Single characters are portrayed as unhappy, anxious, and lonely, while characters in relationships are happier or excited when a prospective new relationship is forming, leading television viewers to perhaps have negative feelings about being single themselves (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). Married couples are shown as either unhappy with their spouse or unwilling to show the positives of a happy marital relationship. Married characters mostly speak negatively to others about their partners, while characters in newer relationships tend to speak more positively (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). This may lead television viewers to believe affection among married couples is an exception rather than a custom and to have generally poor perceptions of marriage, especially as many movies end with a wedding as the peak of a relationship (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). Romantic relationships are typically given greater importance over other character aspects such as friendships, personality, and careers (Johnson & Holmes, 2009).

Watching a lot of television has been shown to increase the amount of conflict in viewers' romantic relationships due to the amount of conflict in television romantic relationships. Conflict is used by television producers to advance plots, create drama, increase viewership, and is a dominant theme in television dramas (Aubrey et al., 2013).

This portrayal results in the viewer's perception that romantic relationships are high in conflict (Aubrey et al., 2013). While prosocial conflict management strategies are more common in television programming, the antisocial behaviors tend to be rated as more interesting to viewers (Aubrey et al., 2013). These all contribute to dysfunctional relationship beliefs held by heavy television viewers (Aubrey et al., 2013). People that viewed more conflict on television were more likely to engage in controlling behaviors within their romantic relationships and this effect increased among viewers that perceived television to be realistic (Aubrey et al., 2013). Further, use of sexual media has specific effects on consumers' attitudes about sexuality within romantic relationships. Viewing pornography is often associated with many effects such as endorsing more traditional gender roles and an increase in sexual aggression. Sexual media consumers rate themselves as less in love and less satisfied with their romantic partners (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011).

As violence is a commonly depicted theme in television programming, people viewing more relational and physical aggression on television display evidence of increased aggression in their interpersonal and romantic relationships (Coyne et al., 2011). Viewing television depicting relational aggression is associated with increased relational aggression among romantic partners (Coyne et al., 2011). However, consumption of television depicting physical aggression is only associated with increased physical aggression among men (Coyne et al., 2011). Although, it must be taken into consideration that Coyne and her colleagues' (2011) found that women more openly admit to physical aggression in romantic relationships than men admit to physical aggression in romantic relationships, which helps explain this finding. The

finding that men and women engage in similar levels of relational aggression is interesting, because it seems inconsistent with the research that shows that women are typically more affected by relational aggression than men due to their increased need for social relationships (Basow, Cahill, Phelan, Longshore, & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2007).

Television's portrayal of romantic relationships has evolved along with society's attitudes about romantic relationships. Westman, Lynch, Lewandowski, and Hunt-Carter (2003) found that the perceived realism of television programming influences how much those depictions are used as sources for ideas about romantic relationships. Portrayal of families on television programming has made a transition along with society from traditional families in the 1950's and 1960's to more nontraditional arrangements such as single-parent families, same-sex couples, and cohabitation (Hetsroni, 2012). The viewers' ability to see television families as similar to their own makes these television families more influential towards viewers' perception of reality. These portrayals of romantic relationships begin early as even children's movies were found to have influential messages about romantic relationships (Martins et al., 2009). Some examples include emphasis on the importance of the romantic relationship towards the character's happiness, ideas about a romantic partner's body image, and romantic relationship behavior norms (Martins et al., 2009).

Advertising

Cultivation literature has primarily examined television programming content (eg., Custers & Van den Bulck, 2013; Shrum et al., 2011). However, there is some literature addressing the role of advertising in the cultivation of television messages.

This has been done in specific contexts such as advertising for beauty products (Tan, 1979) to more general contexts such as compulsive buying (Kwak, Zinkhan, & DeLorme, 2002). Much of the literature addresses the general cultivation effect of television advertising such as materialism (Harmon, 2001) or female gender stereotyping (Lafky, Duffy, Steinmaus, Berkowitz, 1996). Looking at more specific advertising such as those for online dating services would add to this limited literature on cultivation and television advertising. Examining the advertisements for online romantic relationship web sites is important towards understanding the cultivation effect on viewers.

Television advertising has been shown to have general and specific effects on consumers. Viewing television commercials has shown to increase expressed importance of having nice things and having a high income as well as unsurprisingly increasing the tendency to spend money without thinking (Harmon, 2001). Viewing television advertising has shown to increase tendencies towards compulsive buying (Kwak et al., 2002). Increased viewing and recall of television advertising for alcohol is associated with increased lifetime alcohol use, lifetime drunkenness, short-term alcohol use, and short-term drunkenness (Unger, Schuster, Zogg, Dent, & Stacy, 2003). Viewing commercials for health and beauty aids increases women's perceived role of beauty in being successful in their career, being a successful wife, and being popular among men (Tan, 1979). Viewing advertising depicting stereotypical gender roles for women increases perceptions of gendered stereotypes (Lafky et al., 1996). These studies represent a sampling of findings that show cultivation effects for consuming general and specific types of advertising.

Television advertisers clearly buy programming with the goal of influencing viewers. Logically, this discussion leads to the following proposed hypothesis:

H2: People who watch more television that has advertising for online dating sites will have a more positive perception of online romantic relationships.

Genre Effects

Genre for the purpose of this research will be defined as specific types of television programming that fall into similar categories. Some examples of genre include drama, cartoons, action, science fiction, comedy, and sports programming. Obviously, television viewers have unique programming interests, and each of these separate categories has varying content. People viewing different genres experience different effects in addition to the overall cultivation effect of television viewing (Cohen & Weimann, 2000). As has been shown, viewing diverse types of programming affects viewers' social reality differently. Genre is another aspect that should be considered when assessing the effect of television consumption on viewers' attitudes towards romantic relationships. Findings show a reasonably strong genre effect within television viewing (Cohen & Weimann, 2000).

Viewers that consume different types of television programming experience different cultivation effects. For example, a person's reported love style was shown to be associated with viewing different television genres (Hetsroni, 2012). The concept of love styles is a description of the attachment seen in romantic interpersonal relationships (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006). Men and women are likely to fall into different love styles and various age groups are likely to display different love styles. Heavier viewers of family and romantic television are more likely to identify with Eros

(Hetsroni, 2012), the passionate physical and emotional love style of wanting to satisfy. People that watch more television in general and news programming in particular are more likely to identify with Ludus (Hetsroni, 2012), the love style associated with playing games and testing a partner. People identifying with Pragma, the love style associated with practicality and a business-like approach, are more likely to view romance-related programming and less likely to view news programming (Hetsroni, 2012).

There have been several cultivation effects shown to be moderated by the type of television that people view. Soap opera viewing was shown to increase people's estimation of the number of doctors, housewives, lawyers, divorcees, illegitimate children, and people committing serious crimes (Carveth & Alexander, 1985). This effect was more dramatic when soap operas were viewed for enjoyment rather than boredom and other reasons. Viewing television news was shown to decrease risky driving behavior such as joyriding. Conversely, viewing action movies was shown to increase joyriding and speeding (Beullens, Roe, Van den Bulck, 2011). Unsurprisingly, men were more likely to report these behaviors than women. Viewing crime dramas is shown to increase perceptions of violent crime occurrence, cause more favorable opinions of the criminal justice system, and increased perceived likelihood of becoming a crime victim (Grabe, & Drew, 2007). These were increases compared with participants with similar overall television consumption. This represents a sampling of studies that have shown cultivation effects for watching specific types of television.

Traditional cultivation research has treated television's effect as universal (e.g., Gerbner, 1969; Hawkins & Pingree, 1981). Some more contemporary studies have

found that different types of television provide audiences with different depictions (e.g., Cohen & Weimann, 2000; Lee, & Niederdeppe, 2011). This affects the way that viewers of specific television genres perceive their reality. From this, it is predicted that viewing some genres of television may affect perceptions of online romantic relationships more or less than others. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Participant television genre preference will affect perceptions of online romantic relationships.

It is clear from the previous discussion that television consumption has an effect on viewers' attitudes about romantic relationships. Online romantic relationships are a specific type of romantic relationship that is becoming more common in today's society. This study's research questions and hypotheses are based upon the previous discussion and the argument that effects on romantic relationships ought to logically generalize to online romantic relationships. To fully understand how television viewing relates to attitudes about online romantic relationships, one must understand the message that these television shows are presenting about online relationships. Thus, the first part of this cultivation study will determine the television message about online dating. The following research question is proposed:

RQ1: What messages do television media communicate about online romantic relationships?

Online Romantic Relationships

Many would argue that online dating has become a mainstream avenue for pursuing romantic partners. For example, online dating has become a major part of internet business. Revenue for the dozens of online dating sites has reached over \$1

billion, 11 percent of adults have used online dating sites, 40 percent of people looking for a partner have used online dating sites, 23 percent of online daters say they have met a spouse or long-term relationship partner online, 42 percent of people know an online dater, and 29 percent of people have gone online to find out more about someone they are dating (Smith & Duggan, 2013). Still, online relationships are the least understood type of romantic relationship (Rosen et al., 2008). For the purposes of this research, online romantic relationships will be defined as the process of pursuing potential romantic partners via online means such as Match.com or eHarmony. This is distinguished from relationship maintenance behaviors via social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The distinction is that online dating pursues a new relationship while relationship maintenance behaviors aim to modify an existing relationship (Sidelinger et al., 2008).

There are several differences between traditional romantic relationships and online romantic relationships. People pursuing online partners are more selective because people meet based upon a laundry list of chosen characteristics, while traditional romantic relationships are pursued because of proximity to one another or mutual acquaintances (Alterovitz & Mendelsohn, 2011). People can search for a person that meets a certain set of criteria. This has a positive effect on perceptions of meeting the ideal person, but the long term health of online initiated relationships remains mostly unknown (Heino et al., 2010). Online dating has been shown to negatively affect relational partners' likelihood of working through relationship problems, and instead choosing to pursue a new relationship (Engelhart, 2013). Online daters are more likely to search for the perfect relationship rather than develop the perfect

relationship, which has led Heino, Ellison, and Gibbs (2010) to term this process ‘relationshopping.’ This is characterized by the search for a partner that fits a certain set of pre-determined criteria. Daters aim to confirm their prospective partner matches qualities that they seek in a partner (Heino et al., 2010). Providing online daters with more choices causes them to focus on the key partner characteristics they are interested in, in the search for the perfect partner, instead of developing a compatible relationship (Wu & Chiou, 2009). Traditional daters find personal information, personality, and education more important while online daters are more interested in communication style and physical attractiveness (Rosen et al., 2008). However, Wu and Chiou (2009) found providing too much choice causes daters to focus on more potential partners at the expense of focusing on their specific intended dating criteria. More options mean that online daters focus on potential partners that do not match their initial dating criteria (Wu & Chiou, 2009). Giving online daters more options means they will spend less time on the potential partners that match their intended criteria. More troubling to traditional ideas of romantic relationships is that online daters are more likely to engage in multiple dating relationships due to the fluidity and availability of the relationships (Pauley & Emmers-Sommer, 2007; Rosen et al., 2008). They also tend to move from relationships quicker in a type of ‘serial monogamy’ (Rosen et al., 2008). Serial monogamy, for the purposes of this study, is defined as the practice of having a number of romantic partners in succession (Heino et al., 2010).

People engaging in online romantic relationships have more easily accessible options and have shown the tendency to move to a new romantic relationship more

readily (Heino et al., 2010; Engelhart, 2013). From this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: High television media viewers will have more positive perceptions of serial monogamy than low television media viewers.

Self-disclosure and issues of privacy are managed differently in online romantic relationships. “Self-disclosure is an act of revealing personal information about oneself to others” (Rosen et al., 2008, p. 2127). Relationship intimacy increases as self-disclosure increases. There are some findings that show self-disclosure increases in initial online dating encounters due to the computer-mediated forums. Other findings show that self-disclosure decreases in initial online encounters because of the apprehension of not knowing the prospective partner in a traditional way (Gibbs et al., 2010). Information seeking is likely to be more specific and direct in online dating than offline dating (Gibbs et al., 2010). Male online daters prefer women that are high self-disclosers compared with low and moderate self-disclosers while female online daters prefer men that are low self-disclosers compared with high and moderate self-disclosers, (Rosen et al., 2008), although these findings were not compared with traditional daters in this study.

Relationships established and maintained via computer-mediated mediums have unique characteristics compared with face-to-face and other avenues (Alterovitz & Mendelsohn, 2011; Engelhart, 2013; Gibbs et al., 2010; Rosen et al., 2008; Sidelinger, Ayash, Godorhazy, & Tibbles, 2008; Wu & Chiou, 2009). Although the goal of online dating is typically to move toward face-to-face interactions, the interactions always begin in mediated forums. Traditional dating encourages a gradual increase in self-

disclosure, while online dating typically involves greater breadth and depth of self-disclosure up front with greater control of self-presentation, which is more likely a projection of what individuals want to be rather than an objective reality. This increased control of self-presentation is representative of Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal theory. The strategies that online daters use to disclose and conceal information are important towards understanding online romantic relationships. Some forms of computer-mediated communication benefit the development of relationships and aid the self-disclosure process (Gibbs et al., 2010). These include social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter as well as Google and public records searches. Online daters use computer-mediated information-gathering strategies differently by taking into account that their partner may be idealizing their personal information or comparing personal information provided at different times in conversation (Heino et al., 2010). People may misrepresent through exaggerations personal characteristics such as physical appearance, desire for children, or being a smoker (Young & Caplan, 2010). However, others suggest that differences between relationships formed online and offline are minimal (Bonebrake, 2002).

