

**THE THEORY OF "IDENTITY DISSONANCE":  
MASS COMMUNICATION, ROMANCE FICTION, AND THE SELF-CONCEPT**

**SARAH BENJAMIN**

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts**

**Graduate Programme in Interdisciplinary Studies  
York University  
Toronto, Canada**

**September, 1999**



National Library  
of Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file* *Votre référence*

*Our file* *Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-43370-6

Canada

**The Theory of "Identity Dissonance":  
Mass Communication, Romance Fiction, and the Self-Concept**

by **Sarah Benjamin**

a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of York  
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

©

Permission has been granted to the LIBRARY OF YORK  
UNIVERSITY to lend or sell copies of this thesis, to the  
NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA to microfilm this thesis and to  
lend or sell copies of the film, and to **UNIVERSITY  
MICROFILMS** to publish an abstract of this thesis.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the  
thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise  
reproduced without the author's written permission.

### **Abstract**

Why are there so many paradoxical representations of women in North American media? It is the assumption of this paper that the antithetical character of mass media is both a reflection and result of the multifaceted nature of our Self-concept and the fundamental process of identity development. Expanding Festinger's (1957) theory of *cognitive dissonance* to encompass identity, I created the theory of *identity dissonance* specifically in order to explore identity development and its relationship to characteristics inherent in mass communication. Identity dissonance is an unsettling feeling of psychological disquiet, occurring when there is roughly equal commitment to two or more conflicting identities; to be dissonant, these identities must contain information and values that an individual considers contradictory. Dissonance theory is a theory of relevant relationship: it is a person's psychological makeup -- his or her sense of Self -- that dictates how relationships between identities are to be organized (for example, as conflictual, consonant, or irrelevant). Identity dissonance occurs when an individual regards particular identities as essential components of his or her Self-concept yet also recognizes, consciously or unconsciously, that these identities oppose each other. Agreeing with perspectives put forth by Radway (1991) and Jensen (1984), this paper argues for an important relationship between women's psychosocial realities and romance novels. I specifically propose that the gendered characterizations of heroes and heroines in Harlequin romance novels, along with plotlines dedicated to the management or

resolution of identity dissonance in the heroine's life, strongly indicate that romance novels provide an excellent environment in which to explore the presence of the psychological phenomenon of identity dissonance. It is postulated that romance readers are drawn to this reading experience because romance novels are able to depict, in the narrative lives of heroes and heroines, situations and emotional realities, analogous to their own personal experiences with identity dissonance.



## **Table of Contents**

<b>SECTION 1: Theoretical Model of Identity Dissonance .....</b>	<b>page 6</b>
<b>Chapter I: The Components of Selfhood .....</b>	<b>page 7</b>
<b>Chapter II: The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance .....</b>	<b>page 18</b>
<b>Chapter III: The Theory of Identity Dissonance .....</b>	<b>page 23</b>
<b>Chapter IV: Identity Dissonance and Women .....</b>	<b>page 39</b>
<b>SECTION 2: Romance Novels as an Environment that Displays Identity Dissonance .....</b>	<b>page 59</b>
<b>Chapter V: Mass Media, Identity, and the Romance Novel .....</b>	<b>page 59</b>
<b>Chapter VI: Reading and Women’s Experience .....</b>	<b>page 66</b>
<b>Chapter VII: Romance Novels -- Media that Reflects the Dissonant Nature of Identity Development .....</b>	<b>page 85</b>
<b>Conclusion: Women’s Lives and Portrayals -- A Rebuttal to the “Schizophrenic” Diagnosis, and the Implications for Identity Dissonance .....</b>	<b>page 110</b>
<b>Endnotes .....</b>	<b>page 117</b>
<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>page 120</b>
<b>Works Cited .....</b>	<b>page 140</b>

**List of Figures**

Figure 1: Calvin Klein Advertisement ..... page 4

Figure 2: A diagram depicting the three structures that compose the  
Self ..... page 12

Figure 3: A diagram of the Self-structures depicting Identity Processing  
Styles as defined by Berzonsky (1990) ..... page 38

Figure 4: bebe Advertisement ..... page 53

Figure 5: Esprit Advertisement ..... page 54

Like her, he was only wearing the minimum amount of clothing, and he looked lean, and muscular, and marvelously fit.

‘Home tomorrow,’ he murmured, against her hair. ‘Will you mind?’

‘Just us not being together every minute of the day,’ she admitted ruefully. ‘But I guess I can live with that. Alexa keeps me busy.’

‘And what about your work?’ he ventured. ‘Have you thought any more about that? You know I won’t interfere - if it’s what you want to do.’

‘Hmm.’ Beth sighed. ‘Well, I’ve been thinking about that too. But, if it’s all the same to you, I’m in no hurry to get back to work. I like being your wife. I like being with our baby. And - who knows? - perhaps we’ll have another baby. It’s possible, you know.’

Alex shook his head. It’s highly probable,’ he muttered his hands moving possessively over her body. ‘I just don’t want to tie you down. I know how you value your independence.’

‘How I *used* to value it,’ Beth amended swiftly. ‘I’m not like that any more. I suppose what I mean is, when you love somebody, you put their happiness first. I don’t think either my mother or my sister ever had that experience.’ (Mather, 1993, p. 187-188)

This excerpt from a romance novel depicts a heroine who, over the course of the book, has struggled with an internal conflict. Beth, as the narrative alludes, had been agonizing over how she defines herself -- is she ‘independent’ or ‘dependent’? This battle between paradoxical identities is far from a peculiarity innate to this particular heroine, nor is this conflict a phenomenon exclusive to romance novels; instead, this paper proposes that this conflictual temperament is in actuality an inherent characteristic of identity development, thus a process that all individuals and specifically North American women<sup>1</sup> are liable to encounter.

In the following paper I will examine identity construction and a byproduct of this process which I label ‘identity dissonance’<sup>2</sup>. Only recently has the importance of a detailed exploration of identity development and the specifics that drive this process been

recognized (Kerpelman, Pittman, & Lamke, 1997a). Theorists such as Graafsma (1994), Bosma (1994), Burke (1991), Berzonsky (1990), and Grotevant (1987) have been instrumental in furthering recent understanding of what influences identity formation. Identity can be regarded as a construction which individuals utilize in order to understand who they are in relation to their external world (Alcock, Carment, & Sadava, 1991). Identity refers to a process whereby an individual develops and maintains a set of Self-understandings which relate to a particular dimension of his or her life. I maintain that individuals contain a multitude of identities, some of which are likely to be regarded as diametrically opposed to each other.

My understanding of identity dissonance is based upon Festinger's (1957) conception of cognitive dissonance. Supporting Aronson's (1997) plea for synthesis in the field of psychology, and his recognition of the value in applying Festinger's theories to multiple areas of psychological investigation, I have used Festinger's (1957) perspectives as a platform for my own analyses of identity development. My assumption is that identity dissonance is a very real part of the natural process of identity construction, that individuals are contradictory by nature, and subsequently, that they cultivate identities that are paradoxical. The goal of this investigation is to provide more insight into the process of identity development by proposing the concept of identity dissonance, and locating this theory within media products, specifically romance novels.

I predict that if individuals do indeed experience identity dissonance, this dissonance will be present in media. For example, women's depictions are marked by an incredible

level of oppositional variation. So much so that media is now acknowledging the presence of dissonance; as the Calvin Klein advertisement for the women's perfume 'Contradiction' explains, "she is always and never the same" (see Figure 1). Romance novels, a medium written by women for women, provide an important environment in which to explore the psychological impact and sociological implications of identity dissonance (and gender identity dissonance, as my theory can be applied to all types of identity i.e. racial, religious etc.). My desire is to focus on how individuals utilize media in order to meet personal needs<sup>3</sup>, particularly, those surrounding the issue of identity. I plan to highlight characteristics or concepts that are present in identity development and use them to analyze and illuminate qualities inherent in mass communication. Following in the foot-steps of Radway (1991) and Jensen (1984) before me, I examine the relationship between women's psychological/social realities and romance novels. I propose that romance novels depict the presence of gender identity dissonance within the characterizations of heroes and heroines and that one of the driving forces behind the romance novel narrative is the heroine's engagement with identity dissonance -- the heroine's struggle to choose between identities that she defines as exclusionary of each other. For example, the identity dissonance facing the heroine depicted in the opening quote: Beth's struggle to reconcile her conception of herself as a woman who does not want nor need a man, and her love of the hero with its accompanying dependency and desire. It is a conflict that she wrestles with up until her identity dissonance is reconciled due to the removal of one of the offending identities, that of independence, in the final

Figure 1.

Saks Fifth Avenue

she is always and never the same



Contradiction  
a new fragrance for women  
Calvin Klein



pages of the novel. Generally romance novels seem to conclude when the heroine reconciles the discrepancies between oppositional identities, consequently reaffirming my conclusion that identity dissonance is a theme explored within this medium.

I propose that mass communication theorists could benefit by applying concrete and measurable terminology when outlining media effects and influences, and suggest that the theory of identity dissonance could be utilized. I would like to help formally conceptualize women's relationship to media and assist in the development of a more concrete understanding of the repercussions from this association; I hope to illuminate and expand upon the work of theorists who recognize women's 'schizophrenic' relationship to, and depiction in, media (Douglas, S. (1994); Thurston (1987) etc.) and provide them with a tool for their analyses. Ultimately I argue that identity dissonance is a product of all individuals' paradoxical Self-concept and that the multifaceted nature of Selfhood is actively displayed and demonstrated within mass communication.

## **Section 1: Theoretical Model of Identity Dissonance**

I cannot remember a time when I did not take it as understood that everybody has at least two, if not twenty-two sides to him [or her].

Robertson Davies - Fifth Business

The recognition that we are naturally composed of multiple aspects of Self supports the outlook proposing that, as individuals, we develop a complex subjective system of identities, a perspective that forms the basis for this paper's exploration of identity development. Identity is constructed using Self-perceptions. Each person is born with innate characteristics, exclusive to his or herself, which ensures that we are all unique. However, we are all a product, not only of our inherited dispositions, but of our social environments. Individuals develop Self-understanding or knowledge from evaluations (comparisons or contrasts) conducted between their Selves and those Others that they encounter in their social lives.

I present a model of Self that consists of three *inter-related* parts: the 'I', 'Me' and 'Contextually Sensitive' Self-structures. This configuration is based on the assumption that individuals continuously encounter new situations and people which contribute to their learning and development. Identity is the result of a relationship between knowledge contained within an individual's Self-concept and the environmental context in which they exist. It is this combination that creates identity; and ultimately, these relationships dictate how people will develop and grow.

As people cultivate ever more complex relationships, and the diversity within the Self-concept is represented by a greater prevalence of identities, they may encounter situations where certain identities become positioned oppositionally; thus causing a process that this essay defines as 'identity dissonance'. According to Leon Festinger (1957) dissonance is a personal feeling of disquiet or disequilibrium that occurs when cognitions are positioned in opposition. For the purposes of this paper this concept of dissonance will also be applied to schemata or scripts pertaining in particular to identity. Identity dissonance, dissonance pertaining to identities in opposition, is conceptualized as a natural (and presumably unavoidable) byproduct of identity development.

### ***Chapter I: The Components of Selfhood***

#### **The Self Defined:**

The 'Self' or 'Self-concept' refers to an individual's conceptualization or understanding of his or her own characteristics and qualities as a human being. Self-concepts contain information pertaining to the way we see both our Selves and Others, and influence how we choose to communicate. When referring to the concept of 'Self' I am referring not only to our 'real' Self (who we actually believe ourselves to be) but also the 'ideal' Self (who we aspire to be). According to Markus (1977),

the concept of self-schema implies that information about the self in some area has been categorized or organized and that the result of this organization is a discernible pattern which may be used as a basis for future judgments, decisions, inferences, or predictions about the self. (p. 64)

Self-schemata can be comprised of traits, abilities, values, motives, preferences or numerous other internal attributes (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). Essentially the term Self-concept refers to the relationship that an individual has uniquely and exclusively with their own Self – an overall or overarching understanding of one's personhood.

Conversely, 'identity' can be regarded as the Self-in-context (Fitzgerald, 1993); an understanding of roles or abilities gathered through social interaction. Identity consists of an individual's relationship to Others and grows out of knowledge maintained in the Self-concept. Identity is composed of information that is relevant for social interactions and understanding the Self in relation to Others (i.e. social-roles) and the more identities held by the individual the more stable and less distressed the individual should be (Thoits, 1983). Identities are established, sustained, and often altered through communication with Others, but the basis for their formation is information residing in Self-structures. Often the concepts 'Self' and 'Identity' are regarded as interchangeable. Nevertheless, in allegiance with other identity theorists such as Graafsma (1994) I assume that, though the Self and identity are undeniably linked conceptually, they must be acknowledged and treated as very different and distinct concepts.

Identity development arises out of comparison and relationship with Others. Identity formation based on social comparison has been proposed by numerous theorists, such as Thomas K. Fitzgerald (1993), Henri Tajfel (1978), Leon Festinger (1957), and George Herbert Mead (1934). Self-Other comparisons are integral to the process of identity development as

it is through role-taking and social interaction that the individual discovers an inner psychological world, conceptualizes the self in terms of interpersonal relationships, rests conclusions about the self on logical and evidential foundations, and anchors knowledge about the self within the self. (Rosenberg, 1986, p. 119)

Self-understanding is connected to comprehension of the Self in relation to the larger social sphere (Burkitt (1991); Rosenberg (1986); Markus (1977); Erikson (1968)). I propose that the process by which the individual constructs understanding of Self-Other relationships consists of that person repeatedly asking him or herself four basic questions. They are: 1) "Who am I?" 2) "Who are Others in relation to me?" 3) "As a group member who am I in relation to other groups?" 4) "How does my society regard me?". All four questions are then followed by: "How do I feel about my answers?". This constant evaluation is necessary for the construction of identity, the negotiation of social relationships, and for composing an understanding of Self-in-context. It is only from persistent questioning of Self in relation to Others or "positive assessment of similarities and differences" (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 116), that individuals become aware of their own personal feelings, and thus knowledgeable about their identities. Self-Other comparisons, and the information that results from these examinations, 'create' identity and propel development.

