

## **Title**

To Thing or Not to Thing, That Should be the Question

## **Project Summary**

Humans being objectified and dehumanized by others, especially those they love and care for, could implicate that the meaning of “love” itself has been devalued or is misunderstood. This project aims to identify persons’ self-concepts of “love,” persons’ awareness of objectification, and how reflection on oneself and one’s relationships can be influenced. While data has been collected for this project previously, the aim is now to partner with institutions outside the state of Oklahoma and analyze any possible regional trends in relationship ideals.

## **Project Narrative**

The idea of love is one that’s meaning has been neglected by society at large, and this misunderstanding of love threatens to take an irrevocable toll on the worth of individuals, if not corrected. Today's shallow understanding of love leads to the treatment of people as objects, and is apparent in murder, rape, controlling parenting, divisive and dismissive discourse, and dating relationships. Where there should be a desire for existential connection between people, finding love is, instead, seen as a quest of acquisition. Often, people see others for what they can provide instead of who they are, using their fellow human beings as a means of satiating their own needs. Examinations of online-dating culture have revealed that “daters” manipulate their own qualities in a bid to get the most matches with potential partners, thereby turning themselves in a product and playing a numbers game, instead of truly looking for a connection (Hobbs, Owens, & Gerber, 2017). Studies on controlling parenting show further that children not afforded basic respect and autonomy suffer from self-esteem and anxiety issues, even years after moving away from home (Hare, Szwedo, Schad, & Allen, 2015). Objectification, such as in these cases, could

be due to that fact that the art of loving is not cultivated in the same way as success, money, and power are (Fromm, 1956).

Endless research has explored the effects of relationship quality on mental health, for example, Soller's (2014) study, which examines adolescents' relationships and their connection to depression, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts, as well as the effects of objectification on subjects. The latter, however, mainly deals with victims of crime or trauma, as in Moor, Ben-Meir, Golan-Shapira, and Farchi's (2013) study on peritraumatic responses of rape victims. While the former provides valuable insights on the effects of "thinging" type relationships, this research intends to go a different direction. This project aims to determine whether persons can identify if authentic love is lacking in their own relationships, if they are aware of any objectification, either by the subject or the subject's partner, and if providing varying depictions of "love" can elicit this self-reflection and/or a change in attitude toward either their personal connections or love in general. Through the use of pre- and post- surveys, the influences of three distinct media depictions of love on one's perception of the self and one's relationship will be measured, and the results will indicate if any depiction could be a valuable tool in encouraging cultivation of authentic, loving relationships. Connection with other people is the basis of human life, so it is vital that people generally afford others respect and honor, however, this is not the norm. The information from this project will indicate whether the shortcomings of interpersonal connection can be identified, and whether they can be honestly reflected upon. If the use of media for depicting commonly accepted forms of "love" is determined to effectively influence this awareness and reflection, the door can be opened for further research and possible forms of education, enriching society's ideal of love.

**Goals of the project** — The purpose of this research is to investigate mechanisms that could stimulate honest self-reflection about habitual interactions and attitudes between partners and the impact those interactions have on the subject. The results will also shed light on the typical attitude/expectations for love and authentic relationships and how those attitudes differ from those of other regions of the United States. The information this research can provide may demonstrate a need for education and further research on this topic, and will determine if methods, like those to be used here, can guide persons to change their habits and raise their standards for interpersonal connection.

**Methods** — Out of state institutions will be contacted by email to establish a partnership that will allow data collection from a wider variety of subjects. The subjects, contacted through email and social media will take pre- and post-surveys which combine the Contingencies of Self Worth Scale (Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003), Loving and Liking Scale (Rubin, 1970), the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988), and the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (1965). Their responses to the questions taken from these scales will indicate subjects' attitudes towards their relationship and their role in it, as well as the state of their "self." After taking the pre-survey, the subject will watch a 5-10 minute long video clip that displays either a wholesome and loving relationship ("10 Signs You've Found the One"), a love-contingent relationship ("7 Signs of an Incompatible Relationship"), or an emotionally abusive relationship ("10 Warning Signs of Gaslighting") (Psych2Go, n.d.). The subjects will then take the post-survey, which is identical to the pre-survey. The belief is, the video clip will have an effect on the subject, and, after reflecting on the clip and their own relationship, the post-survey will yield differing answers from the first. A new score will be calculated, and the two scores compared. All subject's scores and differences in scores will then be compared statistically. The three

conditions (wholesome/love-contingent/emotionally abusive) will be emailed/posted one month apart, and each survey will be completely anonymous.

**Contributions to the Field** — This study could not only shed light on the prevalence of disingenuous relationships in society, but also could identify the effect these interactions have on the person experiencing them and the influence of regional mindsets/values on relationships. The socially accepted definition of “love” could undergo a much-needed revision as a result, encouraging healthier and more well-rounded relationship norms. Further, the results of this research could indicate whether depictions of “love” can facilitate reflection and contemplation about interpersonal interactions, and encourage persons to see others as more valuable, respect-deserving beings than they considered them previously. Depending on these findings, instituting education about interpersonal connection could be a valuable addition to school curriculum; of course, further research would be necessary.

## References

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- Rubin, Z. (1970). Measurement of romantic love. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 16*(2), 265–273
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### Time Line (Action Plan)

The timeline for this project is realistic and it is highly probable that I will be able to accomplish my goal within the required amount of time.

Tasks	Aug 20	Sept 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Dec 20	Jan 21	Feb 21	Mar 21	Apr 21	May 21
Secure IRB Approval	X									
Conduct Research		X	X	X	X					
Evaluate Results					X	X				
Present at SPSP							X			
Conclude Research								X	X	X

### **Detailed Budget and Budget Justification**

I am requesting \$500 for my 2020-2021 RCSA budget. The budget will allow me to present my research at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology's (SPSP) 2021 Preconference (and/or possible other conferences). Registration to SPSP, based on this year, is \$185 while current airfare round trip to the conference location of 2021 (Austin, Texas) is \$295 - \$311.