Attitudes about online dating change with age (Stephure et al., 2009). Older adults engage in online dating because they view their opportunities for romantic relationships as finite and coming to an end, while younger adults engage in online dating because they are dissatisfied with their current romantic relationships (Stephure et al., 2009). Usually, younger people are the early-adopters when it comes to technology, but older adults are likely to use online dating because they do not run into as many available partners in their day-to-day activities (Stephure et al., Boon,

MacKinnon, & Deveau, 2009). Younger people are likely more skilled and more comfortable with the online dating process than older adults, as many young adults are already familiar with the relationship maintenance process of social networking sites (Stephure et al.2009). There is little difference in the amount of reported stigma attached to online dating across ages, but the stigma experienced occurs for different reasons (Stephure et al., 2009). Younger online daters are more likely to possess the stigma of having ‘resorted’ to online dating when so many other dating opportunities are available, while older online daters are more likely to fear the stigma of doing something unusual or unconventional (Stephure et al., 2009).

There are some similarities and differences between online and traditional dating. Not surprisingly, both daters emphasize the need for chemistry in order to continue dating (Rosen et al., 2008). Daters that contact fewer people and have fewer resulting dates are more likely to discontinue online dating (Rosen et al., 2008). However, there are many differences including that relationships beginning online progress faster than relationships that begin traditionally (Rosen et al., 2008). Not surprisingly, online daters are more open to try new technologies than traditional daters (Rosen et al., 2008). Traditional daters have more positive experiences than online daters (Rosen et al., 2008). People are less likely to tell others that they are dating someone if they met their partner online (Rosen et al., 2008). Romantic partners engage in similar relationship satisfaction behaviors in online communication as they do in face to face communication (Sidelinger et al., 2008).

Television consumption may have a positive or negative effect on the stigma associated with online romantic relationships. It may not be a popular theme on

television programming so this may make the process seem more out of the ordinary for television viewers. Conversely, exposure to more television means more exposure to advertising for online dating services. This is more likely to reduce the stigma associated with online romantic relationships. There are arguments for television's positive and negative effect on the stigma associated with online romantic relationships. Therefore, the following research question is posed:

RQ2: How will the amount of television people watch predict the level of stigma people attach to online romantic relationships?

The same argument could be made for the normalization of online dating. People that watch more television may view online dating as less mainstream because of its infrequent mention on programming, but conversely, they may also view online dating as more mainstream because of the greater exposure to online dating service advertising. Once again, there are arguments for television's positive and negative effects on the normalization of online romantic relationships. Therefore, the following research question is posed:

RQ3: How will the amount of television people watch predict the level of normalization people attach to online romantic relationships?

The prior literature on cultivation theory and romantic relationships has shown there is a connection between television viewing and distorted attitudes about romantic relationships (e.g. Aubrey et al., 2013; Martins, et al., 2009). As online romantic relationships have become more commonplace (Rosen et al., 2008; Stephure et al., 2009), it is likely to be more commonly depicted on television. This research aims to explore the generalization of consumption of television media on romantic relationships

into the more specific area of online romantic relationships. The literature on online romantic relationships has shown similarities and differences between the general romantic relationship and specific online romantic relationship initiation styles (Alterovitz & Mendelsohn, 2011; Heino et al., 2010). People already have a unique understanding and perception of online romantic relationships (Stephure et al., 2009; Young & Caplan, 2010). However, thus far, cultivation theory has not been applied to this emerging romantic relationship approach. This research contributes to a more complete understanding of Gerbner's (1969) initial conception of cultivation theory as prior literature has already done into other areas of viewers' attitudes and perceptions of violence (Signorielli & Gerbner, 1995), gender norms (Hawkins & Pingree, 1982), and news reporting (Hetsroni, 2009).

As previously shown in the literature, television viewing has an effect on viewers' attitudes and perceptions of romantic relationships. It is a logical generalization that this effect would translate to the more specific online romantic relationships. The current study expands the literature on cultivation theory. There is already considerable research on television's effects on attitudes generally and about romantic relationships specifically. As has been shown, online romantic relationships have distinguishable characteristics from traditional romantic relationships. These differences are seen in relationship initiation, escalation, maintenance, and termination. Differences are also seen in the way people perceive and describe online romantic relationships.

It is predicted from this review of the literature on cultivation theory and online romantic relationships that people who watch more television will have more negative

perceptions of online romantic relationships. From this, the following research question is posed:

RQ4: How will the amount of television people watch predict perceptions of online romantic relationships?

Chapter Three

Method

Study One: Content Analysis

Many media effects studies are concerned with manipulating an independent variable within participants and then assessing the level of effect among the viewers on a hypothesized related dependent variable (Scheufele, 1999). Cultivation theory is a unique media effects theory in that it is focused upon generalized effects that have occurred over a long period of time. A particular media viewing or small period of time is considered inconsequential to the overall cultivation effect. Gerbner's (1969) second prong, which is to analyze samples of television programming to assess the relevant phenomena within the television world, will occur in this study and be followed by a survey assessment of a sample of the population, which is the third prong. This method is indicative of Gerbner's (1969) three-prong approach to cultivation research, except that it does not include the first prong, which is to assess the policies and processes for how mass media messages are created and transmitted to the consumer.

Gerbner's (1969, 1998) second prong involves a content analysis of a representative sample of the variety of media the participants are viewing. The content analysis in this study was a purposive sample of specific television shows depicting online romantic relationships. Content analysis involves making inferences by systematically identifying specific characteristics in messages. Content analysis can serve as a valuable tool for analyzing communicative messages. The analysis relies on explicit rules for unitization and categorization of messages. The primary researcher conducted the content analysis in order to assess specific television media depictions of

online romantic relationships in order to make an argument for the television world's portrayal of these relationships. Traditional Gerbnerian content analysis involves assessing large amounts of television programming in search of specific themes (Gerbner, 1998). The entire haystack of television is the useful point of analysis. In the specific context of online romantic relationships, the few mentions of online romantic relationships are the more useful data. It is more important to examine the needles rather than the haystack. Finding the specific mentions of online romantic relationships is a first step.

The television programming sample was obtained by conducting a comprehensive search of television programming containing online romantic relationship content. As there are thousands of programs shown on television every year, the search was refined to the criterion of featuring online romantic relationships. The comprehensive search consisted primarily of reviewing TV guide episode listings and television show fan web pages. A sampling of television programming with a specific non-traditional dating theme, such as *Online Dating Rituals of the American Male*, *Catfish*, and *Dating Naked*, was included along with the mainstream television programming with specific episodes featuring non-traditional dating. It is arguably impossible to gather every reference to online romantic relationships made on every television program during a certain time period. For the purposes of content analysis, all of the 'regular' programming found via the previously mentioned comprehensive search of programming descriptions was used in the content analysis and then a sampling of television programs featuring online romantic relationship themes (e.g. *Catfish*, *Online Dating Rituals of the American Male*) was added so that it represents approximately

one-third of the sample. A sample of 31 television programs that feature an online romantic relationship theme was used for this content analysis. A listing of these television programs included in the content analysis may be found in Appendix B.

This study also analyzed television advertisements for online romantic relationships, which is a deviation from traditional Gerbnerian content analysis that typically focuses exclusively on television programming. It is important for this research to examine advertising because advertising specifically aims to sell viewers on the positive qualities of online romantic relationships. There is no advertising promoting other cultivated television messages, such as societal violence, gender norms, or environmental awareness, in the same way there is for online romantic relationships, which makes this a unique cultivation topic. It is also important to examine television advertising for online romantic relationships because advertising is clearly portraying online romantic relationships positively in trying to sell online dating to television viewers, but the television programming message is less clear. Content analysis that focuses on the communicated advertising messages as well as the television programming message provides a more complete understanding than exclusively focusing on the television programming message.

The advertising sample was obtained by conducting a comprehensive search of television advertisements for online dating services. Advertisements for online romantic relationships were purposively selected and gathered as online video media representative of advertising featured on television. Sixty advertisements were selected for the content analysis as this was believed to allow a large and diverse enough sample to represent television's advertising for online romantic relationships. The ratio of

advertisements from different sources chosen for the television advertisement content analysis is representative of known usage of online dating services (Smith & Duggan, 2013). For example, more people use Match.com and eHarmony than Plenty of Fish and Zoosk so advertising for more commonly used sites represented a larger portion of the advertising included in the content analysis. Advertising aimed towards general audiences were a larger portion of the advertising included in the content analysis than advertising aimed at specific audiences, such as BlackPeopleMeet or JDate. Selection of advertisements for the content analysis was made based upon viewing on television and to represent known usage. A listing of the television advertisements included in the content analysis may be found in Appendix C.

A constant comparative method was used to create theme categories for the television programming and advertising. The first step in the process was a listing of themes representative of the researcher's a priori conception of television's message about online romantic relationships. Further modification of existing categories and the creation of additional categories came from analysis of TV Guide, Internet Movie Database (IMDB), and other published descriptions of the television programming included in the content analysis. The researcher then viewed a sampling of approximately 35 percent of the television programming and advertising used in the content analysis until theme saturation was reached and the themes were accurately categorized and explained. The theme categories were revised, modified, and added for improvements throughout the creation process. Once the categories were established, the themes were defined in a way that could be understood by others, specifically the recruited coders. The end result was a coding manual based upon the researcher's

conception of the television message, prior literature, and an analysis of the television content included in the content analysis. The coding manual may be found in Appendix A.

The researcher recruited four senior communication students to serve as coders to analyze the selected television programming and advertising. After the coders were selected, training consisted of an initial session in which the researcher explained the content analysis process by displaying advertising and programming examples in order to familiarize the coders with the coding theme categories. These examples were randomly selected and removed from analysis. Television programs were split into five minute programming segments as a convenient unit of measurement. The unit of measurement for advertisements was a single advertisement, as most of them were 30 seconds. Gerbnerian content analysis does not typically focus upon advertising so there are few models for assessing the message of television commercials for online romantic relationships. Each programming and advertising segment was coded by classifying it into one of the categorized themes. Coders sometimes saw multiple themes in individual programming and advertising segments. The coders were instructed to select the more 'important' or 'dominant' theme in the television segment when this occurred. Coders were only allowed to select one theme per television segment. There are fewer advertising themes than television programming themes because some themes such as known, better, worse, and none found in the television programming are not found in television advertising for online romantic relationships.

Coders were randomly paired for the purpose of establishing inter-coder reliability. After the initial training session meeting, a sample of the television

programming (n = 2, 6%) and advertising (n = 5, 8%) was assigned to each of the coders for independent coding. A second meeting was held a week later in which the researcher addressed questions and concerns the coders had about the process. The coders were once again assigned a sample of television programming (n = 4, 13%) and advertising (n = 10, 17%). Sufficient inter-coder reliability (programming $\kappa = .705$, advertising $\kappa = .865$) was found from these initial content analysis assignments based upon six of the 31 (19%) television programs and 15 of the 60 (25%) television advertisements. After sufficient inter-coder reliability was found, subsequent weekly meetings were held between the researcher and coders to address concerns and issue additional television coding assignments. The coders were randomly assigned different sets of programming and advertisements to view and code each week. The content analysis coding process took six weeks.

Television Programming

The following represent the themes for coding the television programming content related to online romantic relationships.

Better. Television segments that portrayed getting matched via online dating with someone who is better than they expected were classified into the category, *better*. Examples of this theme included when a character was matched with someone exceptionally attractive, intelligent, or having other qualities more positive than expected.

Comparisons. Television segments that portrayed comparisons between online dating and more traditional methods of meeting and pursuing romantic partners were classified into the category, *comparisons*. Examples of this theme included references to

the difficulty of meeting people traditionally compared to the success people have finding partners online.

Idealization. Television segments that portrayed meeting the perfect person were classified into the category, *idealization*. Examples of this theme included descriptions of an ideal romantic partner or characteristics a person is seeking in a potential romantic partner.

Known. Television segments that portrayed getting paired with someone who they already know were classified into the category, *known*. Examples of this theme included someone getting matched with a friend, coworker, ex-partner, family member, or neighbor.

Mainstream. Television segments that portrayed online dating as something acceptable or mainstream today when it may not have been in the past were classified into the category, *mainstream*. Examples of this theme included references to it being 2014, a friend or family member having found a partner through online dating, or commenting that everyone is joining online dating sites today.

Offline. Television segments that reference more traditional methods of meeting a potential romantic partner were classified into the category, *offline*. Examples of this theme included discussions of meeting people through friends, at work, at social outings, or sporting events.

Readiness. Television segments that portrayed program characters as ready for a relationship were classified into the category, *readiness*. Examples of this theme included references to an age where people should be looking for a romantic partner or a lifestyle where having a romantic partner is desirable.

Superiority. Television segments that portrayed problems with meeting potential partners via more traditional face-to-face matching methods were classified into the category, *superiority*. Examples of this theme included references to concerns of the bar scene or meeting the ‘same types of people’ at places such as work or through friends.

Traditional. Television segments that portrayed more traditional methods of meeting a potential romantic partner were classified into the category, *traditional*. Examples of this theme included meeting people through friends at work, social outings, or sporting events.

Uniqueness. Television segments that portrayed specific characteristics of people who met through online dating services were classified into the category, *uniqueness*. Examples of this theme included references to the types of people that specifically join online dating web sites, regardless of the desirability of these characteristics.

Worse. Television segments that portrayed getting matched with someone who is worse than they expected were classified into the category, *worse*. Examples of this theme included when a character is matched with someone who is exceptionally unattractive, uninteresting, or other qualities less positive than expected.

Other. *Other* was used to describe a television segment referring to online dating behavior that did not fit into one of the other categories.

None. *None* was used to describe any five minute segment of programming that did not include mentions of romantic relationships.

Television Advertising

The following represent the themes for coding the television advertising content related to online romantic relationships:

Comparisons. Advertising segments that portrayed comparisons between the advertiser and other online dating sites were classified into the category, *comparisons*. Examples of this theme included references to the site's superior matching methods or the likelihood that the site's members would find a romantic partner.

Idealization. Advertising segments that portrayed meeting the perfect person were classified into the category, *idealization*. Examples of this theme included descriptions of an ideal romantic partner or characteristics a person is seeking in a potential romantic partner.

Readiness. Advertising segments that portrayed users of the site as ready for a relationship were classified into the category, *readiness*. Examples of this theme included references to an age where people should be looking for a romantic partner or a lifestyle where having a romantic partner is desirable.