Morris Rosenberg's (1986) analysis of how young children conceptualize their world in reference to a series of connections with Others lends more evidence to the perspective that Self-Other comparisons are an essential part of identity development. He concludes that with age comes growth of more complex and detailed Self-schemata. Rosenberg

regards role-taking or 'mutual perspective taking' where "the self comes to be described in terms of the nature of its interaction with others" (1986, p. 114), as a vital part of the shift from childhood to adulthood. Consequently, Rosenberg's (1986) research supports the notion that complex and dynamic Self-Other relationships are characteristic of identity development and the aging Self.

Identity is gained not only through recognition of shared similarities with Others, or analysis of what is unique about the Other, but also by an actual empathic immersion of Self in the Other's viewpoint. By evaluating one's own Self through the Other's 'eyes' more information regarding identity, particularly one's social identity, can be attained.

Only by taking the attitude of the generalized other toward himself [or herself] ...can he [or she] think at all; for only thus can thinking - or the internalized conversation of gestures which constitutes thinking - occur. And only through the taking by individuals of the attitude or attitudes of the generalized other toward themselves is the existence of a universe of discourse, as that system of common or social meanings which thinking presupposes at its context, rendered possible. (Mead, 1934, p. 156)

Mead proposes that individuals need something to contrast their Selves against if Self awareness is to be attainable. In a more concise and explicit statement Mead clarifies his position, stating,

we cannot realize ourselves except in so far as we can recognize the other in his [or her] relationship to us. It is as he [or she] takes the attitude of the other that the individual is able to realize himself [or herself] as a self. (Mead, 1934, p. 194)

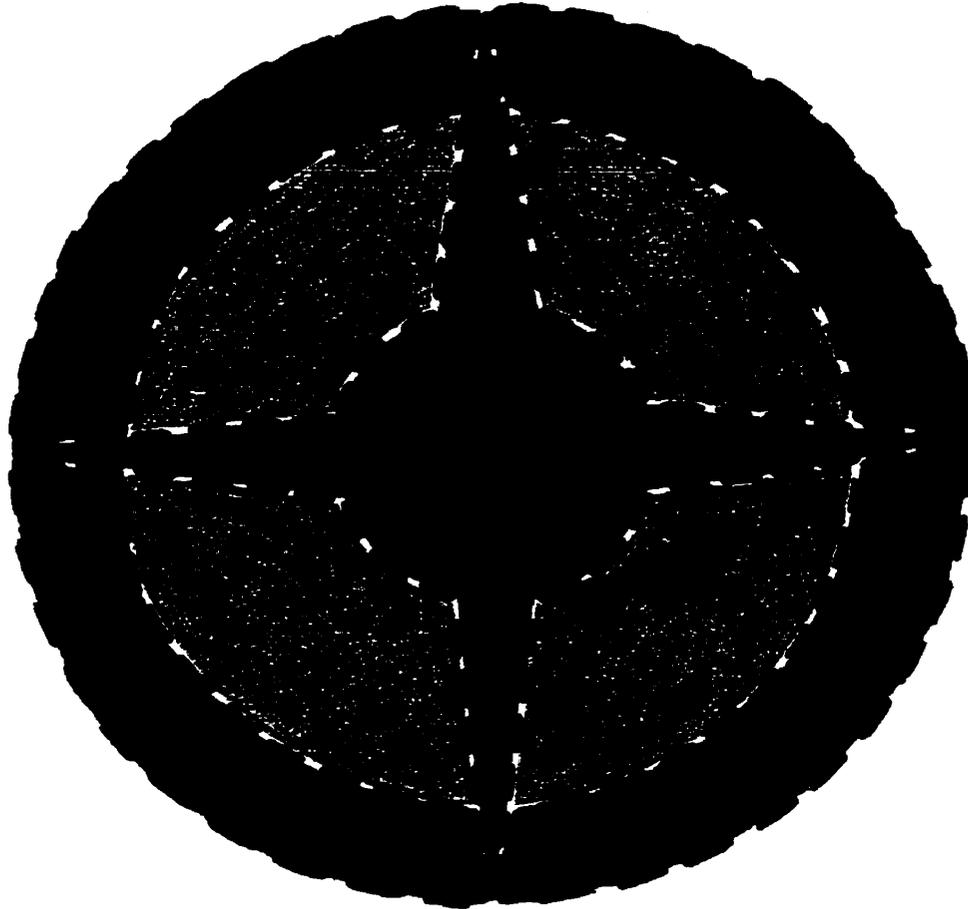
Heinz Kohut's (1977) theorizing elaborates this relationship by specifying that it is the empathic responses of the Other (whom he refers to as the Self-object) that dictate the quality of the identity that subsequently develops in the individual. Therefore, the

temperament of Others and the manner in which they choose to relate to the Self plays a vital role in the development of the Self-concept and identity.

All people are not equally important to the Self, some will be deemed more influential and consequently receive more attention. Therefore, some Others ultimately have more influence in the shaping of identity. Foucault's (1980) notion of the Self developing from power relations and his recognition of the impact that Others have on Self-construction and Self-perception is reflected in my model of identity development. It is the value an individual attributes to an Other that is the deciding factor on how influential that Other will be in the development of the Self-concept, and consequently, identity development.

Altogether three structures comprise the Self. The first structure, the 'I', is innate, and contains that which is inherently unique to all individuals. The second structure is the 'Me' and it contains knowledge gained from, or necessary for, operating in social situations. The third level is 'Contextually Sensitive' and operates according to highly variable situationally-relevant schemata (see Figure 2)<sup>4</sup>. The three Self-structures that I propose are not static, they develop over time and also allow for movement of knowledge and schemata between themselves. It should be understood that schemata do not operate in complete isolation from one another. Instead, the individual's Self-schemata should be conceived as operating only in degrees of separation/relation to each other; as they all combine to create a network of interconnected conceptual bundles. In addition, though the word 'structure' implies separation it should not be assumed that the schemata are isolated between these boundaries. The dotted line in the visual depiction of my model

Figure 2. A diagram depicting the three structures that compose the Self.



-  = **'I' Self-Structure**
-  = **'Me' Self-Structure**
-  = **'Contextually Sensitive' Self-Structure**

(see Figure 2) attempts to portray the flow between the three Self-structures; as schemata, under my theoretical assumptions, are able to branch out to encompass all parts of the Self. These structures ('I', 'Me' and 'Context-Sensitive') comprise the Self, and they function to assist in identity development.

### **'I' Self-Structure:**

The 'I' Self-structure stems from 'core' characteristics, an essence with which all individuals are born. My model presumes that the primary determinant of Self-understanding is the innate 'I' sense of Self that we are born with. The Self's 'I' is operational prior to, and without the necessity for, experience; it is a structure whose characteristics and influence permeate into the other two Self-structures. It is inherently individualized, the part of ourselves that is the result of our biology, our genetic inheritance. The 'I' contains schemata pertaining to the individualized manner with which people view themselves and consequently is the most static of the Self-structures (i.e. a person's sexual orientation or basic inherited personality characteristics such as predisposition towards shyness). The 'I' Self-structure is a baseline from which schemata from all structures develop. The 'I' Self-structure is a biologically determined 'lens' that colours people's perception of Others and shapes their orientation to their world.

My model develops George H. Mead's (1934) understanding of Self. According to Mead's (1934) theorizing, the Self is comprised of two main parts: the 'I', a structure responsible for a person's attitude towards, and responses to, Others; and the 'Me', an 'organized set of attitudes of others' which the person then assumes. His

conceptualization has the 'Me' exerting social control over the 'I', setting the limits on the 'I's' Self-expression according to what is socially acceptable (1934). Mead seems to have a very Freudian conceptualization of Self with the individual requiring the 'Me'(Ego/Superego) to control the indulgent 'I' (Id). Though my theorizing recognizes, as Mead does, the notion that the 'I' contains uniquely individualized information, it does not accept that the 'I' is developed primarily through interaction with Others (1934). Mead proposes that society's impact on the Self would be organized by the 'I' and that this structure would be responsible for the final actions that were utilized by the individual in social situations (1934). Consequently, the 'I' would be very influenced by social context. Instead, this paper's formulation is more similar to Rosenberg's (1986) 'baseline' portion of the Self-concept, or Kohut's understanding of the 'nuclear self' (Jones, E., 1981) as these theorists conceived of a core structure which would contain only the most basic and stable traits (therefore minimally influenced by social context) exhibited by individuals.

#### **'Me' Self-Structure:**

In contrast to the 'I', the role of the 'Me' is to navigate and attend to an individual's socialness. This structure contains information essential for the development of a person's sense of group affiliation(s) or Self-in-relation-to-Others. For example, the Self-learning that occurs in situations of social comparison is expressed in feelings such as "I feel happy/sad about being a good/bad student in relation to my peers and the expectations placed upon me". In comparison to the 'I', the 'Me' is very influenced by

personal experiences and social exposure. Mead (1934) argues that this structure represents the values of the society in which the individual is operating; consequently, Mead perceives the 'Me' to be particularly sensitive to social environment. Though this paper's model, in accordance with Mead, conceptualizes this structure to be responsible for the social aspects of identity, it does not assume that the values represented in the 'Me's' schemata are direct reflections of those proposed by an individual's social context. Instead, the 'Me' at its most essential is an environment which holds an individual's awareness of social norms and protocols which he or she then, at the very least subconsciously, acknowledges while proceeding to assemble the schemata utilized in the coordination of social perceptions and behavior connected to identity.

It should not be assumed that these two structures, the 'I' and the 'Me', are autonomous. In accordance with Mead's (1934) perspective, this essay's model suggests not only that a dialogue occurs between these two structures but that neither could exist without the other. To conceptualize their interconnectedness they could be diagrammed using the symbol:  $\infty$ , inextricably linked, forever allowing for information to flow from one structure to the other. Ultimately, a person's Self-concept is the result of a cognitive interplay between what is innately available psychologically for development and the social experiences of the individual.

#### **'Contextually-Sensitive' Self-Structure:**

The model presented in this paper presumes a third level of Self that is 'Contextually Sensitive'; a structure which contains transitory, situationally relevant schemata which

are constantly fluctuating and volatile. The slippery nature of this structure is necessary in order for the individual to fulfill daily needs for diversity in behavior, and to coordinate a situationally relevant approach.

You are many things, in many places, with many people. Thus, you have many contextualized selves, each with a set of features. The features of these contextualized selves, this family of selves, will overlap in some ways and be distinctive in others. (Pervin, 1989, p. 462)

'Contextually-Sensitive' schemata are 'dialogues' which are developed using evaluations made by the 'I' and the 'Me'. My three tiered model of the Self, which shares similarities with John Hewitt's (1991) theorizing, assumes the need for individuals to adopt (and maintain) adaptive identities to assist in new, never-before-conceived social realities, or situations where the expression of one's general sense of Self or identities would be less desirable or detrimental. For example, a person may choose to suppress their standard loud, outgoing, self-absorbed personality at a job interview in favor of the implementation of a more subdued obedient, socially attentive identity so that they may win the favor of the interviewer and meet the demands of the context. Because this Self-structure is very attuned to situational variables it is less likely to be reliant on schemata relating to the 'I' Self-structure.

Maintaining a multiplicity of contextual Self-schemata can be extremely adaptive. Henri Tajfel (1978) notes that individuals try to make sense of their world by organizing and ordering their environments using stereotypes and schemata. These 'shortcuts' allow people to alleviate lengthy evaluation processes by basing current decision-making on assumptions that have been previously constructed. Bearing in mind that each day

provides an individual with a multitude of situations, there are numerous opportunities for a person to express diverse, though appropriate, identities derived from previously constructed, context sensitive, stereotypes and schemata. If we were to approach every person and event as unique, without having any expectations about what they would be like, we would be overwhelmed by the uncertainty and complexity of modern life. Thus, we tend to organize our world in terms of categories (Alcock et al., 1991). Situationally relevant Self-conceptions are utilized when environments call for Self-understandings or transitory identities that are not generally necessary, or, are contrary to the individual's core conceptions of Self to be found in the 'I' Self-structure.

It needs to be stressed that the third component of Self is not wholly independent of the other two more stable structures. More accurately, the 'Contextually-Sensitive' portion is based on the interaction between unique experiences and previously established, less transitory Self-schemata. Thus the 'I' and the 'Me' structures and their associated schemata, act as blueprints on which subsequently more transient, 'Context-Sensitive' Self-conceptions, and thus identities, can be based. The schemata associated with this structure are not randomly developed, just less constrained by the overall nature of the individual. Rosenberg (1986) has a similar conceptual approach presuming a 'barometric' Self-understanding that can fluctuate significantly while a 'baseline' Self-concept remains stable. In summary, I propose that the three structures (the 'I', the 'Me', and the 'Context-Sensitive' schemata) constitute an individual's Self and are the necessary components from which identity develops.

## **Chapter II: The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance**

### **Festinger's Approach:**

My concept of identity dissonance is based on work by Leon Festinger. In 1957, Festinger introduced his theory of cognitive dissonance which merged the fields of cognition and motivation (Aronson, 1992). Dissonance can be defined as “the existence of nonfitting relations among cognitions” (Festinger, 1957, p. 3), an uncomfortable experience which individuals are motivated to remove from their lives. Festinger (1957) outlines how dissonance can arise under a number of circumstances: logical inconsistency, cultural rules of conduct, the ramifications of cognitive groupings, or the influence of past experiences. Dissonance often results from daily interactions with people and encounters with information that are not reflective of opinions currently held (Festinger, 1957), therefore every personal interaction and every cognition is a possible source of dissonance. Ultimately, any situation or instance that can induce the organization of cognitions into oppositional positions has the potential to cause dissonance.

Festinger's (1957) theory assumes that there is an essential drive toward maintaining or reestablishing consistency in thoughts and behaviors, a basic instinct to try to relieve the uneasiness produced by disharmony between cognitions. Beauvois and Joule (1996) point out that numerous theorists have proposed that individuals have an idealized state of cognitive organization that is based on a need or drive for consistency: Newcomb (1953) talked about the individual's wish for 'symmetry', Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955)

explain the desire for 'congruence', Festinger (1957) proposed the theory of 'consonance' and Heider (1958) proffered his 'balance' theory. Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance states that

people strive for consistency among their cognitions regarding their actions, beliefs, past experiences, and so forth. Accordingly, when faced with cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent, the individual experiences dissonance, an uncomfortable motivational state similar to hunger or thirst. Once dissonance is aroused, the individual becomes motivated to reduce it, either by changing one or both cognitions to make them more consonant or by adding a third cognition which will render the original cognitions less inconsistent with one another. (Aronson, 1997, p. 22)

If techniques of avoidance are not effective and the inconsistency stays, Festinger (1957) concludes that the individual then experiences 'psychological discomfort' or dissonance. Consistency can be defined as agreement between feelings or actions, for example, we expect someone we like to like the same things we do (DeVito, 1989). Festinger's theory is based on an understanding that individuals strive to maintain consistency in their lives and that there is a tendency for people to want to maintain balance amongst their perceptions and attitudes.