Superiority. Advertising segments that portrayed problems with meeting potential partners via more traditional face-to-face matching methods were classified into the category, *superiority*. Examples of this theme included references to concern over the bar scene or meeting the 'same types of people' at places such as work or through friends.

Uniqueness. Advertising segments that advertise specific characteristics of members of an online dating service, such as the site's focus on a specific religion, race,

or ethnic group were classified into the category, *uniqueness*. Examples of this theme included references to the dating service catering to a specific religion or ethnicity.

The findings of this content analysis are presented in Chapter four.

Study Two: Survey

Overview. A survey was conducted to assess television viewing and perceptions of online romantic relationships. The overall purpose of the survey was to determine whether peoples' television viewing patterns predict attitudes about online romantic relationships.

Participants. Participants were recruited from the University of Oklahoma communication department research pool. The survey had 522 original participants. One participant did not agree to participate and was removed. Forty-nine participants were removed because they did not provide demographic information or did not respond to significant portions of the survey. This provided a final sample of 472 participants. The participants were 47 percent ($n = 222$) male and 53 percent ($n = 250$) female. Demographic information is shown in Table 1. Participants were 7.8% ($n = 37$) eighteen, 27.5% ($n = 130$) nineteen, 17.4% ($n = 82$) twenty, 14.6% ($n = 69$) twenty-one, 10.2% ($n = 48$) twenty-two, 3% ($n = 14$) twenty-three, 2.8% ($n = 13$) twenty-four, and 16.7% ($n = 79$) twenty-five or older. Mean participant age was 20 years and 5 months old ($SD = 2.27$). The participants were primarily Caucasian (71.1%, $n = 335$) with African American (6.6% $n = 31$), Hispanic (6.4%, $n = 30$), Mixed (5.7%, $n = 27$), Native American (3.8%, $n = 18$), Asian American (3.6%, $n = 17$), and other (2.8%, $n = 13$) composing the minority groups in the sample. The most common household income was higher than \$150,000 (26.3%, $n = 105$) followed by \$100,000-\$150,000 (18.5%, n

= 74), \$75,000-\$100,000 (16%, n = 64), \$50,000-\$75,000 (14.8%, n = 59), \$35,000 to \$50,000 (10.8%, n = 43), \$25,000 to \$35,000 (5.3%, n = 21), \$10,000 to \$25,000 (4%, n = 16), and less than \$10,000 (3.5%, n = 14). Participants reported most commonly they were in their second semester of school (31.8%, n = 150), followed by fourth semester (20.6%, n = 97), sixth semester (11.2%, n = 53), first semester (9.5%, n = 45), eighth semester (8.5%, n = 40), third semester (6.4%, n = 30), fifth semester (3.4%, n = 16), tenth or more semester (3.4%, n = 16) seventh semester (1.7%, n = 8), and ninth semester (.4%, n = 2). Participants were most commonly ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.32$) freshman (34.9%, n = 148) followed by sophomore (27.3%, n = 129), junior (18.6%, n = 88), senior (17.2%, n = 81), other (3.6%, n = 17), and graduate student (1.7%, n = 8).

Table 1

Frequencies of Survey Participant Demographics

Demographic	N	% of total
Gender		
Female	250	53%
Male	222	47%
Age		
18	37	7.8%
19	130	27.5%
20	82	17.4%
21	69	14.6%
22	48	10.2%
23	14	3%

24	13	2.8%
25 or older	79	16.7%
Race		
Caucasian	335	71.1%
African-American	31	6.6%
Hispanic	30	6.4%
Mixed	27	5.7%
Native American	18	3.8%
Asian American	17	3.6%
Other	13	2.8%
Income		
Higher than \$150,000	105	26.3%
\$100,000-\$150,000	74	18.5%
\$75,000-\$100,000	64	16%
\$50,000-\$75,000	59	14.8%
\$35,000-\$50,000	43	10.8%
\$25,000-\$35,000	21	5.3%
\$10,000-\$25,000	16	4%
Less than \$10,000	14	3.5%
Semester in school		
Second	150	31.8%
Fourth	97	20.6%
Sixth	53	11.2%

First	45	9.5%
Eighth	40	8.5%
Third	30	6.4%
Fifth	16	3.4%
Tenth or more	16	3.4%
Seventh	8	1.7%
Ninth	2	.4%
Year in school		
Freshman	148	34.9%
Sophomore	129	27.3%
Junior	88	18.6%
Senior	81	17.2%
Other	17	3.6%
Graduate student	8	1.7%

Procedures. The University of Oklahoma Human Subjects Review Board approved this research. Participants for the survey were petitioned via the communication department research pool. Incentive for participation was extra credit offered in communication courses in which they were enrolled. The online survey was conducted via Qualtrics. Participants were required to read and review an informed consent form prior to completing the survey. Participants next responded to questions about their television viewing. This assessed how much television they watch on a daily basis as well as their television genre preference. They were then asked questions about

how much television advertising for online dating services they had seen and asked questions about those advertisements. The following section of the survey assessed perceptions, attitudes, and prevalence of distorted beliefs about online romantic relationships among the participants. This section asked for perceptions of online romantic relationships and asked for some opinions about romantic relationships in general. Participants then responded to a series of questions about stigma and normalization for online romantic relationships. For the purposes of this research, ‘*stigma*’ was defined as the effect certain qualities or characteristics have on a person’s reputation (Cockrill, Upadhyay, Turan & Foster, 2013). ‘*Normalization*’ was defined as the process of making qualities or characteristics a conventional part of society (Cockrill et al., 2013). The last section asked participants about their own personal experience with online romantic relationships and the experience of their friends and family as well as romantic relationships in general. Finally, participants provided general demographic information including age, gender, household income, and questions used to assign participants’ research course credit.

Measures. The independent measures for this project were television viewing, advertising viewing, previous experience with online romantic relationships, and television genre. The dependent measures for this project were assessments of perceptions of online romantic relationships, attitudes about serial monogamy, and perceptions of stigma and normalization for online romantic relationships. Demographic measures served as covariates. Additional free response data was collected to allow survey participants to provide question-specific contextual information to explain their responses. Participants were asked to recall a recent advertisement for online romantic

relationships they had seen, for example. This information was not used in the survey data analysis as it primarily duplicated more detailed findings in the content analysis.

Exploratory factor analysis. Each of the scales was submitted to exploratory factor analysis using principal components analysis and oblique rotation. Items with loadings below .40 were removed from their respective scales. The specifics of each exploratory factor analysis are explained in the measure descriptions and summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Factor Analysis and Reliabilities for Survey Scales

Scale	Factor Loading
Television viewing ($\alpha = .74$)	
How many hours of television do you watch on an average week day?	.88
How many hours of television do you watch on an average weekend day?	.88
Advertising viewing ($\alpha = .90$)	
How often do you see advertising for online dating sites on television?	.84
Which of the following online dating sites have you seen television advertising for?	.84
Advertising effectiveness ($\alpha = .71$)	
In general, how well do you like online dating commercials?	.79

In general, how effective do you think online dating commercials are?	.79
In general, how believable do you think online dating commercials are?	.82

Advertising liking ($\alpha = .87$)

How well do you like how online dating commercials portray online dating?	.79
How well do you like the actors in online dating commercials?	.80
How well do you like the slogans in online dating commercials?	.77
How well do you like the dialogue in online dating commercials?	.88
How well do you like the colors in online dating commercials?	.54
How well do you like the branding in online dating commercials?	.76

Previous experience ($\alpha = .15$)

Have you personally ever used an online dating site such as match.com, eHarmony, or OK Cupid?	.61
Have you ever used a dating app on your cell phone?	.66
Do you personally know anyone who has used an online dating site or app?	.67

Do you personally know anyone who has been in a long-term relationship with or married someone they met through an online dating site or app? .53

Perceptions of online romantic relationships ($\alpha = .82$)

What are your overall perceptions of online romantic relationships? .72

How safe do you think it is to use online dating sites? .62

How good are the romantic relationships initiated on online dating sites? .71

How positive do you feel about online dating? .82

How likely are you to recommend online dating to a friend? .87

Perceptions of serial monogamy ($\alpha = .96$)

Indicate the degree to which you think it is right or wrong for someone to be involved in serial monogamy. .97

Indicate the degree to which you think it is positive or negative for someone to be involved in serial monogamy. .96

Indicate the degree to which you think it is acceptable or unacceptable for someone to be involved in serial monogamy. .93

Stigma attached to online romantic relationships ($\alpha = .85$)

How worried do you think online daters are that other people may find out that they met their romantic partner .82

online?

How worried do you think online daters are that people .86
would judge them negatively if others found out that
they met their romantic partner online?

How ashamed are people to admit that they met their .79
romantic partner online?

Normalization for romantic relationships ($\alpha = .86$)

Indicate the degree to which you think it is right or .87
wrong for someone to be involved in an online romantic
relationship.

Indicate the degree to which you think it is positive or .65
negative for someone to be involved in an online
romantic relationship.

Indicate the degree to which you think it is acceptable .97
or unacceptable for someone to be involved in an online
romantic relationship.

Note. N = 472. Factor loadings are those reported in the structure matrix after oblique (SPSS direct oblimin) rotation. Cronbach's alphas for the scales were computed after standardizing the variables.

Covariates. Gender, age, income, year in school, and semesters attended college were used as they were recorded on the survey. Gender was split into male and female categories. Participants were provided with eight age categories to choose from: 18, 19,

20, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 25 or older. Participants were provided with eight racial groups: African American, Asian American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islander, mixed race, or other. No participants identified as Pacific Islander. The racial group was split into two dichotomous dummy variables minority and non-minority for analysis. Participants were provided with six categories for student status: freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, graduate student, and other. Participants were provided with eight income categories: less than \$10,000, \$10,000 to \$25,000, \$25,000 to \$35,000, \$35,000 to \$50,000, \$50,000-\$75,000, \$75,000 to \$100,000, \$100,000 to \$150,000, and more than \$150,000. Participants were provided 10 categories for the number of semesters they had attended the University of Oklahoma: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and ten or more. Items used in these measures can be found in Appendix D.

Predictor variables. Television genre was assessed by asking each participant for their favorite type of television from the following options: action, cartoon, comedy, drama, documentary, information, news, sporting, science fiction, reality, talk show, and soap opera. Genre was collapsed into four categories representing the most frequently chosen preferred genres: comedy, drama, reality, and sporting. These four genre preferences accounted for a considerable majority (84.5%, $n = 399$) of the sample. The remaining responses (15.5%, $n = 73$) were recoded into the baseline dummy variable as a comparison for the effect of the dummy coded genre variables, because each represented a small segment of the participants' chosen preferred preferences. The items used in this measure can be found in Appendix D.

Frequency of television viewing was measured as the amount of television viewed per day on weekdays and weekends via a previously validated scale (Lee, Hornik, & Hennessy, 2008). As mentioned, past cultivation literature has placed television viewers into groups of high, medium, and low consumers. Television viewing was a continuous measure for the purposes of this research. Past research categorized television viewing into levels because this was formerly easier to assess than using the information as a continuous measure. This type of data analysis has been made easier with statistical programs and provides more powerful assessments. The items for the frequency of television viewing scale were submitted to an exploratory factor analysis using principal components analysis and oblique rotation. The items on the television viewing scale loaded on one factor at .880 or above and the scale showed good reliability ($\alpha = .736$; $M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.74$). Items used in this measure can be found in Appendix D.

Frequency of advertising viewing related to online romantic relationships was measured via a modified previously validated measure (Smith & Duggan, 2013). One item asked participants to recall which online dating sites among a list they had seen advertising for and a second item asked generally how frequently they see advertising for online dating sites. Participants received a score one to seven from the number of online dating services they had seen advertisements for from a list of seven and a self-report measurement from one to seven asking how frequently they see television advertising for online dating services. The scale items assessing how much online dating advertising participants had seen were averaged to give participants a score of zero to seven, creating a measure of online dating advertising viewing. The items for the

frequency of advertising viewing scale were submitted to an exploratory factor analysis using principal components analysis and oblique rotation. The items on the television viewing scale loaded on one factor at .836 and the scale showed good reliability ($\alpha = .901$; $M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.25$). Items used in this measure can be found in Appendix D.

The measure for assessing *liking* of advertising for online romantic relationships is adapted from a previously validated measure for cosmetics (Bjerke, Rosendahl, Gopalkrishna, & Sandler, 2005). The scale was modified to ask participants for their perceived liking of advertisements for online romantic relationships instead of advertisements for facial cream. The items for the advertising liking scale were submitted to an exploratory factor analysis using principal components analysis and oblique rotation. Each of the items on the advertising liking scale loaded on one factor at greater than .540 and the scale showed good reliability ($\alpha = .867$; $M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.14$). Items used in this measure can be found in Appendix D.

The measure for assessing *effectiveness* for advertising of online romantic relationships is adapted from a previously validated scale for perceptions of television beauty advertising (Tan, 1979). The scale was modified so that ‘online dating commercial’ replaces ‘beauty commercial’ on each scale item. The items for the advertising effectiveness scale were submitted to an exploratory factor analysis using principal components analysis and oblique rotation. An item asking participants if they felt similar to the people in online dating commercials loaded at .302. Once this item was removed, each of the remaining items on the advertising effectiveness scale loaded on one factor at greater than .787 and the scale showed good reliability ($\alpha = .713$; $M = 2.77$, $SD = .96$). Items used in this measure can be found in Appendix D.

Previous experience with online romantic relationships was assessed via four items (Smith & Duggan, 2013) asking participants about their personal use and experience with online dating. One asked participants if they had personally used online dating services, a second asked if they had personally used an online dating phone application, a third asked if they know someone who had personally used online dating services, and a fourth asked if participants know someone who has been in a long term relationship or married someone they met online. Each item allowed participants to respond ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ or ‘unsure.’ Those who responded as ‘unsure’ were recoded as ‘no’ responses providing four dichotomous variables representing previous experience. Each ‘yes’ response was added to a scale as an assessment of how much personal experience participants have with online romantic relationships. This gave each participant a ranking from zero to four on how much personal previous experience they have with online romantic relationships. The items for the previous experience with online romantic relationships scale were submitted to an exploratory factor analysis using principal components analysis and oblique rotation. Each of the items on the television viewing scale loaded on one factor at greater than .530 and the scale items were tested for reliability ($\alpha = .148$; $M = 1.23$, $SD = 1.01$). This reliability is not unsurprising as the items are not intended to assess the exact same components of the phenomenon. The items counted together provide a measure of how much online dating is going on in the participants’ life. Items used in this measure can be found in Appendix D.

Criterion variables. Perceptions of online romantic relationships were measured via a modified previously validated measure (Anderson, 2005). Two items from Smith and Duggan’s measure (2013) were added to the Anderson (2005) measure’s four items.

The two additional items were from the Pew Internet Project's online dating survey that asked similar questions about perceptions of online romantic relationships. The items for the perceptions of online romantic relationships scale were submitted to an exploratory factor analysis using principal components analysis and oblique rotation. An item asking participants if they think users of online dating sites are honest about themselves to other site users loaded at .306. Once this item was removed, the remaining items on the perceptions of online romantic relationships scale loaded on one factor at greater than .620 and the scale showed good reliability ($\alpha = .815$; $M = 4.62$, $SD = .98$). Items used in this measure may be found in Appendix D.

Stigma attached to online romantic relationships and normalization for online romantic relationships were measured via modified previously validated measures (Cockrill et al., 2013). The original scale measured for abortion stigma and normalization. Nine of the scale's 20 items were removed from the scale used in this research because they assessed medical and health issues relevant to abortion that are not relevant to online romantic relationships. References to 'abortion' were replaced with references to 'online romantic relationships' throughout the scale. The items for the stigma attached to online romantic relationships scale were submitted to an exploratory factor analysis using principal components analysis and oblique rotation. Items asking participants how often people in online romantic relationships shared this with others and how people in online romantic relationships feel about their relationship loaded at .109 and .213, respectively. Once these items were removed, the remaining items on the stigma scale loaded on one factor at greater than .791 and the scale showed good reliability ($\alpha = .848$; $M = 2.2$, $SD = .58$). The items for the normalization of

online romantic relationships scale were submitted to an exploratory factor analysis using principal components analysis and oblique rotation. Each of the items on the normalization scale loaded on one factor at greater than .647 and the scale showed good reliability ($\alpha = .864$; $M = 3.86$, $SD = .99$). Items used in these measures may be found in Appendix D.

Perception of serial monogamy was measured via a modified previously validated scale (Anderson, 2005). The perceptions of serial monogamy scale was adapted from the scale for perceptions of online romantic relationships. References to 'online romantic relationships' were changed to references to 'serial monogamy' and participants were provided a definition of 'serial monogamy.' The items for the perceptions of serial monogamy scale were submitted to an exploratory factor analysis using principal components analysis and oblique rotation. An item asking participants how they feel about serial monogamy loaded at .216. Once this item was removed, the remaining items on the serial monogamy scale loaded on one factor at greater than .928 and the scale showed good reliability ($\alpha = .957$; $M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.74$). Items used in this measure can be found in Appendix D.

Analysis. The researcher conducted linear regression analysis to assess each criterion variable based upon predictor variables and covariates. Demographics were entered as covariates. Television viewing, advertising viewing, previous experience, and preferred television genre were entered as predictor variables. The measures for perceptions of online romantic relationships, perceptions of serial monogamy, stigma for online romantic relationships, and normalization for online romantic relationships were used as criterion variables in separate multiple regression models.

Four linear regression models were run with demographics entered as step one, preferred television genre entered as step two, and television viewing, advertising viewing, and previous experience with online romantic relationships entered as step three. The demographic covariates were entered as block one to control for their model effects. The television genre preferences were entered as block two to see how these variables affected the criterion measures regardless of other predictors. The predictor variables most relevant to the hypotheses and research questions were entered in the final third block to see how they influenced the regression models above and beyond any other variation explained in the models. The first model used the measure for perceptions of online romantic relationships as the criterion measure and addressed hypotheses 1 and 2, and research question 4. The second model used the measure for perceptions of serial monogamy as the criterion measure and addressed hypothesis 4. The third model used the measure for the level of perceived stigma for online romantic relationships as the criterion measure and addressed research question 2. The fourth model used the measure for the perceived level of normalization for online romantic relationships as the criterion measure and addressed research question 3.

These analyses are presented in Chapter four.

Chapter Four

Results

Study One: Content Analysis

Research question 1 asks what messages television communicates about online romantic relationships. To identify these messages, the analysis focused on themes depicted in television programming and advertising. Thirty-one television programs and 60 television advertisements were used in the content analysis. Tables 3 and 4 show the frequencies of the coded themes from television programming and advertising. The following description of the data is a report of the most prominent to the least prominent coded themes.

Table 3

Frequencies of Coded Themes from Television Programming

Coded theme	N observed	% of total observed
Worse	177	26.7%
None	136	20.5%
Better	70	10.6%
Mainstream	58	8.7%
Traditional	56	8.4%
Offline	42	6.3%
Known	28	4.2%
Idealization	26	3.9%

Other	17	2.6%
Superiority	15	2.3%
Readiness	15	2.3%
Uniqueness	14	2.1%
Comparisons	9	1.4%

Television Programming

Worse. The most commonly coded category identified themes in which a character is matched with someone that is worse than they expected, which accounted for 26.7% (n = 177) of coded themes. The inclusion of NBC’s ‘To Catch a Predator’ and MTV’s ‘Catfish,’ reality-based television programming in which characters are intentionally deceived into believing they are communicating online with someone different than they actually are, may have skewed this category. For example, in ‘Catfish’ (season 3, episode 4), Jeff connected with a woman named Megan, who he met online because of a shared affinity for Siberian huskies. It turned out her name was Brandy and the several photos she sent were of a different woman. The woman he actually met has a different job, lives with her mom, and does not have many of the positive qualities that attracted Jeff to Megan before he found out she was actually Brandy.

None. The *none* category (20.5%, n = 136) represents parts of the television programming that do not contain themes related to romantic relationships.

Better. Depictions of characters meeting someone they were matched with online that is better than they expected were coded ‘*better*,’ which accounted for 10.6%

(n = 70) of coded themes. An example of this theme occurred on ‘Dating Naked’ (season 1, episode 7) in which characters were sent out on dates with strangers in the buff. Sometimes they liked who they were paired with better than they expected and other times they liked them less well. In the case of Liddy, she did not connect well with the first two people she was paired with so she was not expecting much with the third, but she was pleasantly surprised when her third date went better than she expected.

Mainstream. Portrayals of online dating as something acceptable or mainstream when it may not have been in the past were coded ‘*mainstream,*’ which accounted for 8.7% (n = 58) of coded themes. An example of this theme occurred in ‘How I Met Your Mother’ (season 1, episode 7), in which Barney convinced Ted to join a matchmaking service, saying they should be done with the single life and mentioning the service’s advertised 100 percent success rate at matching people with their soul mate. Ted countered that joining a matching service is like giving up and described it as the man version of getting a cat, but Barney ended up tricking him into joining anyway.

Traditional. Portrayals of more traditional methods of meeting a potential romantic partner such as through friends, at work, or social outings were termed ‘*traditional,*’ which represented 8.4% (n = 56) of coded themes. An example of this theme occurred on ‘How I Met Your Mother’ (season 3, episode 5), where the program flashed back to when Ted met Lily at a college freshman orientation party. This was contrasted with the current girl Ted was seeing, whom he met online, but they tell everyone they met at a French fusion cooking class.

Offline. Discussion of more traditional methods of meeting a potential romantic partner such as talk of meeting people through friends, at work, or social outings were termed ‘*offline*,’ which accounted for 6.3% (n=42) of coded themes. This is distinguished from *traditional* in that the *offline* theme was used when characters were *talking* about more traditional dating methods while *traditional* was used when characters were *engaging* in more traditional dating methods. An example of this theme occurred on ‘Third Rock from the Sun’ (season 3, episode 13), in which Sally got a call from Paul and invited him over to her house. She then talked to her friends about meeting Paul at a policeman’s ball and accepting his overtures even though she was not interested in Paul. Sally’s friends wondered why she continued to talk to Paul even though she was not interested.

Known. Portrayals of a character on a television program being online matched with someone they already know, such as a friend, co-worker, or neighbor, were termed ‘*known*,’ which accounted for 4.2% (n = 28) of coded themes. An example of this theme occurred on ‘The Drew Carey Show’ (season 4, episode 5), in which Drew became attracted to a woman he chatted with online named ‘Honeybee28.’ Drew later discovered he had been chatting with his annoying co-worker ‘Mimi’ when she mentioned collecting ‘troll dolls.’ Drew stopped talking to her online after finding out without telling ‘Honeybee28’ of their real world relationship.

Idealization. Portrayals of the concept of meeting the perfect person, such as descriptions of an ideal romantic partner or characteristics a person is seeking in a potential romantic partner were termed ‘*idealization*,’ which accounted for 3.9% (n = 26) of coded themes. An example of this theme occurred on ‘How I Met Your Mother’

(season 7, episode 22), in which Ted found an ‘amazing’ woman online. She was beautiful, smart, funny, a huge fan of pre-war architecture, her favorite poet was Neruda, and her favorite movie was ‘Ghostbusters.’ “She’s perfect,” he said. The only problem was that the account was actually Barney creating the perfect person for Ted to talk him into seeing someone else he had found online for him.

Other. Television segments that did not fit into one of the other categories were termed ‘*other*,’ which represented 2.6% (n = 17) of coded themes. An example of this non-theme occurred in ‘The Office’ (Christmas special part 2), in which David used a pairing service to secure a partner for the office Christmas party so that the boss of the company was not viewed as alone at an office party. Coders were unsure how to code this as it was a sort of deceptive dating behavior that was neither online nor traditional. It was more for David to convince others that he had a partner rather than romantic relationship behavior. This code was rarely used to describe romantic behavior that did not fit into other categories.

Readiness. Portrayals of online daters as ready for a long-term romantic relationship, such as references to an age where people should be looking for a permanent romantic partner or a lifestyle where having a romantic partner is desirable, were termed ‘*readiness*,’ which accounted for 2.3% (n = 15) of coded themes. An example of this theme occurred on ‘Online Dating Rituals of the American Male’ (season 1, episode 5), in which Grant said, “I’m not looking for a party girl. I’m looking for a wife to raise a family with. I’m not looking for just a girlfriend for the week or the month. I’m looking for that partner for life. Someone who has the same morals and values as I do. I wanna raise a family. I want to have kids. And, I’m gonna be even

more picky about this decision than any other one.” This showed someone who believed he had reached a stage in his life where he felt ready for a certain type of romantic relationship he hoped to find via online dating.

Superiority. Portrayals of problems with meeting partners through more traditional face-to-face matching methods, such as references to concerns about the bar scene or meeting the same types of people at work or through friends, were termed superiority, which accounted for 2.3% (n = 15) of coded themes. An example of this theme occurred on ‘MadTV’s Lowered Expectations’ (Antonia) in which the announcer asked viewers “Are you having trouble finding your ideal mate? How about any mate? Do you fear you’ll be the last man or woman on earth still not getting any?” The parody advertisement segment continued to show an undesirable character named ‘Antonia’ using the dating service to hopefully meet a potential partner.

Uniqueness. Portrayals of specific characteristics of people met through online dating services, such as references to the types of people that specifically join online dating web sites, were termed ‘*uniqueness*,’ which accounted for 2.1% (n = 14) of coded themes. An example of this theme occurred on ‘X-Files’ (season 3, episode 6), in which a serial killer found his victims via ‘big and beautiful’ online chat rooms.

Comparisons. Comparisons between online dating and more traditional methods of meeting and pursuing romantic partners, such as references to difficulty of meeting people traditionally or the success people have with finding partners online, were termed ‘*comparisons*,’ which accounted for 1.4% (n = 9) of coded themes. An example of this theme occurred on Parks and Recreation (season 3, episode 10) when Leslie monologue, “I don’t know if the online thing is for me. I prefer to meet people in

person. It's like door number two on 'Let's Make a Deal.' Do you want the thing that you have...that you know you like, but isn't perfect? Or, do you give it up for what's behind door number two? I think I like what I have." She said this after being matched online with a co-worker that particularly annoys her.

Television Advertising

Table 4

Frequencies of Coded Themes from Television Advertising

Coded theme	Number observed	% of total observed
Uniqueness	71	30.6%
Comparisons	55	23.7%
Other	49	21.1%
Superiority	33	14.2%
Idealization	15	6.5%
Readiness	5	2.2%
None	4	1.7%

Uniqueness. Portrayals of the specific characteristics of advertised dating services, such as references to the types of people that specifically join the advertised site, were termed '*uniqueness*,' which accounted for 30.6% (n = 71) of coded themes. An example of this theme occurred in an advertisement for 'Christian Mingle' in which Tracey said of Thomas, "I want a man who loves God because, if he has a relationship with Christ and loves him more than anything, he's gonna know how to love me.

Christian Mingle was the only one that had to offer exactly what I was looking for.” It was common for advertisements to suggest they catered to a unique type of person that was harder to find elsewhere. This theme was especially common on advertising for sites such as JDate and BlackPeopleMeet.

Comparisons. Comparisons between the advertiser and other online dating sites, such as references to the likelihood that members of the site will find a romantic partner or the site’s superior matching methods, were termed ‘*comparisons*,’ which accounted for 23.7% (n = 55) of coded themes. An example of this theme frequently occurred at the end of Match.com advertising when an announcer said, “Match.com: More dates. More relationships. And, more marriages than any other site.” eHarmony started one of their advertisements saying, “What’s the difference between eHarmony and dating sites?” More mainstream paid sites such as Match.com and eHarmony often marketed that their matching methods were better than the competition.