According to Festinger (1957), to determine the overall level of discomfort, or cognitive dissonance, the characteristics of the conflicting elements must be examined. Not all dissonant relationships are of 'equal magnitude' (Festinger, 1957). The "*maximum dissonance that can possibly exist between any two elements is equal to the total resistance to change of the less resistant element*" (Festinger, 1957, p. 28), as once this threshold is reached the less resistant element will collapse and the dissonance will be

removed. Specifically Festinger makes two hypotheses regarding the degree of dissonance that will be experienced by an individual:

*If two elements are dissonant with one another, the magnitude of the dissonance will be a function of the importance of the elements. The more these elements are important to, or valued by, the person, the greater will be the magnitude of a dissonant relation between them...[and] the total amount of dissonance between this element and the remainder of the person's cognition will depend on the proportion of relevant elements that are dissonant with the one in question. Thus if the overwhelming majority of relevant elements are consonant with, say, a behavioral element, then the dissonance with this behavioral element is slight. If in relation to the number of elements consonant with the behavioral element the number of dissonant elements is large, the total dissonance will be of appreciable magnitude. (1957, p. 16-17)*

Consequently, the degree of dissonance experienced is dependent upon the significance that the elements are accorded by the Self and their relation to other inter-connected cognitive elements. Ultimately, the magnitude of the disturbance is an important determinant of whether a person will be pressured to resolve or reduce their dissonance (Festinger, 1957).

The greater the dissonance the larger the drive for reduction (Festinger, 1957).

Festinger (1957) suggests a number of ways to reduce dissonance: change the originating action or feeling that induced the conflict, add new cognitions to reduce the dissonance, or remove oneself from the physical or social environment that reinforces the dissonance. He also hypothesizes that some people might be more accepting of dissonance than others:

One would expect a person with low tolerance for dissonance to see issues more in terms of "black and white" than would a person with high

tolerance for dissonance who might be expected to be able to maintain “grays” in his [or her] cognition. (Festinger, 1957, p. 267)

In addition, Festinger (1957) recognizes that the effectiveness of dissonance reducing techniques will vary from person to person, as will the preference for a particular method. To completely eliminate dissonance Festinger (1957) assumes that the cognitive element that is causing the disturbance must be removed, although he does recognize that often this is an impossible task to accomplish.

#### **Aronson’s Expansion:**

Elliot Aronson’s development of Leon Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance lies in Aronson’s recognition of the importance of the Self-concept. Aronson’s theorizing centers around three predictions that he makes regarding how individuals govern their lives. He proposes that people are always striving to: 1) maintain an established, permanent, and predictable sense of Self 2) preserve a competent Self-concept 3) preserve a positive moral sense of Self (Aronson, 1992). With these goals in mind, Aronson concludes that cognitive dissonance theory “is greatest and clearest when it involves not just any two cognitions but, rather, a cognition about the self and a piece of our behavior that violates that self-concept” (Aronson, 1992, p. 305). Aronson (1969) states that the major weakness with Festinger’s theory is its conceptual ambiguity regarding the limits and boundaries of cognitive dissonance’s theoretical application. According to Aronson (1969), dissonance is not only the result of logical inconsistencies but also psychological incompatibilities because “if dissonance exists it is because the individual’s behavior is

inconsistent with his [or her] self-concept” (p. 27). Aronson’s expansion of Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance to include the predominant influence of the individual’s Self-concept is both a vital and valuable extension of dissonance theory.

Aronson (1969) presumes that cognitive dissonance arises due to people’s need to rationalize their actions to themselves and Others. Aronson, along with Carlsmith, argues that “dissonance would occur when negative [or positive] self-expectancies were violated” (Aronson, 1997, p. 24). For example, when a person with low Self-esteem does something that results in positive Self-reflection the person will experience dissonance due to the breaking of Self-expectancies. Aronson (1997) concludes that “the greater the personal commitment or self-involvement implied by the action and the smaller the *external* justification for the action, the greater the dissonance and, therefore, the more powerful the attitude change” (p. 24-25). Consequently, like Festinger, Aronson (1969) recognizes that each person will have a unique and individual reaction to dissonance.

Dissonance reduction, as Aronson (1997) envisions it, always involves some level of Self-justification. According to Aronson “what leads me to perform dissonance-reducing behavior is my having done something that (a) astonishes me, (b) makes me feel stupid, or (c) makes me feel guilty” (1992, p. 305). As dissonance arousal is caused by a disturbance in Self-concept, dissonance removal is based upon reparations being made to the Self in order to ease the distress. “Specifically, dissonance reduction will typically involve an effort to maintain two important elements of the self-concept: the sense of self as both (a) morally good and (b) competent” (Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992, p. 592).

These two Self-conceptions, which Thibodeau and Aronson propose are present in any healthy person, are what motivates individuals to take action to dissipate the mental discomfort brought on by dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is rooted in disruptions to the Self-concept, consequently, it can only be repaired by addressing the damage in a manner that re-establishes the previous Self-schemata, or, allows for the development of new and acceptable Self-definitions.

### ***Chapter III: The Theory of Identity Dissonance***

#### **How Identity Dissonance Occurs:**

Increasingly we emerge as the possessors of many voices. Each self contains a multiplicity of others, singing different melodies, different verses, and with different rhythms. Nor do these many voices necessarily harmonize. At times they join together, at times they fail to listen one to another, and at times they create a jarring discord. But what are the consequences of the multiply populated self? (Gergen, 1991, p. 83)

To begin to answer Gergen's query: a consequence of the multiply populated Self is identity dissonance. Individuals may not only accept a certain level of identity dissonance in their lives but also embrace it as both an unavoidable and intrinsic side effect of the process of identity construction. In order to examine the consequence of an identity development which includes aspects that are discordant or dissonant, Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance is expanded to specifically include the scenario of identities in conflict and, in so doing, his theory is both deepened and broadened. Frequently what distinguishes cognitive dissonance experiments is that they are actually

examining issues pertaining to identity (see for example Murphy & Miller, 1997; Mahaffy, 1996), therefore in certain circumstances it would seem most descriptively accurate to refer to the effect being measured as identity dissonance rather than cognitive.

Identity dissonance as a theoretical concept, not only refers to an uneasy feeling of disquiet (Festinger, 1957), but can also be regarded as a label which describes the oppositional positioning of two identities. Identity dissonance is the consequence of a disequilibrium that results when internalized identity-schemata are psychologically perceived as in opposition. It occurs when there is roughly equal commitment to two or more identities; these identities to be dissonant must contain information and values that are contradictory to each other. Ultimately, when an individual regards these identities as vital to his or her Self-concept but recognizes (either consciously or unconsciously) that they actually oppose each other, identity dissonance will be experienced.

The conceptualization of identities in dissonance put forth by this paper recognizes the importance of the Self-concept in the development of dissonance, but in contrast to other understandings of dissonance, assumes that an equally important way of theorizing about dissonance is to conceptualize the conflict as occurring between identities. Festinger (1957) concludes that dissonance occurs when cognitions are in opposition, Aronson (1969), when a behavior occurs that is inconsistent with the Self-concept. Though I recognize the importance of the Self-concept (as it is responsible not only for the development of identities, but also their organization), I postulate that the Self-concept is not directly involved in the development of dissonance. Thibodeau & Aronson (1992)

conclude that “according to the self-concept position, it is the psychological significance of a behavior, as it reflects on the self, that carries the potential to arouse dissonance” (p. 594). Consequently, Aronson conceptualizes dissonance as arising or resulting from counterattitudinal behavior. In contrast, I argue that the Self-concept is naturally inconsistent and that ultimately it is this inconsistency that sparks the development of conflictual identities. Because dissonance is the result of action taken in the world (as explained by Festinger and Aronson’s behavior induced dissonance) according to my theorizing, identities can suffer from dissonance, but not the Self. The Self does not directly act in the world, but rather its wishes, needs, values etc. are manifested in identities which, once recognized by an individual as contradictory, set off the process of identity dissonance. If an individual does not recognize or perceive his or her feelings and/or behaviors to be manifestations of conflict between identities, the individual will not experience ‘identity dissonance’. Awareness of the inconsistency of Self, as manifested in identities, is what triggers feelings of identity dissonance.

According to my theory, dissonance occurs when conflicting identities are consistent with, or representative of, the expectations and desires of the Self-concept instead of only when the baseline understanding of Self is threatened, as Aronson presumes. In contrast to Kerpelman, Pittman & Lamke’s (1997a, 1997b) theorizing, identity dissonance is not based on an activation model; therefore identities that are positioned in opposition are not the result of a particular ‘action’ taken by the individual, nor the outcome from one competing identity being accepted and the other ‘interrupted’, as Burke (1991) theorizes<sup>5</sup>.

Instead, I propose that dissonance can take place when identities being maintained are of importance to the Self, though conceived as oppositional by the individual. Although the theory of identity dissonance recognizes that individuals are motivated by a drive for consistency, it nevertheless is based upon the presumption that our Self-concepts are inconsistent, that individuals are contradictory by nature. My theory suggests that Selves are composed of needs and desires that are often in opposition to each other and that this reality may explain why individuals experience the drive towards internal consistency. People do not seem by disposition to be consistent, but consistency is the most 'comfortable' state for the psyche (Heider, 1958), therefore humans are motivated to try and attain this state of being. A motivation towards consistency is what removes dissonance, but what causes dissonance is the reality of people's inconsistencies.

Societal influences promote the development of an inconsistent Self-temperament. I assume that individuals are constantly exploring their external world for Self-relevant information. Information that is vital in the development of new or already held identities, or for verification of the presently held identities' value and validity in their lives (often based on their acceptance or positive endorsements by society). Ultimately, I argue that a determining factor in the degree of Self-inconsistency that will most likely be experienced are the demands put upon people by their social environment. North Americans are often confronted with socially prescribed but oppositionally situated identities and/or values (i.e. for women, the Madonna-Whore dichotomy), between which individuals cannot be expected to attain congruence. Therefore, I propose that dissonance

is the natural repercussion of multiple conceptualizations of Self-in-relation-to-the-world (or being in the possession of multiple, oppositional, valued and valuable, identities) which are necessary for effective navigation of Self-in-society and part of a healthy Self-concept.

Identity dissonance theory proposes that the range of valued identities that a modern and effective Self-concept has available for integration are most often contradictory in nature; consequently, everyday life and normal Self-concept development encourage the adoption of identities in opposition. Erikson (1968) proposes that the main task of adolescence is the formation of a stable understanding of Self. My perspective presumes that a 'stable' Self-concept is also a dissonant one. This assumption is contrary to an interruption model of identity development, postulated by such theorists as Kerpelman et al. (1997a) and Burke (1991), where dissonance is perceived as preventing the normal operation and status quo of identity maintenance. In contrast, Festinger (1957) states that "some dissonance is the usual state of affairs" (p. 17) because "for almost any action a person might take, for almost any feeling he [or she] might have, there will most likely be at least one cognitive element dissonant with this 'behavioral' element" (p. 16). Identity dissonance theory specifies that feelings of dissonance are not just the result of a behavioral action but also a repercussion of living in a continuously evolving modern society -- an environment of constant social change, inducing the need for a continual evolution of social norms, values, and expectations. The multifaceted nature of society demands that an individual be highly aware of his or her own disparate Self, as

individuals who both explore and develop their own diverse nature will be better able to successfully negotiate constant social change. Therefore, dissonance is not just the result of a single action or behavioral response (as proposed by Kerpelman et al., 1997a; Aronson, 1969; Festinger, 1957) but also an inherent repercussion of identity development and social exposure. Accordingly, dissonance effects are influenced by individual differences (Thibodeau & Aronson, 1992; Snyder & Tanke, 1976; Epstein, 1969). People are constantly accepting and living with dissonance, resolving dissonance, and encountering new situations/cognitions/Self-perceptions that promote the development of new dissonances. Ultimately, when experiencing identity dissonance an individual may choose to accept, deny, ignore, remove, or resist its presence.

#### **Factors Influencing the Magnitude of Identity Dissonance:**

Identity dissonance does not always cause the same degree of disturbance. Instead, the magnitude of the discord relates to the value that the individual places on that disagreement. Burke (1991) discusses how interrupted identity processes cause stress:

The magnitude of distress experience [sic] by an individual is a function of the severity of the interruption itself, the degree to which the interrupted identity process is highly organized, the degree to which the individual is committed to the identity, and the significance to the individual of an interrupted source of input (feedback). (p. 841)

He concludes that the more salient and systematic the identities, the greater the likelihood that the individual will experience anxiety. Therefore the degree of dissonance experienced could relate to what kind of identities are in dissonance and how the individual perceives their Self-importance. According to the model of Self proposed by

this paper it is assumed that schemata relating to the 'I' Self-structure are those that are the most reflective of, and connected to, the Self's essential nature (the needs, desires and values that we are born with and which shape our conceptualization of the world).

Consequently, schemata located in the 'I' Self-structure would be extremely important to the individual. Determining how close to the center of the circular model of Self (see Figure 2) the schemata causing the dissonance are rooted is one important means of predicting the degree of dissonance that may be experienced. Thus, 'Contextually-Sensitive' identities, which are only minimally connected to the individual's core disposition, would be least likely to be involved in significant forms of identity dissonance; in contrast, identity schemata located in the 'I' Self-structure should have the potential to cause the greatest amount of dissonance.

It is important to be aware of how identity ranking can affect levels of dissonance. My model assumes that identities are ranked by the Self in order of relevance and importance. Kerpelman et al.'s (1997a) model of identity development rests on the same assumption: that there is a hierarchy of 'identity standards' that the individual calls upon and utilizes<sup>6</sup>.