Other. Themes that did not fit into one of the other categories were termed ‘*other*,’ which accounted for 21.1% (n = 49) of coded themes. Some advertisements for Zoosk featured a ‘love through the ages’ theme with characters such as ‘Adam and Eve’ and ‘Cleopatra and Mark Antony.’ These particular advertisements barely mentioned the site or its features. Another example of this theme was an advertisement for Match.com that discussed the ease of using the site’s mobile phone application.

Superiority. Portrayals of problems with meeting potential partners via more traditional face-to-face matching methods, such as references to concerns for the bar scene or meeting the same types of people at places such as work or through friends, were termed ‘*superiority*,’ which accounted for 14.2% (n = 33) of coded themes. An

example of this theme occurred on an advertisement for JDate in which a person who was set up on a date by a mutual friend made a reference to ‘Maccabiah’ at Jewish summer camp that his partner did not understand. He immediately became tired and was ready to go home. On a second date, which he made on JDate, he used the same ‘Maccabiah’ reference and his partner played color wars at Jewish summer camp as well. He immediately asked the girl out for post-date drinks and then they both asked if the other wanted to meet their parents. The advertisement made it clear that people would have more in common with the people they met on JDate.

Idealization. Portrayals of meeting the perfect person, such as descriptions of an ideal romantic partner or characteristics a person is seeking in a potential romantic partner, were termed ‘*idealization*,’ which accounted for 6.5% (n = 15) of coded themes. An example of this theme occurred on a BlackPeopleMeet.com advertisement in which a character said, “I had no idea when I signed up for BlackPeopleMeet.com that I would really gonna be meeting my wife, ya know, the woman of my dreams. Our friends see us and how we met on BlackPeopleMeet.com and all of them have rushed to the site. They all want what we have.”

Readiness. Portrayals of online dating site users as ready for a romantic relationship, such as references to an age where people should be looking for a romantic partner or a lifestyle where having a romantic partner is desirable, were termed ‘*readiness*,’ which accounted for 2.2% (n = 5) of coded themes. An example of this theme occurred on an eHarmony advertisement in which an announcer asked ‘Jon,’ “So you really want a relationship?” He responded, “Yes, I mean, I didn’t sign up to

eHarmony for dates.” This theme was used to show a stage in life where people considered themselves ready for a romantic relationship.

None. Some advertisements made no references to romantic relationships (1.7%, $n = 4$) or coded themes. A few advertisements for the site Zoosk contained no references to romantic relationships. This theme was distinguished from the *other* theme in that there was no mention of romantic relationships at all compared with no mention of the site or online dating. Coders considered this similar to advertisements for Old Spice that did not mention the advertised body-wash product or MasterCard advertising that does not mention credit cards. This theme seemed less common on advertisements for online dating sites than on advertising for more mainstream products.

Survey

To test hypotheses 1 through 4 and research questions 2 through 4, the researcher conducted four linear regression analyses. The first linear regression model used perceptions of online romantic relationships as the criterion variable with demographic variables as covariates in step one, genre variables in step two, and television viewing, advertising, and previous experience measures in step three ($R^2 = .411$, adjusted $R^2 = .378$, $p < .001$). The results are summarized in Table 5.

The linear regression model summarized in Table 5 was used to test hypothesis 1 that people who have used online dating services or know someone who has used online dating services will have more positive attitudes about online romantic relationships. Previous experience was a significant predictor ($\beta = .183$, $p < .001$) of perceptions of online romantic relationships, suggesting that being involved in online

dating or knowing someone that does increases positive perceptions of online romantic relationships. Hypothesis 1 is supported.

An additional test was conducted to determine if there was an interaction between television viewing or advertising viewing and previous experience with online romantic relationships. Interaction variables for television viewing and advertising viewing with resonance as a moderator were computed showing how previous experience with online dating influenced the cultivation effect of perceptions of online romantic relationships. Resonance showed a non-significant interaction with television viewing ($\beta = .041, p = .772$) as well as advertising viewing ($\beta = .152, p = .392$)

The same linear regression model was used to test hypothesis 2 that people who watch, like, and can recall more television advertising about online romantic relationships will have more positive attitudes about online romantic relationships. The measures for viewing online dating advertising ($\beta = .021, p = .688$) and liking online dating advertising ($\beta = .109, p = .150$) were non-significant predictors. However, participant perception that online dating advertising is effective was a significant positive predictor ($\beta = .504, p < .001$) of perceptions of online romantic relationships. Gender was a significant predictor ($\beta = -.134, p = .029$) of perceptions of online romantic relationships, revealing that male respondents were more likely to have positive perceptions than female respondents. Hypothesis 2 is partially supported.

The same linear regression model summarized in Table 5 was once again used to address research question 4. Television viewing was a significant positive predictor ($\beta = .107, p = .038$) of perceptions of online romantic relationships. The belief that television advertising for online romantic relationships is effective was also a

significant positive predictor ($\beta = .504, p < .001$) of perceptions of online romantic relationships. Research question 4 was addressed by the finding that television viewing was a positive predictor of perceptions of online romantic relationships.

Table 5

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Model for Perceptions of Online Romantic Relationships

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step one - demographics			
Gender (m = 1, f = 2)	-.261	.113	-.134 *
Age	.023	.026	.044
Minority	.084	.119	.037
Income	.002	.027	.004
Step two - genre			
Drama	.148	.169	.063
Comedy	.046	.160	.023
Reality	-.130	.182	-.061
Sporting	-.070	.176	-.030
Step three – predictor measures			
Television viewing	.060	.029	.107 *
Advertising viewing	.017	.041	.021
Advertising effective	.608	.089	.504 **
Advertising liking	.093	.064	.109
Previous experience	.179	.049	.183 **

Note: * indicates significance at $p < .05$

** indicates significance at $p < .001$

$R^2 = .023$ for step one ($p = .198$); $\Delta R^2 = .012$ for step two ($p = .524$); $\Delta R^2 = .369$ for step three ($p < .001$)

Testing for hypotheses 3 occurred as step two across each of the four linear regression models. Contrary to prediction, genre was a non-significant predictor of perceptions of online romantic relationships with significance ranging from $p = .148$ to $p = .966$. There is no evidence to support genre preference as a predictor of online romantic relationship attitudes in this study. Hypothesis 3 is not supported. This finding will be addressed again in Chapter 5.

In order to test hypothesis 4, the researcher conducted a linear regression analysis with perceptions of serial monogamy as the criterion variable and demographic variables, television, advertising, previous experience, and genre as predictors. Once again, the demographic variables were entered as a block in step one, genre variables as step two, and the remaining television viewing, advertising viewing, and previous experience measures as step three ($R^2 = .124$, adjusted $R^2 = .057$, $p = .034$). The regression model is summarized in Table 6. Television viewing was not a significant predictor ($\beta = .143$, $p = .052$) of perceptions of serial monogamy. All other predictor measures were non-significant as well. Minority status was the only significant predictor ($\beta = .156$, $p = .024$) of perceptions of serial monogamy, meaning that minority respondents had more positive perceptions than Caucasian respondents. Hypothesis 4 is not supported.

After it was found there were no significant predictors of perceptions of serial monogamy, the measure was added to the three other models as a predictor measure. Perceptions of serial monogamy showed to be a significant positive predictor of perceptions of online romantic relationships ($\beta = .201, p < .001$) and a significant negative predictor of online dating stigma ($\beta = -.201, p = .007$). Perceptions of serial monogamy was a non-significant predictor ($\beta = .070, p = .313$) of normalization for online romantic relationships.

Table 6

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Model for Perceptions of Serial Monogamy

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step one - demographics			
Gender (m = 1, f = 2)	.058	.204	.024
Age	.034	.045	.055
Minority	.425	.210	.156 *
Income	-.008	.047	-.013
Step two - genre			
Drama	.423	.313	.148
Comedy	.715	.439	.285
Reality	.055	.410	.021
Sporting	.263	.465	.091
Step three – predictor measures			
Television viewing	.095	.049	.143
Advertising viewing	.072	.069	.079

Advertising effective	.139	.157	.092
Advertising liking	-.029	.111	-.028
Previous experience	-.051	.088	-.041

Note: * indicates significance at $p < .05$

$R^2 = .029$ for step one ($p = .214$); $\Delta R^2 = .058$ for step two ($p = .039$); $\Delta R^2 = .036$ for step three ($p = .184$)

In order to address research question 2, the researcher conducted a linear regression analysis with the measure of stigma attached to online romantic relationships as the criterion variable and demographic variables, television, advertising, previous experience, and genre as the predictors ($R^2 = .087$, adjusted $R^2 = .036$, $p = .052$). The demographic variables were entered as a block in step one, genre variables as step two, and television viewing, advertising viewing, and previous experience measures as step three. The regression model is summarized in Table 7. Television viewing was not a significant predictor ($\beta = .097$, $p = .127$) of online dating stigma. However, advertising viewing ($\beta = -.133$, $p = .040$) and the perception that online dating advertising is effective ($\beta = -.231$, $p = .013$) were significant negative predictors of online dating stigma. Age was a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.137$, $p = .031$) of online dating stigma, meaning that younger respondents reported less online dating stigma than older respondents. The findings addressing research question 2 will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Table 7

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Model for Stigma Attached to Online Romantic Relationships

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step one - demographics			
Gender (m = 1, f = 2)	.034	.069	.036
Age	-.035	.016	-.137 *
Minority	.112	.073	.101
Income	-.005	.017	-.019
Step two - genre			
Drama	-.007	.106	-.006
Comedy	.060	.149	.061
Reality	-.008	.143	-.007
Sporting	.062	.159	.054
Step three – predictor measures			
Television viewing	.027	.017	.097
Advertising viewing	-.051	.025	-.133 *
Advertising effective	-.135	.054	-.231 *
Advertising liking	.019	.039	.045
Previous Experience	-.008	.030	-.017

Note: * indicates significance at $p < .05$

$R^2 = .024$ for step one ($p = .167$); $\Delta R^2 = .010$ for step two ($p = .739$); $\Delta R^2 = .053$ for step three ($p = .014$)

In order to address research question 3, the researcher conducted a linear regression analysis with normalization for online romantic relationships as the criterion variable and demographic variables, television, advertising, previous experience, and genre as the predictors. The demographic variables were entered as a block in step one, genre variables as step two, and television viewing, advertising viewing, and previous experience measures as step three ($R^2 = .200$, adjusted $R^2 = .156$, $p < .001$). The regression model is summarized in Table 8. Television viewing was a non-significant predictor ($\beta = .042$, $p = .482$) of people's attachment of normalization for online romantic relationships. However, the liking of advertisements for online romantic relationships ($\beta = .192$, $p = .028$), the belief that those ads are effective ($\beta = .205$, $p = .018$), and previous experience with online dating ($\beta = .128$, $p = .029$) were significant positive predictors. Advertising viewing and previous experience, specifically, were positive predictors of normalization for online romantic relationships. These findings related to research question 3 will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Table 8

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Model for Normalization for Online Romantic Relationships

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step one - demographics			
Gender (m = 1, f = 2)	-.240	.135	-.121
Age	.052	.031	.100
Minority	.022	.218	.097

Income	.008	.032	.016
Step two - genre			
Drama	-.302	.208	-.127
Comedy	.104	.292	.051
Reality	.060	.280	.027
Sporting	-.166	.310	-.069
Step three – predictor measures			
Television viewing	.024	.034	.042
Advertising viewing	.060	.048	.075
Advertising effective	.251	.105	.205 *
Advertising liking	.167	.076	.192 *
Previous experience	.126	.057	.128 *

Note: * indicates significance at $p < .05$

$R^2 = .026$ for step one ($p = .134$), $\Delta R^2 = .027$ for step two ($p = .204$), $\Delta R^2 = .147$ for step three ($p < .001$)

These findings are discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to better understand online romantic relationships by examining the message television gives viewers about these relationships. A second goal was to explore cultivation theory in the specific context of online romantic relationships. These are important issues in communication because online dating has become more commonplace and shows no signs of becoming less so. In this final section, the research questions and hypotheses are interpreted, limitations are addressed, and directions for future research are proposed. This study extends the current literature in five important ways: a) it tells us what television communicates about online romantic relationships, b) the study tells how television viewing predicts a person's perceptions of online romantic relationships, c) the study advances cultivation theory into a previously unstudied context, d) the study assesses cultivated television advertising messages, and e) the study helps advance the understanding of an expanding and fairly unstudied area of interpersonal communication.

There were two concerns going into the project. One concern was that the content analysis was not a traditional Gerbnerian content analysis in which large segments of general television were viewed, looking for references to a particular context, in this case online romantic relationships. However, it was correctly predicted that online romantic relationships were not a large part of television programming. Therefore, it made sense to use a targeted, purposive sample of television programming and focus on advertising, which was not representative of traditional cultivation content analysis.

Content Analysis

Television message. Research question 1 assessed the television message about online romantic relationships. The results of the content analysis of television programming show that television does not frequently feature online romantic relationships with 32 percent (none, other, and traditional) of the segments from the pre-selected television programs for this research project not containing references to online romantic relationships. The largest selection of references to online romantic relationships included negative representations (worse and known), accounting for 31 percent of television selections. This means the remaining 37 percent of representations were neutral or positive.

The most important finding here is, once again, the lack of references to online romantic relationships found even with this purposive sample. The other important finding is that many of the references were negative. The content analysis confirms previous suspicions that the television message about online romantic relationships is generally not a positive one. Whether discussing *X-Files* depicting a serial murderer finding his victims via online chat rooms or Ted on *How I Met Your Mother* rejecting online dating even though the entire premise of the television show is based on his shameless pursuit of a romantic partner, based upon the content analysis, the television message on online dating is rare and frequently not a good one. It must be recognized that there may a certain level of researcher and coder bias in the valence attached to the television programming references to online romantic relationships. While bias is not completely unavoidable, future work should aim to reduce the role of coding predisposition. The researcher questions why television viewing positively predicts

perceptions of online romantic relationships when the content analysis shows that programming depicts online romantic relationships negatively. The answer is likely in the advertising. People who watch more television programming undoubtedly also watch more television advertising.

Advertising, not surprisingly, portrays a positive image of online romantic relationships. This confirms what is intuitively expected of advertising. It makes sense to positively portray the product a company is selling. These advertisements were not much different from what is expected from other types of product advertisements, as the most common theme showed unique characteristics of the online dating service (31%) and the second most common theme compared the advertised service with other similar online dating services (24%), which accounted for just over half (54%) of the sampled online dating advertising content. Given the content analysis of advertising for online dating services, we can infer that advertising for online dating services uses similar marketing appeals as other products and services.

Advertisements for online dating services do not seem all that entirely different from advertising for other products such as soft drinks or athletic shoes. The advertising uses similar appeals and, unlike television programming, is shown with similar frequency to advertising for other products. The goal of the advertising is to make romance seem easy and accessible to anyone. The advertisements suggest that online dating is for everyone and particularly the viewer. Television programming portrays online romantic relationships negatively (e.g., worse = 26.7%), while television advertising portrays online romantic relationships positively in an effort to sell viewers on the benefits of their online dating services. This makes the television message about

online romantic relationships unique in that the programming message and advertising message are different.

The finding that the television programming and advertising messages are contradictory makes predicting television viewers' attitudes more difficult. The researcher hypothesized that television viewing would predict more negative attitudes about online romantic relationships. The survey results showed the opposite relationship as television viewing predicted more positive attitudes about online romantic relationships. This makes sense when taking into account the role of advertising. People that watch more television programming are expected to also watch more advertising. The influence of television advertising on perceptions of online romantic relationships may be more frequent and impactful than the influence of television programming.

This distinction between the negative or absent television messages about online romantic relationships and the positive messages of advertising for online dating services is an important distinction. It highlights the struggles that advertisers have in changing prevailing attitudes among consumers. There is stigma associated with online romantic relationships, as is shown in the survey data. More importantly, it underlines the need for expanding how educators investigate cultivation theory. Advertising is telling television viewers that online dating is something they should be considering while programming is telling television viewers that it is something that isn't a normal part of their social reality. This distinction is significant to the understanding of cultivation and society's perception of online romantic relationships.

Previous experience. The measure for previous experience with online dating was a bid at assessing resonance for online romantic relationships. Resonance is the

notion that television depictions are more influential if they appear similar to what's happening in our real world (Gerbner, 1994; Romer et al., 2003; Shrum, 2001). With cultivation's original context of societal violence, we can assess a community or area's level of violent crime. There are detailed crime statistics for states, regions, cities, and even within towns. There are similar statistics for general online dating service use, but this does not assess how much online dating occurs in specific areas and there is no way of knowing how much online dating occurs in a participant's life and social circle. This is not a measure of resonance in the traditional sense. Previous experience with online romantic relationships provides a measure of how much online dating is happening in the participants' lives. With this in mind, it is meaningful to see how personal experience with online dating predicts perceptions of online dating.

Hypothesis 1, that using online dating services or knowing someone that has predicts more positive perceptions, was supported. The measure for personal experience with online romantic relationships was a relatively strong significant predictor of perceptions of online romantic relationships. This tells us that online dating is a generally positive experience for people. Previous experience was also a significant predictor of perceptions of normalization. These are not unsurprising findings given appropriate measures. It makes sense that online daters and people that have online daters in their life would have more positive attitudes and online daters would find online dating a more 'normal' part of life. However, the interaction of television viewing and advertising viewing and previous experience was non-significant. Resonance in a more traditional sense was a non-significant predictor of perceptions of online romantic relationships.

Advertising. An important contribution of this study to the cultivation literature is the analysis of television advertising. Few cultivation studies use television advertising as a way to measure the television message. Many of the television programs in this study's content analysis sample are 20 to 22 or 40 to 43 minutes long, meaning that half hour or hour-long programming are approximately 26 to 33 percent advertising. This shows the importance of understanding the influence of advertising messages. Violence depicted in movie trailer advertising would arguably have similar influence to the violence depicted on television programming. Similar arguments could be made for the influence of gender norms and many other contexts depicted on television advertising. The context of this study made examining television advertising an essential part of the cultivation assessment, but this also shows the need for further examination of the cultivation of television advertising messages.

A fundamental problem with cultivation research that aims to assess advertising viewing is that it is difficult to know how much advertising someone views. Imagine trying to recall how many advertisements you have seen for heavily market saturated products such as soft drinks or athletic shoes. It would be difficult to watch television at all without seeing advertisements for these kinds of products, although there are ways to bypass commercial television advertising and subscription streaming television services remove advertising entirely. It is difficult to self-report how much advertising someone has seen for any type of product. However, assessing how effective advertisements for Pepsi are or how well a person likes advertising for Nike indicates a level of viewing and recall. Further, asking if a participant has seen advertising for Coca-Cola featuring a polar bear or Santa would provide additional indicators of viewership. This is what was

done in this study to assess participant cultivation of advertising for online romantic relationships. These measures provide an indication of what we are looking for and are supported in the literature and include the scales used in the study.

The perception that online dating advertising is effective was a strong predictor of positive perceptions of online romantic relationships and it supports the hypothesis that advertising for online romantic relationships is associated with increased positive perceptions of online romantic relationships. This, along with the finding that the advertising effective measure is a positive predictor of online dating normalization and a negative predictor of online dating stigma, confirms part of one of the major purposes of this study, which is to show that advertising for online romantic relationships has a positive effect on attitudes about online romantic relationships. Advertising viewing measured as described in Chapter 3 was also a significant negative predictor of online dating stigma and liking online dating advertising was a positive predictor of online dating normalization. All of the indicators of viewing advertising for online romantic relationships were significant predictors as hypothesized of the perceptions of online romantic relationships. These findings about online dating advertising show they can persuade audiences in a way that is good for business.

Genre. Based upon previous cultivation literature, the researcher predicted that television programming genre preference would be a predictor of perceptions of online romantic relationships. The study's findings did not support this hypothesis, although this does not necessarily fully explain how watching different types of programming may affect attitudes about online romantic relationships. This likely has more to do with not having an adequate theory for how watching different types of television affect

perceptions of online romantic relationships. Cultivation studies finding a genre effect have had a theoretical reason for why a specific type of television may influence a particular worldview perception. Watching a lot of news programming may influence political attitudes or watching a lot of nature television may influence environmental attitudes, for example. Cultivation studies showing a genre preference effect have had a specific genre with a hypothesized influence on the study's context.

We can see from the television programming included in the content analysis (Appendix B) that a considerable portion are comedies, so perhaps there is a theoretical argument for comedy preference as a predictor of perceptions of online romantic relationships. Focusing measurement of participant interest in a specific genre that is hypothesized to have an influence on perceptions of online romantic relationships may provide a better answer to the question of genre influence. However, there is not currently a theoretical reason why watching comedies would influence online dating perceptions. There was little theoretical reason from prior cultivation literature for the researcher to hypothesize that viewing a particular type of television would influence online romantic relationships attitudes, so it is not unsurprising that a genre effect was not found.

Measures assessing degrees of preference for specific genres of interest should replace more superficial assessments of many different genres. A better genre assessment appropriate for cultivation studies will hypothesize a specific genre as meaningful towards predicting participant attitudes about the context of the study. The measure should accurately define the hypothesized genre and assess participant viewing of the genre. The researcher suspects this type of measurement still may not show a

genre preference, but it would provide additional credibility to the argument that cultivation theory is not dependent upon genre preference or viewing.

Survey

Serial monogamy. It is clear from the literature that serial monogamy is a characteristic of online daters (Engelhart, 2013; Heino et al., 2010; Pauley & Emmers-Sommer, 2007; Rosen et al., 2008). It is easier to leave a relationship behind when there is a digital rolodex of available singles only a click away. The concept of relationship shopping (Heino et al., 2010) shows that online daters pursue partners that match a set of predetermined criteria. These characteristics may or may not be important to an overall healthy romantic relationship, although the perception may lead to the reality. Finding a partner matching a dater's predetermined characteristics becomes arguably more important than the relationship with the partner.

It is hypothesized that participants did not read serial monogamy and think online romantic relationships. The literature shows that online romantic relationships are associated with serial monogamy; however, there is limited basis for a connection between television consumption and attitudes about the serial monogamy seen in online daters. The connection between serial monogamy and online romantic relationships is open to further inquiry in research less focused on cultivated television messages. Another reason serial monogamy may not have had any significant predictors is the participants in the study may not have had as much negative stigma attached to serial monogamy. Long term romantic relationships may not be as important to younger adults as they are to older adults, so age could be more an indicator of attitudes about serial monogamy. Certainly, though, television viewing, online dating advertising, and

online dating experience do not significantly predict attitudes about serial monogamy within this sample. However, follow up exploratory analysis showed that perceptions of serial monogamy were a positive predictor of perceptions of online romantic relationships and a negative predictor of online dating stigma. This finding warrants further examination of the connection between perceptions of serial monogamy and attitudes about online romantic relationships.

Stigma and normalization. Despite what advertising, online daters, and supporters suggest, there is still stigma associated with online dating as is shown in the literature (Cockrill et al., 2013; Stephure et al., 2009) and in the collected survey data. There are plenty of perfectly successful, attractive, well-adjusted people that have used online dating services to find their romantic life partner. This does not, however, mean that there is not still stigma attached to online romantic relationships. Understanding from where this stigma comes is a meaningful pursuit. It is noteworthy that the advertising effective and advertising viewing measures were both significant negative predictors of online dating stigma. The goal of advertising, in general, is to figure out why consumers are not purchasing products and then convince them to make purchases. This is difficult to do when there is negativity associated with those purchases. It is a meaningful finding that the advertising measures were negative predictors of online dating stigma and that television viewing was a non-significant predictor. It is theoretically important to show that advertising viewing has a cultivation effect similar to television (Harmon, 2001; Kwak et al., 2002; Tan, 1979; Unger et al., 2003). The finding that advertising viewing negatively predicts online dating stigma means there is a cultivation effect associated with viewing television advertisements.

The advertising viewing measures were again significant predictors of normalization for online dating. The content analysis shows online dating advertising aims to make viewers feel their services are a normal, mainstream process for pursuing a romantic partner. Based upon the findings in the content analysis, it follows that liking online dating advertising and thinking online dating advertising is effective would be predictors of increased normalization for online romantic relationships. There obviously could be the inverse argument that increased normalization for online romantic relationships may also improve perceptions of online dating advertising. This is something that could be explored in further investigation. As seen in the content analysis, the appeal that online dating is something everyone should be doing if they are not already is a frequent component of online dating advertising. Normalization appeals are more important to online dating advertising than would be for more mainstream products because of the perceived stigma attached to online romantic relationships (Cockrill et al., 2013; Rosen et al., 2008; Stephure et al., 2009). Mainstream products such as the previously mentioned soft drinks and athletic shoes do not have to address consumer concerns that purchasing their product is out of the ordinary. This is a purchasing obstacle that other products do not have to manage.

Perceptions of Online Romantic Relationships

It is notable that the survey data shows watching television predicts perceptions of online romantic relationships. The overall goal of this research project was to show that television viewing could predict perceptions of online romantic relationships, so this was more central to the perceived success of the study than any other measure. Effect sizes for cultivation research have historically been small and generalized to

many different contexts, so the small cultivation effect of television viewing on a measure of perceptions of online romantic relationships is not unsurprising or unmeaningful. It is also worth noting that television viewing did not predict online dating stigma or normalization. This finding ultimately means viewing television advertising has a cultivation effect on perceptions of online romantic relationships, which has implications for cultivation theory and online romantic relationships.

This finding is meaningful and offers an explanation that advertising's positive presentation of online romantic relationships may be influencing perceptions. An increase in general television viewing translates into viewing more television advertising. The general lack of references to online romantic relationships seen in the programming content analysis combined with the overall positive messages seen in the advertising content analysis means that viewing more television means receiving proportionally more positive messages about online romantic relationships than negative. There are many other possible explanations for television viewing as a predictor of positive perceptions of online romantic relationships. The purpose of this study was to find whether a predictive relationship between television viewing and online romantic relationships exists, which it did.

In sum, the finding that television viewing positively predicts perceptions of online romantic relationships can be explained by a general lack of references to online romantic relationships on television programming and the increased viewing of advertising for online dating sites associated with increased overall television viewing. The content analysis and survey data justify this finding. With this finding established, future research can help the literature further enlighten this understanding by refining

the content analysis process, improving survey assessment, and better understanding the nature of online romantic relationships themselves.

Contributions

This study contributes to a greater understanding of cultivation theory. The theory has never in the published literature been used as a lens for better understanding online romantic relationships. Cultivation theory has frequently been nuanced and explored in the context of romantic relationships on television (Hetsroni, 2012; Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Westman et al., 2003; Zurbriggen, Ramsey, & Jaworski, 2011) and then in specific contexts such as relationship conflict (Aubrey et al., 2013; Coyne et al., 2011). Both are frequently depicted within romantic relationships on television programming. The unique aspect of online romantic relationships is that their non-depiction within programming is as important towards understanding their influence as their depictions.

Another contribution is the role of advertising in the cultivation effect. Advertising is not commonly a part of cultivation studies. Cultivation studies that examine television advertising focus exclusively on advertising (Harmon, 2001; Kwak et al., 2002; Tan, 1979; Unger et al., 2003), so they do not examine both television programming and advertising effects in a context as this study has.

This study has practical contributions to online romantic relationships beyond the cultivation context. Determining what television tells us about online dating is part of a larger understanding of online romantic relationships to be explored in the interpersonal communication literature. It is likely that television programming storylines will continue to include online romantic relationships more frequently. The

practical contribution of the study is that we can better understand our perceptions of online romantic relationships by exploring a part of how those perceptions are formed. Online dating is likely to become more common on television as well as in society. Romantic relationships are an important aspect of our way of life. Understanding how we perceive these subjects and where those perceptions come from are important questions. Further understanding these issues are important goals for communication educators. These contributions make this study a unique addition to the cultivation literature.