The identity control perspective posits an emergent structure that is seen in a developing hierarchy of salience among identity standards. At any point in an individual's life, the *content* of the hierarchy would be shaped by the individual's developmental period and their social or cultural context. Developmental period and context would be associated with a set of normative self-perceptions. Within any combination of period and context, however, the *arrangement* of those identity standards within the hierarchy would depend on...individual differences. (Kerpelman et al., 1997b, p. 365)

The salience or importance of identities to the Self change over time, and consequently, identities will be constantly re-evaluated and re-positioned. Identity rankings will reflect the most important needs and desires of the Self-concept and this will be reflected in the individual's reaction to dissonance.

The theory of identity dissonance does not propose that individuals would necessarily refrain from pursuing information or situations which would induce dissonance. Consequently, in accordance with Beauvois and Joule (1996), I disagree with Festinger's statement that "when dissonance is present, in addition to trying to reduce it, the person will actively avoid situations and information which would likely increase the dissonance" (Festinger, 1957, p. 3). I assume that individuals may often seek out information that will increase the magnitude of their dissonance, as commitment to defend an identity's prominence and position in the psyche, or the decision to integrate new Self-conceptions, can be influenced by positive or negative cultural evaluations (Thoits, 1983). Thus, maintaining or increasing dissonance could be beneficial, based on the identities' usefulness and importance (Mills, Aronson, & Robinson, 1959), and their social utility (Allen, 1968). Berzonsky (1997) recognizes that just because dissonance arousal occurs does not mean that the individual will make changes. Dissonance does not necessarily remove the desirability or attractiveness from identities, as the positive gains may very possibly outweigh the negative experience of dissonance.

Ultimately identity dissonance is not necessarily a negative experience<sup>7</sup>. Though the feelings that result from dissonance are aversive by nature, the overall experience need

not be damaging and could even be regarded as having a positive effect (Cooper & Fazio, 1984). When individuals are uncomfortable with the disquiet caused by dissonance they will react in a manner that reflects psychological unease and distress. Their increased stress levels may evoke noticeable feelings of discomfort and disturbed behavioral cues (Burke, 1991). For example, frustration over identity dissonance may be displayed in behaviors such as short-temperedness, confusion, uncertainty in interpersonal dealings, and inconsistency in actions. In contrast, individuals who are more accepting, or positively motivated by the presence of identity dissonance may experience emotions and behaviors that are both agreeable and socially adaptive. Identity dissonance, when regarded and managed positively, may lead to dynamic and diverse coping strategies, deliberations, and conduct that could assist individuals to adjust effectively to diverse social environments. For example, individuals may feel an increased sense of social competency (resulting from personal awareness that their oppositional identities are providing them with assistance in social interactions) and therefore may be more likely to experience empathic role taking, greater Self-disclosure, and consequently deeper and more intimate friendship development. Overall, identity dissonance can be regarded as a potentially productive component of identity development and part of the healthy expression of an individual's Self-concept.

#### **Factors Influencing the Resolution of Identity Dissonance:**

Identity dissonance is resolved in the same manner as oppositional cognitions: through the removal of the offending conflict and the re-establishment of consistency. Some of

the ways to reduce dissonance, according to Berzonsky (1997), are: rationalize away responsibility (Schlenker & Trudeau, 1990), affirm another perspective or value (Steele & Liu, 1983), or, misattribute the source of the dissonance (Cooper & Fazio, 1984). Berzonsky (1997) credits Festinger with suggesting another manner of dissonance reduction, the modification or altering of the Self-standard. Festinger's solution would provide a very effective way of relieving identity dissonance, as removing the schemata in the Self-concept that necessitated the development of the offending identities will remove the root source of the dissonance. However, not all sources of dissonance can necessarily be removed.

Ultimately, any psychological theory that attempts to explain how identity develops and evolves might benefit by exploring or including the theory of identity dissonance. Nevertheless, this investigation chooses to examine the phenomenon of identity dissonance using a social interaction processing approach reflected in this paper's assumption that identity dissonance and the specific techniques for dissonance removal or reduction are determined by the balancing of social/cultural demands with personal needs and identity management. Integral to this discussion is the presumption, asserted by Festinger (1957), that reactions to dissonance and choices made around its resolution will vary from person to person.

I propose that the three Self-structures are not equally balanced in their influence on identity formation and execution. Instead, their dominance is dependent upon the temperament of the individual, as this determines how much weight will be assigned to

each of the Self-structures. Though all individuals have three structures making up their Self-concept, the influence that a structure will have is determined by the personal values and interests held by each human being. Therefore, it is possible that people are predisposed to gather more information or pay more attention to information that is useful to either their 'I' (personal), 'Me' (social), or the 'Contextually-Sensitive' (situationally variable) Self-structure.

There appear to be repercussions to having certain types of Self-construals. Individuals who are 'high Self-monitors' are particularly sensitive to external social cues, therefore more able to regulate behavior to fit a context, in comparison to those who are 'low Self-monitors' and consequently less attentive to social information and more regulated by internal feelings (Pervin, 1989). Mead (1934) suggests that artists and other types of creative people downplay the influence of the 'Me' for the sake of a more pronounced individuality. Thus, these people would have a greater understanding of their Self's 'I' and would accordingly be far more likely to utilize, and attend to, information and identities that are constructed/based upon this Self-structure. Mead also states that the same would be true for the opposite; that individuals endowed with a more socially oriented nature would be more likely to attend to information (and thus develop identities) relating to the 'Me' portion of their Self (Mead, 1934). For example a member of a government military or army may be more likely to downplay 'I'-related identities for the more pleasurable effects derived from enhancing schemata associated with socialness and belonging. Ultimately, people's personal choices, based on psychological

characteristics, determine the manner in which they relate to their world and seek out information.

Marcia (1966), in a development of Erikson's theorizing regarding ego-identity status, classifies four different approaches to identity development: achieved, foreclosed, diffused, and in moratorium. An 'achieved' identity status is one which has been committed to and attained through personal exploration (Kerpelman et al., 1997a). In contrast, according to Kerpelman et al. (1997a), adolescents with 'foreclosed' identities demonstrate "uncritical commitment to identity positions that have been defined by someone else" (p. 334). Individuals experiencing 'diffused' identity statuses have low commitment to identity positions (Berzonsky, 1990), use situation-specific information to construct identity, and avoid challenging data (Kerpelman et al., 1997a). Finally, commitment to an identity in 'moratorium' is not yet firm, therefore the identity is highly sensitive to the influence of new information (Kerpelman et al, 1997a) thus, prone to change. These four identity statuses influence the way that individuals perceive identity relevant information and consequently are important to this paper's discussion of Self-structures and identity development.

Berzonsky (1990), elaborating on Marcia (1966), proposes that identity statuses indicate different identity processing styles or orientations. He suggests that an individual, depending on identity style, will attend to differing information and engage in assorted means of problem-solving (Berzonsky, 1990). There is research to support the claim that different types of personalities experience different levels of dissonance

(Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1971) and of specific importance to this paper is how an individual's identity status or style may influence the way that he or she manages identity dissonance.

Berzonsky (1997) proposes three identity styles or approaches to Self-theorizing: informational, normative and diffuse/avoidant. The 'achieved' identity status proposed by Marcia (1966) is based on an 'information-oriented' identity style. Accordingly, for a person using this method, there is always room for new information and the individual is receptive to demands for change. In addition, identities in 'moratorium' are similar to those who are 'achieved' as "rather than experiencing distress in response to conflicting types of social feedback, this input would be received largely as information about the self to be tried on" (Kerpelman et al., 1997a, p. 336). 'Achieved' or in 'moratorium' identities actively "using an information-oriented identity style tend to approach challenges with problem focused coping strategies, seeking out and evaluating identity-relevant information....[and] will accommodate and modify their identities when new information demands such changes" (Kerpelman et al., 1997a, p. 335). Consequently, individual's with these identity styles and statuses may be very motivated to resolve dissonance (Berzonsky, 1992, 1997) rather than live with discomfort.

In contrast, individuals with a 'foreclosed' identity status "use a *normative orientation*; their major concern is conforming to the prescriptions and expectations of significant others (e.g. parents) and reference groups" (Berzonsky, 1992). 'Normative' Self-theorists are more resistant to changing their identity standards and may rationalize or discount

inconsistencies (Kerpelman et al., 1997a). Thus, these individuals may be less susceptible to internalizing new identity related knowledge that would produce dissonance (Berzonsky, 1997). Nevertheless, in the face of discrepant information the 'foreclosed' standard may need to suffer significant 'psychological distress' before a change is finally implemented (Kerpelman et al., 1997a). Therefore, people with 'normative' orientations may experience far greater levels of dissonance, though less often, than someone with an 'information-oriented' identity standard.

Finally, people who hold 'diffused' identities and have an 'avoidant' approach to identity development typically "avoid dealing directly with personal problems and basic identity questions" (Berzonsky, 1992). Accordingly people with this status are very susceptible to situational cues and outcomes (Berzonsky, 1992) and are generally more concerned about whether Others perceive them as consistent than being consistent themselves (Berzonsky, 1997). Thus, dissonance may be most likely to occur between identities arising from the 'Context-Sensitive' Self-structure. Though these individuals may experience prolonged dissonance due to situational constraints, effects will most likely be low in magnitude as dissonant identities will only be of concern to the degree that they are socially non-adaptive. Regardless, situational constraints causing dissonance are very likely to change thus bringing about its dissipation.

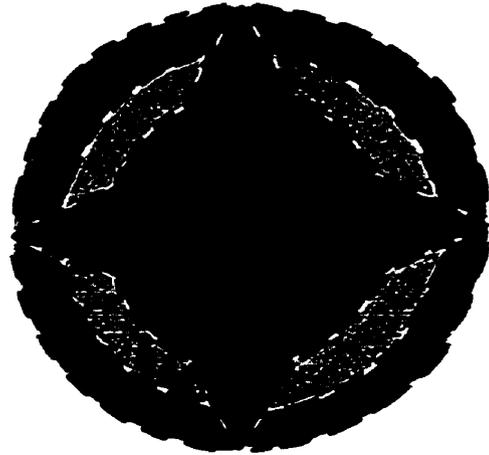
When mapping out different orientations towards identity development, my circular model of Self can demonstrate, through the thickness of its rings, the particular identity style of the individual as defined by Berzonsky (1990, 1992). If 'Information-Oriented',

the person would be very 'I' focused, 'Normative' Self-theorizers would primarily be 'Me' oriented, and 'Diffuse/Avoiders' would be most Context-Sensitive (see Figure 3). The three Self-structures with their associated identity styles provide one more way of postulating how individual differences might effect dissonance reduction. Identity dissonance may occur most often between an identity or identities associated with the 'I' Self-structure, may be most severe when associated with the 'Me' Self-structure, and be of least amount of consequence when attributed to identity/identities located in the Context-Sensitive Self-structure. Though dissonance effects will undoubtedly vary according to culture and socialization, by combining my model of Self with the theorizing put forth by Kerpelman et al., and Berzonsky, there emerges a beginning picture of when, to whom, and to what degree, identity dissonance could occur.

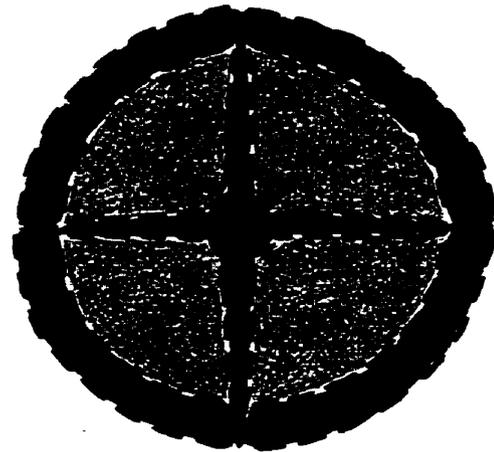
Ultimately, it is the interaction between all three Self-structures that creates individual personalities, and consequently, identities. It is my position that, though people may be predisposed towards a particular identity style, everyone maintains and utilizes all four identity statuses and all three of the identity processing orientations. Consequently, these different approaches to identity must only be regarded as tools to be utilized by individuals to meet ongoing needs. Self-construals most likely vary across culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) therefore, predominance in Self-structures should reflect cultural variations. This paper's model acknowledges how everyone develops identity in all three of the processing orientations as outlined by Berzonsky (1990, 1992) and also assists in the explanation of how one style might dominate, depending on numerous

Figure 3. A diagram of the Self-Structures depicting Identity Processing Styles as defined by Berzonsky (1990).

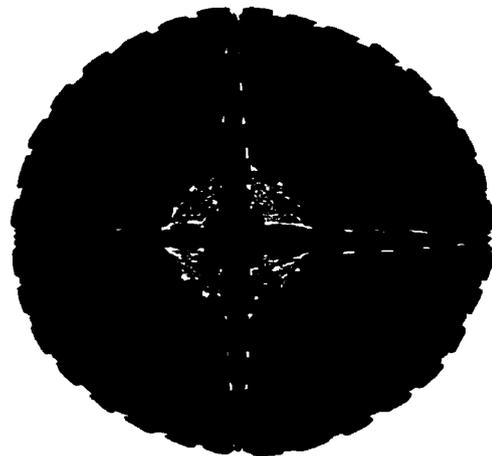
Information Oriented:



Normative:



Diffuse/Avoidant:



-  = 'I' Self-Structure
-  = 'Me' Self-Structure
-  = 'Contextually Sensitive' Self-Structure

situational and psychological factors.

#### **Chapter IV: Identity Dissonance and Women**

Gender is historically and culturally specific. Furthermore, it is most often *beliefs* about gender rather than gender differences themselves that are at issue...Cultures vary tremendously in their assignment of sex roles. Although certainly influential, biology alone does not determine human behavior. Gender becomes largely a symbolic category, an overlapping continuum of possibilities. (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 113)

The term gender refers to the social meanings or roles that people ascribe to themselves, and/or are ascribed to them by their society, according to the biological sex with which they are born. Gender signals a person's social standing and influences how a person regards him or herself (Stets & Burke, 1996). It is important to recognize that the terms 'feminine' and 'masculine' are not fixed; instead they are constantly evolving, and ultimately as traits have the possibility of existing in either of the sexes (Hollway, 1984). Though slippery, these categories have great impact on how individuals conceptualize their Selves and evaluate their Self-worth. Ultimately, gender identity, or gendered subjectivity, is both historically and culturally sensitive and as a consequence significantly influenced by political forces. Gender identity, an understanding of Self in gendered relation to Others, is not fixed, thus provides great opportunity for contradictions, or multiplicity of truths (Simon, 1995), to occur.