Limitations

One concern of the project is the lower intercoder reliability among television programs compared with television advertisements within the content analysis. This is not completely unexpected, because, as mentioned, there is more diverse content on television programming and advertising messages are more straight-forward. There is a more clear, coordinated message about online romantic relationships communicated from television advertising. Coders also had more themes to choose from for television programming than they did advertisements.

A second concern for the project is that the content analysis is a modified conception of traditional Gerbnerian content analysis. There are easily countless references to online romantic relationships that go un-noted in programming descriptions. As an anecdotal example, entertainer Britney Spears was a guest on *The Tonight Show starring Jimmy Fallon*. Jimmy created a ‘Tinder’ account on Britney’s phone for the audience to interact directly with her during the show. This is a reference to non-traditional dating, but it would be difficult, arguably impossible, to include these

types of references without also including an unmanageable amount of content irrelevant to the study.

A third concern is that the line between online romantic relationships and social media relationships is becoming increasingly blurred. Traditional online dating sites such as Match.com and eHarmony are clearly online initiated relationships. However, meeting someone through a mutual Facebook friend or a shared membership in an online community is less clear. Phone applications such as Grindr, Skout, and the previously mentioned Tinder make this distinction increasingly less clear. These phone applications allow users to connect with potential romantic partners also using the application on their mobile phone. Skout allows users to create a profile similar to online dating web sites that other users can view and respond to. Tinder connects to a user's Facebook account to create a user profile that others can view and 'swipe right' if they are interested or 'swipe left' if they are not. Grindr can be appropriately described as 'Tinder for the gay community.' The key features of each of these phone applications are that they are not connected to a web-based dating service and are free to use. Describing these phone applications as online dating is not accurate, yet they are non-traditional dating.

A fourth concern for the project is the use of self-report. The survey was anonymous, but people may not be honest even with themselves about their romantic lives. As mentioned, romantic relationships are essential to a person's overall health and well-being (Sidelinger et al., 2008; Young & Caplan, 2010). People may not have wanted to think of their romantic history honestly. Survey participants may have struggled with perceived personal online dating stigma for themselves, thus idealizing

their responses. Further, participants may have had difficulty recalling their past practices. They may not accurately recall some of the relationship issues that correspond to their survey responses, meaning they may not accurately represent themselves. Self-report is a concern when asking participants to respond to something that is central to a person's identity and stigmatized, which are both the case for this project. Survey assessment is frequently dependent upon self-report, so this limitation is not specific to this study in particular.

The sample used for the survey data collection has generalizability issues. As shown in the literature, online daters are typically post-college aged (Smith & Duggan, 2013). College students use online dating sites as well, which is demonstrated in the survey results, but not as much as older single adults. Seven percent of the survey sample had personally used online dating services, which we know is not representative of the approximately 40 percent of adult daters who have personally used online dating services (Smith & Duggan, 2013). There were additional assessments that could have been part of the data analysis if more participants had personal experience with online romantic relationships. The findings of this study show there are meaningful relationships between television viewing and attitudes about online romantic relationships. Those findings would perhaps be more generalizable if the survey participants were closer to the typical age of online daters.

Future Directions

There are a few inherent benefits of this particular topic of study. To begin with, romantic relationships are something important to most every member of our community. This is not a contextual issue that addresses a small part of society. Second,

previous literature, popular media, and intuition tells us that online romantic relationships will continue becoming more commonplace in society (Rosen et al., 2008; Smith & Duggan, 2013; Stephure et al., 2009). This issue will continue to become more important to examine in the future. There is a lot of room for understanding how these relationships develop, how they are distinguished from traditional romantic relationships, and the long-term health of the relationships.

One direction for this research is to collect a more inclusive sample of television content with references to online romantic relationships. It happened that the researcher was watching *The Tonight Show starring Jimmy Fallon* when Jimmy mentioned setting one of his guests up with the ‘Tinder’ phone application. There are countless online dating references that could be included in the sample if there was a way to find these references beyond programming descriptions. The researcher is open to suggestions. Analyzing a larger sample of advertising for online dating services would be another possible direction for the content analysis. Yet another direction for this research would be to conduct a more qualitative analysis of the television programming and advertising included in the content analysis. The content analysis method used in this study was effective at classifying and quantifying the themes portrayed in the television content. A qualitative approach would likely provide context to the sample of online dating references.

Another consideration to extend the research would be to use a survey sample that includes older adults. A sample representative of the more typical 24 to 35 year-old online dater cohort would provide different and arguably more generalizable responses to the survey assessment. A pool of adults over 35 would provide a richer response to

the survey. We often suggest that the generalizability issues associated with a convenience sample are not necessarily the biggest research limitation, which is the case here as well, but attitudes about romantic relationships change with age so it follows that attitudes about online romantic relationships are likely to also evolve.

These are all practical future directions that build upon the current study and provide a more complete understanding of the issues currently presented.

Conclusion

There was debate from the beginning of this study's proposal how television may predict attitudes about online romantic relationships. The question was how television programming's seemingly negative depiction of online dating would be offset by advertising's positive spin. The research study shows there is a connection between television viewing and attitudes about online romantic relationships. Further explaining and exploring that connection will be a goal of future research.

The results of this study suggest a number of overall conclusions. First, television viewing predicted positive perceptions of online romantic relationships. However, the content analysis showed that online romantic relationships are infrequently a part of television programming and are often depicted negatively when featured. The findings of the survey assessment are not fully explained by the findings of the content analysis. Second, television advertising for online dating services predicted positive perceptions of online romantic relationships. Further, television advertising negatively predicted perceived stigma and positively predicted perceived normalization. These are all meaningful results allowing us to better understand online romantic relationships. Finally, we know that romantic relationships are important to

people and can often be a central aspect of the human experience. Romance is hard work and no one really knows what they are doing. Further understanding the romantic experience is a worthwhile goal for communication educators.

In sum, this project extends research in the area of cultivation theory and online romantic relationships. There is a television in almost every home, office, and business in the country and online romantic relationships will continue to become more commonplace, which make these important issues for further discovery. These are both areas of human communication worthy of continued investigation.

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Appendix A: Content Analysis Codebooks

Advertising

Theme	Description	Example
Comparisons	Comparisons between the advertiser and other online dating sites	References to the likelihood that members of the site will find a romantic partner or the site's superior matching methods
Idealization	Portrayals of meeting the perfect person	Descriptions of an ideal romantic partner or characteristics a person is seeking in a potential romantic partner
Readiness	Portrayals of users of the site as ready for a romantic relationship	References to an age where people should be looking for a romantic partner or a lifestyle where a having a romantic partner is desirable
Superiority	Portrayals of problems with meeting potential partners via more traditional face to face matching methods	References to the concerns of the bar scene or meeting the same types of people at places such as work or through friends
Uniqueness	Portrayals of the specific characteristics of the advertised online dating service	References to the types of people that specifically join the advertised site

Other Something that doesn't fit Briefly describe on your coding form
into one of the other
categories

Television Programming

Theme	Description	Example
Comparisons	Comparisons between online dating and more traditional methods of meeting and pursuing romantic partners	References to the difficulty of meeting people traditionally or the success people have finding partners online
Known	A character in the show is paired with someone they already know	Someone gets matched with a friend, co-worker, ex-partner, family member, neighbor, etc.
Idealization	Portrayals of meeting the perfect person will be termed idealization.	Descriptions of an ideal romantic partner or characteristics a person is seeking in a potential romantic partner
Better	Someone is matched with someone that is better than they expected	A character gets matched with someone who is exceptionally attractive, intelligent, or other qualities more positive than was expected
Worse	Someone is matched with someone that is worse than	A character gets matched with someone who is exceptionally

	they expected	unattractive, uninteresting, or other qualities less positive than was expected
Readiness	Portrayals of users of online dating sites as ready for a romantic relationship	References to an age where people should be looking for a romantic partner or a lifestyle where a having a romantic partner is desirable
Superiority	Portrayals of problems with meeting potential partners via more traditional face to face matching methods	References to the concerns of the bar scene or meeting the same types of people at places such as work or through friends
Uniqueness	Portrayals of specific characteristics of people met through online dating service	References to the types of people that specifically join online dating web sites
Mainstream	Portrayals of online dating as something acceptable or mainstream today when it may not have been in the past	References to it being 2014, a friend or family member having found a partner through online dating, or everyone is joining online dating sites today
Offline	References to more traditional methods of meeting a potential romantic	Discussions of meeting people through friends, at work, at social outings, sporting events, etc.

	partner	
Traditional	Portrayals of more traditional methods of meeting a potential romantic partner	Meeting people through friends, at work, at social outings, sporting events, etc.
None	There is no mention of online romantic relationships	N/A
Other	Something that doesn't fit into one of the other categories	Briefly describe on your coding form

Appendix B: Listing of Television Programming

The Big Bang Theory (season 3, episode 23: May 14, 2010) ‘The Lunar Excitation’

(20:14)

The Big Bang Theory (season 2, episode 3: October 6 2008) ‘The Barbarian

Sublimation’ (20:49)

Bones (season 4, episode 13: February 5, 2009) ‘The Hero in the Hold’ (41:54) *

Bosom Buddies (season 2, episode 7: December 18, 1981) ‘All You Need is Love’

(25:13)

Catfish (season 2, episode 13: October 1, 2013) ‘Derek & Kristen (41:05)

Catfish (season 3, episode 8: June 25, 2014) ‘Miranda & Cameryn’ (40:31)

Dating Naked (season 1, episode 7: August 28, 2014) ‘AJ & Liddy’ (41:15)

Dating Naked (season 1, episode 3: July 31, 2014) ‘Keegan and Diane’ (41:33) *

The Drew Carey Show (season 4, episode 5: September 30, 1998) ‘In Ramada Da Vida’

(20:23)*

Eli Stone (season 1, episode 10: April 3, 2008) ‘Heartbeat’ (41:53)

The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air (season 5, episode 22: April 24, 1995) ‘To Thine Own Self

Be Blue...and Gold’ (22:25)

Friends (season 2, episode 24: May 16, 1996) ‘The One with Barry and Mindy’s

Wedding’ (22:44)

How I Met Your Mother (season 7, episode 22: April 30, 2012) ‘Good Crazy’ (21:07)

How I Met Your Mother (season 1, episode 7: November 7, 2005) ‘Matchmaker’

(21:19) *

How I Met Your Mother (season 3, episode 5: October 22, 2007) ‘How I Met Everyone Else’ (21:16) *

iCarly (season 1, episode 24: July 25, 2008) ‘iWin a Date’ (23:36)

MadTV Lowered Expectations (season 3, episode 5: October 25, 1997) ‘Antonia’ (1:40)

MadTV Lowered Expectations (season 4, episode 13: January 16, 1999) ‘Bunifa’ (1:41)

MadTV Lowered Expectations (season 1, episode 7: November 25, 1995) ‘Chanin’ (1:09)

MadTV Lowered Expectations (season 1, episode 19: June 22, 1996) ‘Danielle’ (1:47)

MadTV Lowered Expectations (season 4, episode 7: November 7, 1998) ‘Marilyn Manson’ (1:22)

Naked City (season 2, episode 28: May 24, 1961) ‘To Dream without Sleep’ (50:57)

The Nanny (season 4, episode 14: January 29, 1997) ‘The Fifth Wheel’ (22:19)

The Office (BBC) ‘Christmas Special (Part 2: December 27, 2003)’ (52:01)

Online Dating Rituals of the American Male (season 1, episode 5: April 1, 2014) ‘Grant and J. Keith’ (42:47)

Online Dating Rituals of the American Male (season 1, episode 3: March 20, 2014) ‘Matt & Jason’ (42:49)

Parks and Recreation (season 3, episode 10: April 21, 2011) ‘Soulmates’ (21:14)*

Third Rock from the Sun (season 3, episode 13: January 21, 1998) ‘The Great Dickdater’ (21:18)

To Catch a Predator (1:26:17)

To Catch a Predator (46:42)

X-Files (season 3, episode 6: November 3, 1995) ‘2Shy’ (45:06)

Total programming time: 862 min. or 14 hrs. 22 min.