#### **Female Identity Development:**

Numerous discussions and studies aim at exploring the characteristics of women's identity and its development. Some theorists propose an innate physiological explanation

for the origin of believed differences between women and men, others suggest that women's social realities are significantly different, and that it is their distinct societal roles that facilitate the appearance of qualities particular to their gender. Specifically, some academics argue that women's special relational needs (a result of their socially mandated upbringing) influence the present shape of their identity and consequently, distinguish their personal development. Regardless of where a theorist sits in this debate he or she would be hard pressed to dismiss the overwhelmingly powerful effects of socially mandated gender roles and expectations in the development of women's gender identity.

Each individual, within the dimensions of normal development, is born with, or into, a sex. A person's 'sex' refers to the biological ingredient which predetermines assignment to a category of gender membership (Skevington & Baker, 1989). "Whereas *sex* refers to the biological dimension of being male or female, *gender* refers to the social dimension of being male or female" (Santrock & Yussen, 1992, p. 578). Therefore, physical features associated with individuals' bodies denotes sex, but the meanings (social roles, behaviors etc.) ascribed to their bodies, is their gender. Gender identity has been described as "the sense of being male or female, which most children acquire by 3 years of age" (Santrock & Yussen, 1992, p. 578). Lips (1993) agrees that "*gender identity* is defined as the individual's private experience of the self as female or male - a powerful aspect of the self-concept that is formed early in childhood and, in most adults, extremely resistant to change" (1993, p. 49). Regardless of this assumption, this essay proposes that though

gender identity is resistant to change (possibly because the schemata related are dense and pervasive), it is never immune from influence or expansion due to social forces.

Many distinguished identity theorists have concluded that 'female' characteristics result from women's unique physiological makeup. Specifically both Erikson and Freud propagate the 'biology as destiny' perspective. "Freudian theory takes masculinity and male anatomy as the human standard; femininity and female anatomy are deviations from that standard" (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988, p. 457). This assumption is reflected in Freud's theory regarding the female 'castration complex': a painful psychological experience where a girl come to acknowledge the "superiority of the male and her own inferiority" (Freud, 1961, p. 229) due to feelings brought about by the realization that she lacks a penis. Erik Erikson bases his ego psychology on many of the same psychoanalytic principles. He concludes from his 'Guidance Study', involving the evaluation of children's play behavior, that "girls and boys used space differently, and that certain configurations occurred strikingly often in the constructions of one sex and rarely in those of the other...the girls emphasized *inner* and the boys *outer* space" (Erikson, 1968, p. 270). Erikson attributes the noticeable differences in play behavior between the sexes (girls were found to construct and play with enclosures and interiors where boys built high structures and 'protrusions') to differences in the genital configuration of males and females. And, in response to the question whether he believes anatomy governs gender, Erikson replies

yes, it is destiny, insofar as it determines not only the range and configuration of physiological functioning and its limitation but also, to an

extent, personality configurations. The basic modalities of woman's commitment and involvement naturally also reflect the ground plan of her body. (1968, p. 285)

Therefore, Erikson, as Freud before him, assumes a relationship between identity characteristics and female physiology.

In an expansion of the theoretical assumption of biological destiny, it has been postulated that being born female predetermines a child to receive a distinctly unique socialization which consequently constructs the characteristic female gender identity as presently observed in North American society. Sociologist Nancy Chodorow, building on psychoanalytic theory, declares there to be differences in boys' and girls' ego development and personality construction (Freed, 1985). She argues, that as a result of the mother-child relationship, girls and boys will proceed from childhood with very different emotional requirements.

Girls emerge from the preoedipal stage with a basis for empathy built into their primary definition of self because there is a continuity of relationship and attachment and they do not have to defend themselves by denying preoedipal relations. They have less demand for differentiation and add father as a primary object without a strong need to turn from mother. (Freed, 1985, p. 207)

Chodorow concludes that girls' development makes it 'natural' for them to maintain connections and not to be threatened (in comparison to boys) by intimacy. Numerous concerns have been raised regarding this theoretical understanding of gender identity and its assumption that "a brief period in early life is responsible for broad-ranging differences in men's and women's lives" (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988, p.459). In fact

Chodorow's work may be limited due to the fact that it could tend to minimize the powerful influence that social rules and practices have on gender identity development.

Carol Gilligan, whose research is based upon the assumptions put forth by Nancy Chodorow, postulates that the biological destiny of women and their subsequent treatment in childhood helps to develop uniquely gendered subjectivities and relational expectations that translate into social and cultural practices that define women throughout their lifespan. There is evidence that "females show a greater propensity for defining themselves in connected terms, and males show a greater tendency to use separate terms when describing themselves in relation to others" (Gilligan, Ward, & Taylor, 1988, p. 204). Thus it seems that women, in contrast to men, potentially show significantly greater interest in the creation and maintenance of relationships. Gilligan et al., (1988) reviewed sex differences in empathy and found that there were no differences between the abilities of boys and girls to identify and understand the feelings of Others, just that "girls tend to *experience* the other's feelings" (1988, p. 125). Consequently, it seems possible that girls/women are potentially (maybe as a result of the relational bias outlined in Carol Gilligan's theory) highly empathic. And, as a possible consequence of both their ability and desire to relate more to Others, women may be more susceptible to pressures to adopt culturally mandated rules and social conventions which go against their own individual notions of Selfhood and identity. Nona Plessner Lyons (1988) proposes there are only two feasible ways to organize an individual's relationship to Others: "a self separate or objective in its relations to others and a self connected or interdependent in its relations to

others” (p. 23). Using the first style a person evaluates Others using their own personal terms; examining how Others compare to the Self while ignoring any understanding that could be derived by attempting to put one’s Self in another’s perspective. The second style regards Others using the Other’s own terms and Self-definitions. And though Nona Plessner Lyons does point out gender differences, with men more often using the first pattern and women most commonly the second, these differences are not absolutes, therefore both men and women share these approaches to relating in their lives. Most likely the gendered tendencies that Lyons uncovers point to social forces which act upon individuals in a manner that rewards socially mandated gender behaviors and responses thus reinforcing the adoption of culturally prescribed gendered identities and relational approaches.

The pressure to satisfy and adopt socially mandated ‘women’s’ roles, realities, and expectations is so prevalent from the moment that women are born that it would be most difficult to tease out which gender characteristics arise from physiological/psychological influences versus socializing effects. Nevertheless, I contend that the dominance of social influence in the development of women’s gender identity is practically indisputable. Research that reports gender differences often attributes these findings to the distinct social expectations and role assignments that are forced upon men and women (Lips, 1993; Santrock & Yussen, 1992; Alcock et al., 1991; Abrams, 1989; Skevington & Baker, 1989). Even Erik Erikson (1968), a strong proponent of a physiological explanation for women’s identity, recognizes the influence that society’s role designation

of women as wife and mother has on their Self-concept, and subsequently, behavior.

Erikson explains how,

much of a young woman's identity is already defined [sic] in her kind of attractiveness and in the selective nature of her search for the man (or men) by whom she wishes to be sought. This, of course, is only the psychosexual aspect of her identity, and she may go far in postponing its closure while training herself as a worker and a citizen and while developing as a person within the role possibilities of her time. (1968, p. 283)

Regardless of his physiological beliefs, Erikson proposed that women's identity must be developed in relation to the external messages propagated by her society at the time of her existence. Recognizing the importance of social influence, Abrams (1989) proposes that both male and female children have similar gender development until they reach the age of 11; at this time it seems that the children attach significance to their own gender, attributable to society's expectations or evaluations of their sex. Abrams concludes that "social behavior rather than physical attributes becomes the most important focus of sex differentiation" (1989, p. 65). Therefore, social and cultural forces along with the age of the individuals and the historical influence of the time in which they are born are all factors that may significantly influence women's gender identity.

Social identity theory proposes that women's identity is assembled in such a manner that it is able to reflect the current sex-typed demands and expectations of society. For the theorist Sandra Bem, the categories of masculinity and femininity are nothing more than "cultural constructions" (1993, p. 123). As so many aspects of identity are derived through membership in social groups (Skevington & Baker, 1989), it is postulated that gender identity is simply a social contrivance. "The social learning view of gender

*emphasizes that children's gender development occurs through observation and imitation of gender behavior as well as through the rewards and punishments children experience for gender-appropriate and gender-inappropriate behavior"* (Santrock & Yussen, 1992, p. 553). Rewards and punishments are handed out by Others, who act to reinforce or remove behaviors that are not socially acceptable. Consequently, the individual 'learns' how to behave in a gender appropriate manner.

Cultural expectations provide guidelines and standards which women internalize and use to govern their behavior and Self-conceptions. Women's gender identity is directly influenced by observation of, and feedback from, Others; gender identity is the product of social comparisons. Judith Kegan Gardiner (1987) explains Joan Lang's hypothesis "that a girl in a patriarchy will disavow masculine-assigned potentials of her self, particularly aggression, as 'not me'" (p. 777). The assumption is that female characteristics are those that are both socially prescribed and sanctioned for women by society. Nevertheless, "gendered personality is both process and product" (Bem, 1993, p. 154) and consequently, gendered identity is not only the result of information provided by an individual's external social environment (i.e. culture, family, peer group etc.) but also the outcome of internal filters or selection processes whereby an individual attends to information that has been previously deemed pertinent to his or her Self-concept. Therefore, it should not be assumed that individuals absorb (or accept) all information that is provided to them democratically.

Women, responding to both personal and socially mandated desires and Self-conceptions, pick and chose information in order to construct an understanding of themselves in gendered relation to others, a female gender identity. The area of 'person perception' uncovers the dimensions that people use to perceive Others and to simplify their social reality (Pervin, 1989). A person's previously constructed schemata greatly influence the type of information that is not only perceived, but attended to (Wood, 1996). For example,

Sandra Bem's work on gender-schemata suggests that people actually differ in the type of schemata used, and, the depth and type of information they attend to. [Bem] argues that strongly sex-typed individuals are those who have a strong tendency toward gender-schematic processing. Her theory states that individual differences in reliance on the gender schema stem from differences in the degree to which the gender dichotomy is emphasized during socialization. (Lips, 1993, p. 61)

An individual, according to Bem, is the product of his or her social environment. A propensity towards the construction of gender-schemata, depth and quality of those schemata, even their presence, is due to social influences/Others that are encountered on a daily basis. Nevertheless, the impact of socialization, in combination with an individual's unique personality characteristics, interact to provide an overall approach to identity development.

What constitutes socially acceptable female identities, fluctuates. In today's modern society, with so many roles available for partial consumption or outright adoption, the process of identity construction seems overwhelmingly complicated. Erik Erikson (1968), explains that women's activities or social roles have been produced to satisfy the

demands of a patriarchal society. Moreover, he concludes that women would have different identities under different historical and societal constraints. As a woman ages what her society expects from her, regarding designated roles and behaviors, changes (Skevington & Baker, 1989) and there are times in a woman's development when her sense of identity will be more likely to fluctuate (Rosenberg, 1986). According to Rosenberg's theory young adolescent girls have a highly 'volatile barometric' Self-concept in comparison to boys of the same age. He postulates two reasons for this finding.

The first is that girls may be more fully immersed in the role-taking stage, more sensitive to the internal thoughts and feelings of other people, more concerned with others' attitudes toward them...the stronger our efforts to learn what others think of us, and the more dependent we are on their judgments, the greater the likelihood that our self-feelings will fluctuate greatly. In addition, girls become greatly concerned with physical appearance at this age....girls are more likely than boys to report that they have changed physically during the past year and that they have greater difficulty adjusting to these physical changes. Our data analyses indicate that the single strongest reason for the higher self-concept volatility among girls is their sense of change in physical characteristics. (Rosenberg, 1986, p. 130)

This first explanation for adolescent girl's identity fluctuations fits well with Carol Gilligan's (1993) conclusions regarding women's preoccupation with developing and maintaining relationships. Rosenberg's second explanation addresses the physical ramifications of being an adolescent in a society that so highly values and expects physical attractiveness in their young women (Ruth, 1990). Erik Erikson (1968) recognizes that what has occurred in an individual's past influences his or her present, and future, sense of Self, and consequently, an individual's understanding of his or her

identity. Thus, in accordance with 'social interaction process theories' (a combination of social learning and cognitive development theories that focuses on behavioral development over a lifespan), it follows that people's needs and role choices would shift along with changes in their environment, and as they age (Lips, 1993; Skevington & Baker, 1989). The identities that a teenager assembles are most likely not the ones accepted or utilized by that same person at 40. Ultimately, the majority of an individual's Self-concept is never fully established or static, and therefore, is continually changing and evolving. Therefore, as women age they are consistently encountering and acquiring new gendered identities that are both socially sanctioned and/or personally desirable, and shedding old ones.

#### **Gender Identity Dissonance and Women's Lives:**

This paper's understanding of gender identity explains how women could conceivably experience dissonance due to conflict between or within their Self-structures. When schemata located in the 'Me' or 'Contextually-Sensitive' Self-structure sit in opposition to schemata residing in any of the three structures, dissonance may occur due to conflicting conceptualizations of identity *between* two structures. Dissonance in gender identity can also result when a conflict is found to exist among two opposing identities located *within* the 'Me' or 'Contextually-Sensitive' Self-structure (the 'I' Self-structure cannot be involved due to the fact that social influence does not directly impact this area of the Self). Gender identity is a negotiation between multiple constructions of the Self, thus, most likely marked by the presence of identity dissonance. And, though not all

contrary beliefs held by the individual about their Self produce feelings of discomfort, the possibility for identity dissonance related to gender is always present.

Women are particularly likely to experience gender identity dissonance due to the unique social and cultural pressures that are part of their upbringing; consequently, a large part of the dissonance women experience may be attributed to living in a patriarchal society. Social Identity theory presupposes that women's gender identity is derived from men's (Skevington & Baker, 1989). It is assumed, that by using social comparisons, women are defined by what men are not. "Woman serves this important function in patriarchy: As negative image of man, his complement, she is the receptacle of all the traits he cannot accept in himself, yet cannot, as a *human* being, live without" (Ruth, 1990). In a patriarchal society, the social conventions, roles, and behaviors allocated to women have often been defined and designated by men (Lips, 1993; Ruth, 1990). Therefore, as the 'Me' and the 'Contextually-Sensitive' schemata that women hold could most likely be based upon masculine definitions and desires, these structures may often find themselves positioned in opposition to women's personal Self-conceptions residing in their 'I' Self-structure.

Women may find themselves consistently experiencing feelings of distress due to the strain of trying to comply with society's definition of who they are and how they should behave while at the same time negotiating their own personal, non-socially prescribed feelings of Selfhood. Sheila Ruth explains how under the influence of patriarchy

women are being asked to choose between their human selves and their sexual identities. Unlike men, who develop and improve their masculinity

and humanity concurrently, women in patriarchy only destroy their human excellence or else destroy their human potential if they become more “feminine”. (1990, p. 128)

Ruth’s conception of women’s ‘human self’ corresponds with my notion of a core ‘I’ Self-structure and reinforces my perspective that a conflict may occur between women’s personal sense of who they are and their socially prescribed gender identity. Dissonance could occur when a woman’s ‘I’ structure contains schemata reinforcing an identity of “strength and independence”, while her ‘Me’ structure, having stereotypes and social roles embedded, reinforces a gendered identity such as: “being a woman means that I am weak and dependent”. Dissonance producing oppositional messages may lead women to deny core Self-characteristics so that they may reap the benefits that occur from exemplifying a gender identity that is socially prescribed. As it seems likely that core ‘I’ Self-conceptions may never be removed or replaced entirely, the ‘offending’ qualities will need to be repressed, which could have significant emotional consequences. Therefore, it seems plausible that women could experience serious levels of gender identity dissonance and feel great dissatisfaction with the socially mandated role of woman.

Leon Festinger’s theorizing regarding conformity pressures can help explain why women would chose to adopt contradictory Self-conceptions. His theory conceives of both individuals and groups as “systems in tension” (Schachter & Gazzaniga, 1989, p. xviii), believing that there is always pressure towards uniformity in groups. Festinger observes that “disagreement within a group would create a pressure on members of the group to reduce the disagreement to the extent that the members were attracted to the

group and the disagreement was on an issue relevant to the group” (Brehm, 1998, p. 336-337). Though the pressure to develop alliances and cultivate socially prescribed similarities may run contrary to women’s internal needs and desires, Festinger’s theory explains how the need for social acceptance would induce women to sublimate personally prescribed feelings and characteristics which oppose social norms. Thus, societal pressure towards uniformity can help explain why women would chose to adopt or accept contradictory Self-conceptions, thus identities, while the ever-present psychological desire for consonance or internal consistency can explain the occurrence of identity dissonance.

So many socially prescribed messages regarding women’s gender identity are themselves contradictory, thus offering another potential source of dissonance for women. Skevington and Baker (1989) explain how the theorist Glynis M. Breakwell assumes that for women sustaining contradictory Self-conceptions is a very arduous experience, as “she theorizes that it is the lack of consensus as to what actually characterizes ‘womanhood’ at any one time that gives rise to an unsatisfactory social identity for women, rather than unfavorable comparisons with men” (Skevington & Baker, 1989, p. 5). For example, present North American gender norms propose that a sexy female is not only bold, brash, and dressed in sexually flirtatious clothes (see Figure 4) but also coy, demure, and virginal in pastel lace and silk (see Figure 5). Understandably, women functioning in a society sustaining no singular definition of womanhood, or unified female identity, may inevitably experience conflicting and

Figure 4.



Figure 5.



||| she believes in hopeful romanticism. [www.esprit.com](http://www.esprit.com) 1.800.4.ESPRIT

I AM ESPRIT

dissonant emotional feelings within their own gender identity. If the Self is regarded as a homeostatic system that strives to maintain/regain consonance between its diverse and unruly parts, it seems obvious that the paradox in socially prescribed gender identities would cause females stress. Nevertheless, though gender identity dissonance will be a very pervasive and most likely uncomfortable experience for women, it can also-function as a positive force in their lives.

Women may be particularly well prepared or equipped to deal with gender identity dissonance. Allen (1968) talks about how important role-expectancies are in regards to tolerating or accepting dissonance effects. Specifically, the manner in which women are socialized to care about relationship and to forge connection should assist them in dealing with the manifestation and management of multiple, diverse identities. Carol Gilligan explains how “the differences between women and men which I describe center on a tendency for women and men to make different relational errors -- for men to think that if they know themselves, following the Socrates’ dictum, they will also know women, and for women to think that if only they know others, they will come to know themselves” (1993, p. xx). According to this examination of gender differences women should be more comfortable confronting diversity and using the many disparate messages and meanings encountered to construct personal identity. Men, on the other hand, conditioned not to seek as much Self-knowledge or validation from external sources, may have a far more impassive and unwavering gender identity and therefore, could find the demands of multiplicity far more difficult and stressful than their counterparts. Women,

due to social pressures, may come to accept that though in charge in one situation, they will be expected to behave weak and compliant in another; identity expectations will often vary according to whether the realm is defined as female or male i.e. household versus boardroom. I assume that social pressures are very keenly felt by women and consequently they have silently developed an adaptive, socially sanctioned, chameleon quality to their identity development and maintenance in order to persevere in diverse situations. Thus women may be socialized in a manner that develops adeptness at integrating and embracing dissonant identities in an environment that is more willing to accept inconsistencies in their personalities. Females therefore may be more likely to benefit from the positive effects that multiplicity of identity can afford.

Identity dissonance may play a very positive and socially adaptive role in women's lives. Women could knowingly choose to embrace information or actions which result in dissonance, recognizing that the benefits might outweigh the discomfort experienced by integrating new contradictory information/Self-conceptions. Elliot Aronson, by way of work he did with Mills and Robinson (1959), came to recognize that dissonance may be an acceptable byproduct of beneficial decision making, observing that "dissonance and utility are in constant tension by virtue of the fact that under certain conditions dissonant information may be extremely useful and, conversely, useful information can arouse dissonance" (Aronson, 1969, p. 31). Aronson recognizes that dissonance may be an unavoidable consequence of the struggle towards a comfortable, sustainable, adaptive, and healthy sense of Self. He seems to understand innately that psychological

malleability or an ability to adapt to contextual changes, thus maintaining a diversity of Self-definitions and understandings, may be an important predictor of mental health. As Kenneth Gergen illustrates, "If a man can see himself only as powerful, he will feel pain when he recognizes moments of weakness. If a woman thinks of herself as active and lively, moments of quiet will be unbearable; if we define ourselves as weak and compliant we will cringe ineptly when we are challenged to lead" (1995, p. 143). In Gergen's description it is the presence of the word "only" that marks his examples as possibly part of an unhealthy process. If a person *only* recognizes/acknowledges one end of a personality continuum they may be unduly restricting themselves from embracing important or beneficial aspects of their Selves. Dissonance is both a motivator, driving individuals towards its removal through reshuffling of identities and reconceptualization of Selfhood, and it is also a consequence, the unavoidable result of an ongoing process of Self-definition and identity development. In both its incarnations identity dissonance plays an important and vital role in women's gender identity development.

It is my hope that through illuminating the presence of identity dissonance and by recognizing both its detrimental and adaptive potential, women may learn to embrace a trait that has sometimes been used to stigmatize them as weaker and more uncertain in character. I argue that gender characteristics that have lead to women being regarded as unstable and capricious can be redefined in order to praise their dynamism and adaptability. Psychological theorizing, at its best, can lead to illumination of previously hidden and unrecognized processes in order that individuals may use the information to

develop Self-understanding. Hopefully, by recognizing the presence of identity dissonance in their lives, women can benefit from the realization that they are the ones who ultimately construct their own personal sense of Self, and that a coherent sense of Self does not preclude a multiplicity of identities nor the presence of feelings of dissonance.

## **Section 2: Romance Novels as an Environment that Displays Identity Dissonance**

### ***Chapter V: Mass Media, Identity, and the Romance Novel***

#### **'Why study Romance Novels?':**

There is growing recognition of the connection between mass communication and identity. "Society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories" (Goffman, 1963, p. 2); consequently, mass media, as a social institution, will demonstrate and display those culturally accepted categories and attributes. And, since "the media operate largely in the public sphere but influence the private -- ultimately how we view ourselves" (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 126), media content covers the realm of identity and its development. Gilroy (1996) and Curran (1996) have both reinforced how the fields of mass communication and cultural studies (and their coverage of such areas as reception theory, uses and effects etc.) have transformed our understanding of identity and its associated issues and brought them to the forefront of academic consciousness. Cultural theorists such as Patricia L. Murphy & Carol T. Miller (1997); Angela McRobbie (1994); Stuart Ewen (1988); Tom Engelhardt (1986) and Erving Goffman (1979) have explored the impact of mass media on Self-concept and identity development. The growing attention paid to the intersection of these areas seems to indicate "the increased salience of identity as a problem played out in everyday life, and to identity as it is managed and

administered in the cultural industries of mass communication” (Gilroy, 1996, p. 36).

Though media can not directly force an individual to embark upon a particular action or specific piece of decision making regarding identity development, its ability to both elevate and marginalize particular identities attests to its strength as a method of socialization and its ability to affect the process of identity development. In other words, mass media’s greatest influence may be in its ability to present and promote a limited amount of socially prescribed identities which it subsequently ‘sells’ to its audiences for consumption.

Media present very contradictory and inconsistent identities to audiences. According to Hall (1996) the cultural production of identity, affected by both historical and institutional practices and strategies, is “the product of the marking of difference and exclusion” (p. 4) and therefore, not as unitary or cohesive as so often assumed. According to Fitzgerald (1993) “it is not difficult to find contradictory media images today: the competitive aggressor side by side with the more sympathetic androgynous male, for example” (p. 125) and it is the presence of ‘contradictory media images’ pertaining to gender identity which makes media an ideal environment in which to search for the presence of identity dissonance. In addition, research has uncovered a possible relationship between exposure to certain types of media products and the presence of postdecisional cognitive dissonance (Murphy and Miller, 1997). Therefore, it seems that not only is the mass media an environment marked by contradictions (Gergen, 1991) and

conflicting identity messages but also very likely able to induce feelings of dissonance in its audiences.

Consequently, the answer to the question ‘why study romance novels’ is, ‘why not’! It is my contention that all media reflect the psychological makeup of those who participate in its production and consumption, therefore, it cannot help but contain identity - dissonance, a process and product inherent to identity development. Though I am not referring to Jane Eyre or Wuthering Heights but instead to the pop culture ‘bodice-rippers’ that are to be found on supermarket shelves, I nonetheless propose that this medium is worthy of examination. I suggest that romance novels are particularly likely to evoke and/or examine the issue of identity dissonance due to the fact that they are a genre solely dedicated to discussing the tumultuous relationship between men and woman. Stories about how heterosexual relationships develop, cannot help but provide commentary on women’s circumstances and accordingly, their identity in relation to men; and romance novels, specifically the brand Harlequin, may actually narratively document the dissonant process of women’s identity construction. Ultimately, my assumption is that media both contains and perpetuates identity dissonance and that this conflict is present within romance novels.

### **The Industry, the Readers, and their Novels:**

Romance novel reading is an extremely popular activity for women, and the market place is dominated by Harlequin books. Romance novels constitute 47% of all general paperbacks sold (Stoffman, 1999) and Harlequin Enterprises, a Canadian based publisher

established in 1949 (Markert, 1985), controls around 80% of the series romance market (Grescoe, 1996; Stoffman, 1999). Harlequin's novels are translated into 24 languages (Stoffman, 1999) and through joint ventures and its own independent operations, it sells 176.5 million books a year in more than 100 international markets, including the former East Bloc nations of Europe. Sales total three billion books in less than half a century, business which translates into revenues of nearly half a billion dollars a year (Grescoe, 1996). Harlequin publishes 70 new books per month, the result of its 13 product lines. There are 24 million readers of Harlequin in North America, 50 million readers world wide which translates into 5.5 Harlequin romance novels sold per second (Stoffman, 1999). Harlequin's industry domination seems to have prompted academic preoccupation with this particular brand of romance novel. Consequently, my own analysis will center around the Harlequin brand due primarily to the fact that much of the research that I will be using for this investigation is based upon Harlequin romance novels.

The incorrect stereotype that romance novels are only read by working class housewives is under attack. Research indicates that romance reading attracts women from all walks of life<sup>8</sup>. Based on results from surveys of Harlequin readers, Mann (1981) concludes that "romance readers are virtually a cross-section of the whole female population" ( p. 13) from all demographic segments of age, class, education, and race (Mann, 1981; Dubino, 1993); a finding that seems to be substantiated by research done by Thurston in 1987. According to Harlequin Enterprises (notoriously tight-lipped about their own data pertaining to customers or company practices and profits) the median age

of North American readers is 41, the median household income is \$35,600, 59% attended or graduated from college, 58% work outside of the home, and 60% of their readers are married (Stoffman, 1999). These findings contradict the stereotype of an uneducated romance reader with nothing better to do than dream away her day while reading romance novels and eating bon bons. The women who read and write these novels are often professionals: lawyers, librarians, geologists and professors (see Krentz, 1992). In any segment of the female population you will find women who enjoy reading romances. They are not from specifically poor or uneducated backgrounds or circumstances. Neither are these readers solely North American women. Thus, it seems that romance novel reading has universal appeal.

The characterizations of heroines and heroes in romance novels are as diverse as their readers. The modern day protagonists bear little resemblance to male or female characterizations to be found in the romance novels of the 50's, 60's or 70's. Instead, current romances present a far more egalitarian and progressive vision of the relationship between the sexes (Hubbard, 1985). Hubbard's 1985 analysis of romance novels uncovered the following heroine traits:

She represents many women, all of whom may be heroines. She may be a young woman or as old as 45. She may be small or nearly six feet in height. She may struggle with hardships like divorce, a child born out of wedlock, a troubled husband, but she is not weak or ordinary. She is most often highly skilled, artistic or well-educated, occasionally holding a graduate degree...her energies are devoted to her career and her independence, and she maintains healthy self-esteem...She may be a virgin, but most often she is fully aware of her own sexual needs and, while she is not promiscuous, she is sexually active...Further, she does not

readily accept a marriage proposal until she is sure that she and her hero can negotiate terms. (p. 120)

The heroines that Hubbard evaluated are far more independent and opinionated than romance novel heroines are popularly believed to be. The modern heroine is, as Hubbard points out, representative of today's women, consequently they depict the current desire to be regarded as equal to men. Harlequin heroine, Virginia, seen through the eyes of her hero reinforces this perspective.