Mean program length: 27:49

* programming excluded from analysis due to its use in training

Appendix C: Listing of Television Advertisements

Anastasia Date

‘A Love Story’

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9I0CRzyMvpU&index=3&list=PL82DhyI6SvfL8jZcMSoG6pz9BM4jkBOmB>)

‘International Online Dating’

(<http://youtu.be/ahevVeDC0VE?list=PL82DhyI6SvfL8jZcMSoG6pz9BM4jkBOmB>)

‘International Treasures Ready to be Discovered’

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGuVzG1hGuo&index=4&list=PL82DhyI6SvfL8jZcMSoG6pz9BM4jkBOmB>)

‘Love is’

(<http://youtu.be/wzPXVEialFI?list=PL82DhyI6SvfL8jZcMSoG6pz9BM4jkBOmB>)

Black People Meet

‘Grocery Girl’

(http://youtu.be/YVrG8zxHK9Q?list=UUKVoNltIVc0JrJ2R_UrTj0w) *

‘Jackpot’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPPd6vnmHE/>)

‘Site’

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyHnMRiSufg&list=UUKVoNltIVc0JrJ2R_UrTj0w)

‘Testimonial’ (http://youtu.be/J2OCwCVwn-c?list=UUKVoNltIVc0JrJ2R_UrTj0w)

‘Tips’ (http://youtu.be/UfRTUqxb9T4?list=UUKVoNltIVc0JrJ2R_UrTj0w)

Christian Mingle

‘Amy & Mark’ (http://youtu.be/wLe8RyG_iW4?list=PLD3017131E0714047)

‘Andrea & Bryan’ (<http://youtu.be/fh1O6WkqtTA?list=PLD3017131E0714047>)

‘Lindsey & Eric’ (http://youtu.be/Eov_JW2nsCs?list=PLD3017131E0714047)

‘Lindsay & Justin’

(<http://youtu.be/bG5qx7eVUfw?list=PLD3017131E0714047>)

‘Lori and Curtis’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EB7LNRQDN8I>)*

‘Lori and Curtis: Love Song’ (<http://youtu.be/pf7QY-8hJoE?list=PLD3017131E0714047>)

‘Tracey & Thomas’

(<http://youtu.be/MrEqwSIXMNo?list=PLD3017131E0714047>)

eHarmony

‘Anastasia and Garret’

(<http://youtu.be/lkhGquIRDss?list=PLB7FC4A6E53A96C88>) *

‘Caroline and Friend’

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWn0QoAi99E&list=PLB7FC4A6E53A96C88>)

‘Compatibility’ (<http://youtu.be/TFYnpLqhb8g?list=PLB7FC4A6E53A96C88>)

‘Every Great Relationship’

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuGH9Tf5cjY&list=PLB7FC4A6E53A96C88&index=4>)

‘Free Personality Profile’

(<http://youtu.be/YbkFzwkog7I?list=PLB7FC4A6E53A96C88>)

‘Kate and Justin’

(<http://youtu.be/DQYVFZWjwCU?list=PLB7FC4A6E53A96C88>)

‘Jon On Why He’s Using eHarmony’

(<http://youtu.be/mMXxRKXkZ7s?list=PLB7FC4A6E53A96C88>) *

‘Maddisen Discusses the eHarmony Process’ (<http://youtu.be/sY7dYZh-IKE?list=PLB7FC4A6E53A96C88>)

‘Nicola’ (http://youtu.be/2wsfTyu_0KM?list=PLB7FC4A6E53A96C88)

‘Our Promise’ (<http://youtu.be/2trfFybWHmA?list=PLB7FC4A6E53A96C88>)

‘Speed Dating’

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZ62WIVAyJs&list=PLB7FC4A6E53A96C88/>)*

Farmer’s Only

‘Down-to-Earth Singles’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOj3o4qN6PU>)

‘Where’s Jill?’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6RvyFFjP7RE>)

JDate

‘Jewish Parents’

(http://youtu.be/8YU0RzXmFBA?list=PLof8Wj311Ud9gRN78bShHn48Wb_5QH6rs) *

‘Jewish Summer Camp’

(http://youtu.be/wBvQ6S7NYwM?list=PLof8Wj311Ud9gRN78bShHn48Wb_5QH6rs) *

‘Matzo ball Recipes’

(http://youtu.be/R6Rs94iHIZE?list=PLof8Wj311Ud9gRN78bShHn48Wb_5QH6rs)

‘Sara & Steve’s Success Story’

(<http://youtu.be/hi1MQq3mvV4?list=UUp0DPTWu0cYRRF-Nvf4c0A>)*

‘Vicky & Chad’s Success Story’

(http://youtu.be/1n_rAuWnvLs?list=UUp0DPTWu0cYRRF-Nvf4c0A)

Match.com

‘Are you Ready 30’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ds5NCmcU-oY>) *

‘Doug 30’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3rtxTfGCOK>) *

‘Everyone Knows Someone Who Met on Match’

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=de1NFQo7hVE&list=PLS9mRu4WaVEF5ZFE60zebk3Vk4WRF74K>)

‘Interesting People’

(<http://youtu.be/FJtsENrZ2UY?list=PLS9mRu4WaVEF5ZFE60zebk3Vk4WRF74K>)

‘It’s JoeKing’

(<http://youtu.be/LDXPocCiX14?list=PLS9mRu4WaVEF5ZFE60zebk3Vk4WRF74K>)

‘Lauren Telling: 30’

(<http://youtu.be/DjysyqiHBiM?list=PLS9mRu4WaVEF5ZFE60zebk3Vk4WRF74K>) *

‘Live My Life’

(http://youtu.be/KKC_CkPMPvY?list=PLS9mRu4WaVEF5ZFEEd60zebk3Vk4WRF74K)

‘Meet People Organically’

(<http://youtu.be/bWcKsiuPXmk?list=PLS9mRu4WaVEF5ZFEEd60zebk3Vk4WRF74K>)

‘Missed Opportunity’

(<http://youtu.be/4cOLu2gJn74?list=PLS9mRu4WaVEF5ZFEEd60zebk3Vk4WRF74K>)

‘Mom Has a Boyfriend’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYWgA2FYg3Q>)

‘My Cousin Met Someone’ (http://youtu.be/T_-h4HI3eeM?list=PLS9mRu4WaVEF5ZFEEd60zebk3Vk4WRF74K)

‘Second Date’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypTG6Bf8-cI>) *

Plenty of Fish

‘Simple, Free, & It Works’

(<http://youtu.be/zgdyMfFhHCc?list=FLetlS8U0zxota7sAsCAzS0Q>) *

‘Simple, Free, & It Works 2’

(<http://youtu.be/cYQV2NWGaAk?list=FLetlS8U0zxota7sAsCAzS0Q>)

‘The Best Things in Life are Free’ ([http://youtu.be/DasTsAl-](http://youtu.be/DasTsAl-7Nw?list=UUetlS8U0zxota7sAsCAzS0Q)

[7Nw?list=UUetlS8U0zxota7sAsCAzS0Q](http://youtu.be/DasTsAl-7Nw?list=UUetlS8U0zxota7sAsCAzS0Q))

‘Why Pay To Meet Someone’

(http://youtu.be/S8cBBg1pQ_I?list=FLetlS8U0zxota7sAsCAzS0Q)

Zoosk

‘Find someone special today with Zoosk’

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YURQEKAvrik&list=UUZ9IgC_sddqmXcTrpqF3SmA) *

‘Love Through the Ages: the Beginning’

(<http://youtu.be/5m4tKOyeQbE?list=PL5A75555E1494CBCC>)

‘Love Through the Ages ‘Cleopatra and Mark Antony’

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYibEpfOc3E&list=PL5A75555E1494CBCC&index=3>) *

‘Love Through the Ages: Medieval Times’

(<http://youtu.be/1E3tl80IoMc?list=PL5A75555E1494CBCC>)

‘Love Through the Ages: Neanderthals’

(<http://youtu.be/C562nASfA1A?list=PL5A75555E1494CBCC>)

‘Love Through the Ages: Wild West’

(<http://youtu.be/wid2n2yk4u4?list=PL5A75555E1494CBCC>)

‘Valentines from Heart Friend 1’ (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wus-nidKnDo&list=FLZ9IgC_sddqmXcTrpqF3SmA)

‘Valentines from Heart Friend 2’

(<http://youtu.be/ttCgng5Q0fY?list=PLk6sFoNnb27wKRpMU7oxHDmlG7N-StKGD>)

‘Valentines from Heart Friend 3’

(http://youtu.be/35S4I_97MRU?list=PLk6sFoNnb27wKRpMU7oxHDmlG7N-StKGD)

‘Valentines from Heart Friend 4’

(<http://youtu.be/WITVCDHZAyk?list=PLk6sFoNnb27wKRpMU7oxHDmlG7N>

-StKGD)

* advertising excluded from analysis due to its use in training

Appendix D: Measures

Gender

Gender

Male

Female

Age

Age

18

22

19

23

20

24

21

25 or older

Minority

Racial Group

African American

Asian American

Caucasian

Hispanic

Native American

Pacific Islander

Mixed Race

Other

Income

What is your family's annual household income?

Less than \$10,000

\$10,000 to \$25,000

\$25,000 to \$35,000

\$35,000 to \$50,000

\$50,000 to \$75,000

\$75,000 to

\$100,000 to

More than \$150,000

\$100,000

\$150,000

Genre

What's your favorite type of television to watch?

Action	Cartoon	Comedy	Drama	Documentary	Information
News	Sporting	Science	Talk show	Soap opera	
		fiction			

Television Viewing

(adapted from Lee, Hornik, & Hennessy, 2008)

How many hours of television do you watch on an average week day?

None	Half	About	About	About	About	About	About	Seven
	hour or	an hour	two	three	four	five	six	or more
	less		hours	hours	hours	hours	hours	hours

How many hours of television do you watch on an average weekend day?

None	Half	About	About	About	About	About	About	Seven
	hour or	an hour	two	three	four	five	six	or more
	less		hours	hours	hours	hours	hours	hours

Advertising Viewing

(adapted from Smith & Duggan, 2013)

How often do you see advertising for online dating sites on television?

Never	Less than	Once a	2-3 times	Once a	2-3 times	Daily
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once a month a month week a week
month

Which of the following online dating sites have you seen television advertising for?

Match.com eHarmony Plenty of Fish Christian Zoosk
Mingle
Black People Farmers Only Anastasia Date Other
Meet

How often would you say that you see advertising for online dating sites compared with television advertising for other products?

Much less Less Somewhat The same Somewhat More Much
less more more

Advertising Effectiveness

(adapted from Tan, 1979)

In general, how well do you like online dating commercials?

Dislike Dislike very Dislike Dislike slightly Neither like
extremely much moderately nor dislike
Like slightly Like moderately Like very much Like extremely

In general, how effective do you think online dating commercials are?

Very ineffective	Ineffective	Somewhat ineffective	Neither effective nor ineffective
Somewhat effective	Effective	Very effective	

In general, how believable do you think online dating commercials are?

Unbelievable	Somewhat unbelievable	Not sure	Somewhat believable	believable
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Advertising Liking

(adapted from Bjerke, Rosendahl, Gopalkrishna, & Sandler, 2005)

How well do you like how online dating commercials portray online dating?

Dislike extremely	Dislike very much	Dislike moderately	Dislike slightly	Neither like nor dislike
Like slightly	Like moderately	Like very much	Like extremely	

How well do you like the actors in online dating commercials?

Dislike extremely	Dislike very much	Dislike moderately	Dislike slightly	Neither like nor dislike
Like slightly	Like moderately	Like very much	Like extremely	

How well do you like the slogans in online dating commercials?

Dislike extremely	Dislike very much	Dislike moderately	Dislike slightly	Neither like nor dislike
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Like slightly Like moderately Like very much Like extremely

How well do you like the dialogue in online dating commercials?

Dislike extremely	Dislike very much	Dislike moderately	Dislike slightly	Neither like nor dislike
Like slightly	Like moderately	Like very much	Like extremely	

How well do you like the colors in online dating commercials?

Dislike extremely	Dislike very much	Dislike moderately	Dislike slightly	Neither like nor dislike
Like slightly	Like moderately	Like very much	Like extremely	

How well do you like the branding in online dating commercials?

Dislike extremely	Dislike very much	Dislike moderately	Dislike slightly	Neither like nor dislike
Like slightly	Like moderately	Like very much	Like extremely	

Previous Experience

(adapted from Smith & Duggan, 2013)

Have you personally ever used an online dating site such as match.com, eHarmony, or OK Cupid?

Yes

No

Unsure

Have you ever used a dating app on your cell phone?

Yes

No

Unsure

Do you personally know anyone who has used an online dating site or app?

Yes

No

Unsure

Do you personally know anyone who has been in a long-term relationship with or married someone they met through an online dating site or app?

Yes

No

Unsure

Perceptions of Online Romantic Relationships

(adapted from Anderson, 2005)

What are your overall perceptions of online romantic relationships?

Strongly positive	Positive	Slightly positive	Neutral opinion	Slightly negative	Negative	Strongly negative
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How safe do you think it is use online dating sites?

Very safe	Safe	A little safe	No opinion	A little unsafe	Unsafe	Very unsafe
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How honest do you think users of online dating sites are about themselves?

Very honest	Honest	A little honest	No opinion	A little dishonest	Dishonest	Very dishonest
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How good are the romantic relationships initiated on online dating sites?

Very bad	Bad	Poor	Neither	Fair	Good	Very good
			good nor			
			bad			

How positive do you feel about online dating?

Very bad	Bad	Poor	Neither	Fair	Good	Very good
			good nor			
			bad			

How likely are you to recommend online dating to a friend?

Very	Unlikely	Somewhat	Undecided	Somewhat	Likely	Very
unlikely		unlikely		likely		likely

Perceptions of Serial Monogamy

(adapted from Anderson, 2005)

Indicate the degree to which you think it is right or wrong for someone to be involved in serial monogamy.

Very	Right	Somewhat	Neither	Somewhat	Wrong	Very
right		right	right or	wrong		wrong
			wrong			

Indicate the degree to which you think it is positive or negative for someone to be involved in serial monogamy.

Very positive	Positive	Somewhat positive	Neither positive	Somewhat negative	Negative	Very negative
			or			
			negative			

Indicate the degree to which you think it is acceptable or unacceptable for someone to be involved in serial monogamy.

Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat acceptable	Neither acceptable or unacceptable
Somewhat unacceptable	Unacceptable	Very acceptable	

Stigma Attached to Online Romantic Relationships

(adapted from Cockrill, Upadhyay, Turan & Foster, 2013)

How worried do you think online daters are that other people may find out that they met their romantic partner online?

Not at all worried	A little worried	Quite worried	Extremely worried
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How worried do you think online daters are that people would judge them negatively if others found out that they met their romantic partner online?

Not at all worried A little worried Quite worried Extremely worried

How worried do you think online daters are that others would gossip if they found out that they met their romantic partner online?

Not at all worried A little worried Quite worried Extremely worried

How ashamed are people to admit that they met their romantic partner online?

Not at all ashamed A little ashamed Quite ashamed Extremely ashamed

Normalization for Online Romantic Relationships

(adapted from Cockrill, Upadhyay, Turan & Foster, 2013)

Indicate the degree to which you think it is right or wrong for someone to be involved in an online romantic relationship.

Very	Right	Somewhat	Neither	Somewhat	Wrong	Very
right		right	right or	wrong		wrong
			wrong			

Indicate the degree to which you think it is positive or negative for someone to be involved in an online romantic relationship.

Very	Positive	Somewhat	Neither	Somewhat	Negative	Very
positive		positive	positive	negative		negative
			or			
			negative			

Indicate the degree to which you think it is acceptable or unacceptable for someone to be involved in an online romantic relationship.

Very acceptable	Acceptable	Somewhat acceptable	Neither acceptable or unacceptable
Somewhat acceptable	Unacceptable	Very unacceptable	