AS WILDER WATCHED Virginia go into the house, he willed himself not to smile. The woman was irritating, independent, and had a big mouth full of opinions. Everything he didn't like in a female.

On the other hand, she was sweet, interested and willing to discuss any subject, and she didn't care if he knew her opinion and disagreed with it. Very unusual. Oh, and one more thing. She was soft. (Estrada, 1997, p. 58)

It should be highlighted that even though the hero is infuriated by the heroine's independent and opinionated behavior, he still regards her as an object for his desire, and by the end of the novel will have learned to not only respect, but require, the heroine's independent and outspoken ways.

Though the characterization of heroines and heroes in romance novels are far more progressive and diverse in their depiction than ever before, they are nevertheless still extremely stereotypical and idealized renderings. In example, the heroine's evaluation of her hero taken from the Harlequin romance Double Take by Janice Kaiser (1997):

On paper, Mark Lindsay was the perfect catch. He was good-looking, his credentials and qualifications impeccable. He was from a socially prominent family, and someday the investment banking firm of Lindsay and Soames would be his. Far more important, she had known right from the start that Mark truly wanted her. He was loving and attentive, a terrific

lover. She'd never once doubted the depth of his feelings or his sincerity.  
But... (p. 7)

A perfect hero; the ultimate dream of the romance reader. However, there must be some outstanding conflict in order for the romance novel to function within its genre. It is the proverbial 'but' which establishes the narrative struggle or conflict which propels the plot line and encourages women to read past the first five pages of the romance novel.

Books associated with the romance novel genre contain a number of key characteristics. "All romances share four basic elements: a heroine, a hero, a conflict-ridden love story, and a happily-ever-after ending" (Barlow, 1992, p. 47) all attained within the 200 or so pages of a typical Harlequin novel. Harlequin romance lines range in degree of sexual explicitness (the very sexy and erotic 'Temptations' series versus the demure 'Romance' line) and importance of setting to storyline (i.e. Historicals or Westerns where setting is a valuable part of the plot versus other romance lines where setting is only referred to in passing). In addition, there is a growing trend towards romance novel hybrids which combine genres. Readers can now choose romances that revolve around time-travel, science fiction, fantasy, mysteries, and westerns; though, the most typical or known of the Harlequin lines is most likely the sexy 'Temptations' series or their signature Harlequin 'Presents'. The romance genre is based on many variations of the same formula, and according to Lowery (1995) they can be broken up into the following plot contrivances:

1. A girl, our heroine, meets a man, our hero, who is above her socially and who is wealthy and worldly.
2. The hero excites the heroine but frightens her sexually.

3. She is usually alone in the world and vulnerable.
4. The hero dominates the heroine, but she is fiery and sensual, needing this powerful male.
5. Though appearing to scorn her, the hero is intrigued by her and pursues her sexually.
6. The heroine wants love, not merely sex, and sees his pursuit as self-gratification.
7. The two clash in verbal sparring.
8. In holding to her own standards, the heroine appears to lose the hero. She does not know he respects her.
9. A moment of danger for either main character results in the realization on the part of the hero or heroine that the feeling between them is true love.
10. A last-minute plot twist threatens their relationship.
11. The two finally communicate and admit their true love, which will last forever. (p. 215-216)

These variations on a theme fulfill the expectations of the romance reader; it is the predictability of the novel that appeals. Romance novels present relational lessons, proposing that with perseverance, trust, and faith, love will prevail; Mann (1981) equates the story line of romance novels to those of fairy tales. The final sentences of a romance novel always confirm the presence of the happy ending. For example, the last two lines in the Harlequin novel The Getaway Bride: "He and Page had been given a second chance at having it all, and they would spend the rest of their lives celebrating. Together" (Wilkins, 1997, p. 218). The hero and heroine are presented with a conflict which they overcome in order to establish an everlasting love -- so ends another romance novel.

## ***Chapter VI: Reading and Women's Experiences***

### **The Act of Reading:**

Literature is not an object, but an experience (Tompkins, 1980a). Reading is a process; an integration of both reader and text. Both text and reader have inherent characteristics and qualities which when combined create a most individualistic and distinct outcome. Reader-Response criticism makes the reactions of the reader, rather than the content of the novels, the most important focus for critical analysis (Tompkins, 1980a). Critics argue that a book cannot be understood apart from its effects. Therefore, until the consequences of women's romance reading are comprehended the romance novel itself will remain unknown. "Reader-response critics argue against locating meaning in the text, against seeing the text as a fixed object, and in favor of a criticism that recognizes the reader's role in making meaning" (Tompkins, 1980b, p. 223). Meaning is manufactured, a result of the act of reading, consequently, the text is only present to the degree that it is acknowledged or actualized by the reader.

Words on a page have no persuasive power until the reader personalizes them, finding them functional or relevant to his or her life. "The manner in which the reader will experience the text will reflect his [or her] own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror" (Iser, 1980, p. 56). Thus a text's most attractive feature may be the range of information and values that it is able to present to its readers.

A novel that works, in which reader identification takes place, is a methodological realization of elements of the reader's innermost life. If the taproot isn't there in the reader in the first place, the novel will not tap anything. The reader reads a good novel with a sense of discovery, but it is a discovery of elements of the existing inner self. (Kinsale, 1992, p. 37-38)

Women may be drawn to romance reading because the text allows them the opportunity to confront (or re-confront) messages and meanings that have value to their lives. What is important about the process of reading is the development of connection(s) between reader and text. Iser (1980) refers to the necessity for identification, though, not as “an end in itself, but a stratagem by means of which the author stimulates attitudes in the reader” (p. 65). Therefore, the result of reading is not the act of identification between reader and text, as the polysemic openness of texts naturally allow this ease of individual interpretation and approach to reading. Instead, identification is a method for establishing the connection necessary for the exchange of meaning(s) between text and reader.

All of us, as we read, use the literary work to symbolize and finally to replicate ourselves. We work out through the text our own characteristic patterns of desire and adaptation. We interact with the work, making it part of our own psychic economy and making ourselves part of the literary work - as we interpret it. For, always, this principle prevails: identity re-creates itself. (Holland, 1980, p. 124)

We seek out in texts what resonates in ourselves -- a recognition of Self -- and once the connection is established we are open to the adoption of new meanings and messages.

It should not be assumed that authors, genres, or any specific characteristic to be found within texts, do not impact on the reading experience. The reader and the text combine to be responsible for meaning production, consequently specific qualities of the textual object significantly influence the meaning(s) that are absorbed. I recognize the value of John Fiske’s notion of the popular text being ‘producerly’ (1989). A producerly text presents already made, dominant ideological meanings for passive consumption while at

the same time maintaining an openness that allows for the reader to participate in the independent construction of meaning. Therefore, I agree that texts contain particular characteristics that shape the production of meaning and the manner in which the knowledge contained within is consumed. This presumption should not be seen to contradict the perspectives put forth by the Reader-Response critics, as I do not assume that these theorists mean to dismiss the notion that there are particular qualities attributed to the text that influence the reading process. Reader-Response theory's belief in the dominance of the reader in the production of meaning or effect does not eliminate the importance of acknowledging other influential factors. Instead, this approach reinforces that it is ultimately the reader's recognition, unconscious absorption, or reaction, to these factors that make them an influential part of the process. The aim of Reader-Response theory is to remove the assumption of distinctiveness between the two objects, not to deny that there are particular characteristics that may be inherent to both reader and text.

My desire is to explore the textual characteristics of romance novels and their effect(s) on readers. My belief is that both the qualities found within the novels and the effects derived from romance reading stem from psychological characteristics and needs located in both readers and writers. I suggest that the intertwined relationship between romance novels and the women that read them is indicative of the reading process as proposed by Reader-Response theorists and agree with Patterson's (1986) assumptions that "by reading, women are *engaged* in the general process of ideological production, the producing of meaning and ideas in their lives" (p. 73) and that "women are not consumers

but active readers; novels are not commodities but cultural experiences” (p. 72). I propose that the cultural experiences captured in romance novel reading are derived from very real psychological needs and desire. I propose that both the fictional heroes and heroines, and the narratives found within romance novels, depict the psychological phenomenon of identity dissonance; that the women who read romance novels are actively seeking to identify and explore along with the fictional heroes and heroines identity conflicts and concerns. Consequently, if romance novels can be viewed, as Iser stated (1980), as ‘mirrors’ of reader’s own lives, these stories must contain qualities that resonate strongly in the readers of this popular genre. I propose that the narrative presence of identity dissonance is part of the ‘identification’ process whereby familiar and desirable meanings are exchanged between reader and text. Therefore the exploration of identity dissonance becomes part of an effective and/or pleasurable reading experience. Ultimately, to understand romance novels you must understand their effects, and one route to uncovering effects is an examination of why readers find these books so compelling.

### **Reasons for Reading Romance Novels:**

**Question: What is your opinion of Romance Novels?**

**Answer: They provide cheap entertainment that is Bad for you -- like potatoe [sic] chips.**

**Question: What is your opinion of Romance Novel Readers?**

**Answer: They have nothing better to do or there is a void in their life that the Romances fill.**

**-- anonymous response from a woman who does not read romance novels**

Few people realize how much courage it takes for a woman to open a romance novel on an airplane. She knows what everyone around her will think about both her and her choice of reading material. When it comes to romance novels, society has always felt free to sit in judgment not only on the literature but on the reader herself.

The verdict is always the same. Society does not approve of the reading of romance novels. It labels the books as trash and the readers as unintelligent, uneducated, unsophisticated, or neurotic.

The fact that so many women persist in reading and enjoying romance novels in the face of generations of relentless hostility says something profound not only about women's courage but about the appeal of the books. (Krentz, 1992, p. 1)

So, why are these books so appealing? Why are romance readers, and some of their critics, known to occasionally refer to the reading experience as 'addictive', and these novels as a 'fix'? Why are readers willing to risk the ridicule that often accompanies the experience? It is important to examine what needs in particular may be satisfied by this activity. There have been many different reasons postulated as to why women enjoy reading romance novels. The results can generally be broken down into the following four categories: nurture deprivation, entertainment value/escapism, empowerment or the productivity of role-playing, and the text's ability to critique patriarchy. It should *not* be assumed that this list comprises all of the possible outcomes to be derived from romance reading (as even a fifth category will be postulated later on in this discussion), that there is necessarily only one outcome per reading experience, or, that all of these outcomes are present every time a romance novel is read. Nevertheless, these identified effects are important to readers and may begin to explain why women are drawn to this pastime.

One important perspective sees romance reading fulfilling the needs of a nurture deprived reader. Suzanne Juhasz, an academic who takes a psychoanalytic perspective to the study of romance novels explains:

Because it is the text that creates a facilitating environment in which the self can grow, the author of romance fiction is mother to her heroine-daughter as well as to the daughter-reader. (1988, p. 247)

It is this nurturing bond between reader and writer that Juhasz suggests helps the reader to further develop her own identity. By grounding her discussion on the theories of Nancy Chodorow, D. W. Winnicott and Alice Miller, she promotes a physiologically rooted explanation for women's romance reading, as she contends that being born a woman predetermines particular needs. In a counter-argument to those theorists who have been critical of romance novels' depiction of the marginalization of women's career/work (Dubino, 1993; DuPlessis, 1985; Rabine, 1985), Suzanne Juhasz asserts that

in contemporary romance fiction, women want meaningful work, but they want love more - and this may be understood as a revelation of how central the original deprivation has been, how crucial is the yearning for the preoedipal mother and for the bond, at once mutual and unconditional, we believe should have been our birthright. Indeed, quest for achievement in the world matters; but love comes first - or ought to have. (1988, p. 250)

She reinterprets the abandonment of the heroine's career for male companionship not as a patriarchal act, but instead one which caters to the deepest feminine needs for love and relationship. Juhasz proposes that the content of romance novels is functional, helping women to regain feelings of being nurtured that they crave. She suggests that analysis of romance novels is now beginning to explain plot configurations and women's reading choices as a positive act of Self-nurturance.

Juhasz is not alone in her presumption of the nurturing effects to be gained from romance reading. Janice Radway (1991) in her study of romance readers concludes that the novels provide the “opportunity to experience the kind of care and attention that they commonly give to others” (p. 100) and that reading romance novels

provides vicarious emotional nurturance by prompting identification between the reader and a fictional heroine whose identity as a woman is always confirmed by the romantic and sexual attentions of an ideal male. When she successfully imagines herself in the heroine’s position, the typical romance reader can relax momentarily and permit herself to wallow in the rapture of being the center of a powerful and important individual’s attention. This attention...provides her with the sensations evoked by emotional nurturance. (Radway, 1991, p. 113)

Identification with the literary heroine may promote vicarious feelings of desirability and importance of an intensity often found only during the initial stages of falling in love and courtship. The kind of feelings induced by falling in love, of being truly valued and looked after, may also be extremely similar to remembered feelings of being pampered as a young child. Therefore, by reading romance novels women may be able to achieve for the first time, or recapture, feelings that they miss and would like to (re-)introduce into their lives.

Romance novels can also function as both a vehicle for personal entertainment and escapism. Janice Radway, one of the most influential romance novel theorist, proposes that these novels allow readers to escape from their oppressive social responsibilities. As she recounts from her study:

Romance reading, as Dot herself puts it, constitutes a temporary “declaration of independence” from the social roles of wife and mother. By placing the barrier of the book between themselves and their families, these women

reserve a special space and time for themselves alone. As a consequence, they momentarily allow themselves to abandon the attitude of total self-abnegation in the interest of the family welfare which they have so dutifully learned is the proper stance for a good wife and mother. (1983, p. 60-61)

The novel's ability to create personal space and remove women from their patriarchal world into an environment that is more sensitive to their needs seems to be a very important aspect of romance reading. The romance novel's capacity to manufacture personal time/space (i.e. "Don't disturb Mommy when she's reading") may draw women to the experience, and, the fact that these environments provide a particularly feminine narrative, might be what keeps women returning to this particular genre. Thurston (1987) proposes that it is the very act of reading romances in the face of criticism that marks them as an assertion of personal independence and desire to remove oneself from a harsh and unwelcoming world. Readers have also described the book's ability to teach them about new places and people as a form of "entertaining education" (Jensen, 1984, p. 148). In addition, romance novels are a source of sexual fantasies. In a world that often denies women's sexuality, romance novels are an environment that does nothing but empower, value, and praise women's sexual responses. The erotic themes and passages allow women the pleasure of exploring their sexuality through the characters in the books. Some women report using the sex scenes in order to 'teach' the men in their lives how to become better lovers (Thurston, 1987). There are numerous ways in which romance novels can function as either escapism or entertainment, not all necessarily recounted here, but all nevertheless valid and worthy of respect.

Another powerful reason for reading romance novels are feelings of empowerment that result from the novel's ability to allow readers, through their identification with the heroine, to develop greater personal understanding and receive validation. In Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature, Janice Radway postulates how women readers, by identifying with heroines, might learn ways of dealing with and solving their own personal dilemmas:

Romance's preoccupation with male brutality is an attempt to understand the meaning of an event that has become almost unavoidable in the real world. The romance may express misogynistic attitudes not because women share them but because they increasingly need to know how to deal with them. (1991, p. 72)

Thus, romance novels may provide a forum where readers can go to examine patriarchal attitudes and confront personal fears. Radway notes that "by picturing the heroine in relative positions of weakness, romances are not necessarily endorsing her situation, but examining an all-too-common state of affairs in order to display possible strategies for coping" (1991, p. 75). The romance reader is potentially given the opportunity to role-play as she can investigate the outcomes of possible solutions to real life problems using the pseudo-realistic context of the romance novel (i.e. dilemmas such as balancing career and motherhood, career and husband, single motherhood and dating etc.). Hubbard (1985) assumes that one of the pleasures to be derived from reading romance novels is the reader's capacity to identify with the heroine. This identification has the ability to validate a reader's perspective and/or values (Hubbard, 1985), thereby reinforcing for her that she is 'O.K.' and her perspectives acceptable and even shared by other women.

Phillips (1992) argues that reading romance novels gives her a personal sense of being in control of her environment, that these stories where the heroine reigns over the hero, and controls the situation (bringing it from one of chaos into one of safety and strength) gives her a feeling that she can overcome the hardships that she personally has to face.

Romance novels allow their readers, through identification with the heroine, to role-play life solutions, feel empowered and personally validated, and to develop a better understanding of their own lives and needs.

The presence of patriarchal discourse within romances has led many academic theorists to denounce the genre. In particular, it seems that fear of the possible patriarchal colonization of the female Self may be the most likely incentive for critics of romances to conclude that it is an 'anti-feminist' activity which continues to reinforce the marginalization of women and feminine Self-betrayal. In 1970 Germaine Greer concluded that "the traits invented for [the hero] have been invented by women cherishing the chains of their bondage" (p. 202). Sixteen years later the scholar Janet Patterson, aligning herself with feminist critics such as Germaine Greer and Susan Brownmiller, asks, "what is it that makes so many women dedicated to such a sado-masochistic cultural and literary experience?" (1986, p. 70). Rachel Blau DuPlessis, in her book Writing beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers, condemns romance reading as an act of patriarchal reinforcement: "In short, the romance plot, broadly speaking, is a trope for the sex-gender system as a whole" (1985, p. 5). Passionate concern has been raised over heroine characterizations; her domestic role

as homemaker (Dubino, 1993), as sexual being (Douglas, A., 1980), and as employee (Jensen, 1984) which scholars argue are based on extremely patriarchal (mis)conceptions of womanhood. Agreeing with the theoretical assumption of patriarchal plot characteristics and narrative content, Tania Modleski concludes that the

heroine of the novels can achieve happiness only by undergoing a complex process of self-subversion, during which she sacrifices her aggressive instincts, her “pride”, and-nearly-her life. And a close analysis of the dynamics of the reading process will show that the reader is encouraged to participate in and actively desire feminine self-betrayal. (1982, p. 37)

Modleski, like many other scholars, is motivated by concern that female readers will model themselves after the romance novel’s heroine. An example of what disturbs feminists about the content to be found in romance novels is seen in the following quote from a Harlequin heroine: “Better she lie than lose him. Better she fulfill the role he wanted her to play than have no part in his life at all” (Lee, 1998, p. 150). Fear that readers would either personally incorporate romance novels’ patriarchal content or have their own previously internalized anti-female messages reinforced seems to be the driving influence behind many theorists’ condemnation of the act of romance reading.

Undoubtedly, romance novels are purveyors of North American culture as “every commodity reproduces the ideology of the system that produced it” (Fiske, 1989, p. 14). Judith Williamson in her article “Woman is an Island: Femininity and Colonization” observes that “the whole point about most of the ideologies manifested in mass cultural ‘texts’ is that they are dominant or hegemonic ideologies” (1986, p. 100), and it is widely recognized that one of the most dominant ideologies put forth by North American society

is patriarchy (Ruth, 1990; Bartky, 1988). Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume the romance novel, a product containing the dominant ideological discourse of its culture, dispenses patriarchal messages and meanings to its readers.

Though romance novels perpetuate the dominant social and cultural ideologies indigenous to the system in which they are created, they also transmit subversive and contradictory narratives. Romance novels provide more than just a 'dominant read', a subject positioning where the reader is inundated only with the governing ideological perspectives of the culture in which the text originates (Hall, 1992). Instead, as popular culture texts they "contain both the forces of domination and the opportunities to speak against them, the opportunities to oppose or evade them" (Fiske, 1989, p.25). Belsey (1992) explains how regardless of the influence and control that dominant ideologies possess, there are still textual gaps present which inherently provide the 'democratic' space necessary for an ideological struggle against the dominant. John Fiske also identifies particular characteristics of the romance genre that can enhance the likelihood of a subversive reading position being taken by its readers. Observing that

the excessive victimization of the heroine of a romance novel, her exaggerated suffering at the hands of the hero, exceeds the "normal" victimization and suffering of women in patriarchy. Norms that are exceeded lose their invisibility, lose their status as natural common sense, and are brought out into the open agenda. (Fiske, 1989, p. 114)

Therefore, Fiske argues that the very characteristics innate to the genre can generate a critique of patriarchy. This outlook is important for understanding the relevancy of the arguments put forth by such authors as Suzanne Juhasz and Diane Elam, an

understanding that theorists such as Modleski seem to overlook: that there are numerous contradictory narratives within the structure of romance novels which are both dominant *and* subversive in nature.

What confuses many feminist critics of the romance novel is why millions of women are habitual readers. Answers to their question may arrive with the recognition that the perspective which condemns romance novels as patriarchal reinforcement is not only limiting but far too quick to condemn without proper evaluation of content and potential (Juhasz, 1988). Suzanne Juhasz's positive appreciation of the impact romance novels have on the lives of their readers is very important, she points out that there must be something terribly powerful and personally valuable operating within the romance text to draw women again and again to the experience. A perspective reflected by Tania Modleski, who though as a theorist is quite critical of romance novels, is still willing to concede that "their enormous and continuing popularity...suggests that they speak to very real problems and tensions in women's lives" (Modleski, 1982, p. 14). Romances provide textual environments where readers can examine the effects of patriarchy on women's lives, and it is those patriarchal messages that have been observed and condemned by feminist scholars who voice opposition to this reading activity. Romance novels illuminate the struggle that women have coexisting alongside men within a patriarchal social structure. Though romances often reinforce how women can exist comfortably within patriarchy's limiting structure, they can also be observed to contain a critical examination of women's present social conditions.

The romance novel's preoccupation with the theme of rebellion and struggle seems to reflect women's patriarchal reality. "Under patriarchal hegemony in thought, values, institutions and resources...women...struggle to form their own feminist consciousness" (Lerner, 1993, p. 14). The possibility that these romances document real problems associated with female identity is an explanation that is quite prominent in the literature (Juhasz, 1988; Rabine, 1985; Radway, 1983). Janet Patterson, an academic who often criticizes romance reading, nevertheless concurs that

Harlequins address this fundamental tension in women's lives; the Romances create and solve the problem of social bonding in a patriarchal world, but do so in a female language created by the joint effort of the narrator and the heroine. Because the narrative technique is female...Harlequins can be seen as active attempts by readers to interpret their world through their own language. (1986, p. 80)

Romance novels may facilitate the process of feminine identity development and possibly even feminist consciousness because they present a narrative on what it is like to be a woman in a man's world. Janet Patterson explains that

reading Harlequins is not an intellectual activity of interpretation which is worked through once; it is a fully-engaged emotional interpretation shared with other women (the narrator and the heroine) expressing the social and emotional contradictions of women's experience under patriarchy. (1986, p. 81)

Romance novels do contain the patriarchal messages and allusions of their culture; but they also provide an atmosphere in which readers can explore and question those customs, and, examine how they as women fit within the system. Patterson confirms that "the reading experience of Harlequins provides women with a highly ritualized validation, a sympathetic expression and a temporary solving of the conflicts in their

lives” (1986, p. 82). Women read romances because they are guaranteed happy endings (Grescoe, 1996), endings which depict positive resolutions to patriarchal problems -- women’s identities and lives accepted and appreciated. Therefore, romance novels depict the struggle that women face as they try and exist in an environment that is often not structured towards caring for or meeting their needs.

Romance novels explore how a man and woman meet, overcome obstacles, and fall in love. Consequently, this genre ends up both portraying and examining the nature and power of men’s influence in women’s lives. Stories about how heterosexual relationships develop cannot help but provide commentary on women’s circumstances under patriarchy. Writing in the early 1980’s Margaret Jensen recognizes that “the emerging feminist consciousness in Harlequins goes beyond incorporating more independent heroines to include pointing out and criticizing sexism in its many forms” (1984, p. 124), a consistent theme being the heroine’s concerted effort to understand the hero’s alienating and bewildering behavior. Tania Modleski, in her important book Loving With a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women, points out that a primary narrative feature of romance novels is how “the heroines engage in a continual deciphering of the motives for the hero’s behavior. The Harlequin heroine probes for the secret underlying the masculine enigma, while the reader outwits the heroine in coming up with the ‘correct’ interpretation for the puzzling actions and attitudes of the man” (1982, p. 34). Modleski concludes that one of the aims of romance reading is the decoding of stereotypical male behavior:

Justine was no psychologist, but she believed that anyone with a brain in their heads could see Marcus's deprived upbringing had been the perfect breeding ground to produce a driven personality with an intense need to succeed in life. But resting alongside his tunnel-vision ambition would lie a deep well of emotional vulnerability.

Love would always present itself as a two-edged sword. He would distrust it, yet crave it as one always craved what one had never had. The only problem would be that he might not know what true love was. The poor darling had had little experience of it, after all. (Lee, 1998, p. 162)

The heroine of this romance novel is trying to comprehend and possibly rationalize the hero's bewildering and alienating behavior. She is having difficulty understanding his motives. Consequently, Justine is unable to develop a meaningful relationship until she reconceptualizes the hero's issues into a very feminine, hence palatable, problem of trust and relationship. Thus, at the same time as deciphering the hero's behavior the heroine is also coming to terms with a masculine world's relationship to her female sensibilities.

Reading romances seems to promote exploration of the readers' relationship to men/patriarchy. Janice Radway bases much of her understanding of the genre on her experience with book store owner Dorothy (Dot) Evans and the readers (Radway refers to them as the Smithton women) who shopped at Dot's store and depended on her advice regarding which romance novels to buy. Analyzing the romances that preoccupied these women, Radway observed that

the heroine spends most of her time in these romances...trying to read the hero's behavior as a set of signs expressing his true feelings towards her. The final outcome of the story turns upon a fundamental process of *re*interpretation, whereby she suddenly and clearly sees that the behavior she feared was actually the product of deeply felt passion and a previous hurt. (1983, p. 65)

Thus a transformation narrative is present within these novels; as the heroine/reader comes to comprehend the reasons for the offenses committed against her, she re-conceptualizes previously negative perceptions of the hero. Though Janice Radway proposes that this process is occurring on an unconscious level, it is still important to note how she postulates that romances not only display patriarchy but allow women to recognize and explore its impact in their lives. Radway concludes that “good romances may operate as a kind of cultural release valve” (1991, p. 158), providing an environment in which to diffuse the tensions which build up as women try to function in an environment hostile to their needs. Tania Modleski (1982) notices that there is a distinct characteristic shared by most romances; the heroine continually rebels against male authority, as it is embodied in the hero:

She gave him a look that silently questioned his sanity. “Someday a woman will be allowed to play more than one role, and her husband will be responsible for the children as she is. They will have a partnership, not a dictatorship based on gender.” (Estrada, 1997, p. 149)

Although, Modleski’s explanation for the presence of this resistance may be far too simplistic, as she attributes most reader satisfaction to the fulfillment of a ‘revenge fantasy’, she does highlight the important possibility that women’s romance reading habits might be at least partially motivated by a desire to view a vulnerable male. The men in romance novels are often lectured by the heroines, reminded that it is their callous sensibilities which are causing women to be the difficult and demanding partners that they accuse them of being.

Romance novels achieve this relevant social dialogue by taking patriarchy's male ideal, embodied in the hero, and dissecting the heroine's relationship to this figure. Romance novels, as patriarchal environments "refer not simply to a society where men hold power, but rather to a society ruled by a certain kind of men wielding a certain kind of power - a society that reflects the underlying values of the traditional male ideal" (Ruth, 1990, p. 45). It is this harsh masculine reality which heroines are constantly confronting.

Her experiences had convinced her that a beautiful woman was just a pawn in a man's world, rarely taken seriously, and often abused. Beauty had killed both her mother and her sister, and she had no intention of falling into the same trap.

But that didn't mean she didn't want to fulfill herself as a woman. Just because she despised men, and all they stood for, she was not above using one to create her own destiny. (Mather, 1993, p. 28)

Once recognizing the patriarchal nature of her environment, the heroine then proceeds to figure out how to not only exist in, but conquer her surroundings. The above quote is one example of how romance dialogue provides readers with a narrative on patriarchy's effect on women's lives and typifies how the narrative environment of the romance novel focuses on solutions to the dilemmas that these relationships cause. Thus, these texts can be seen as beneficial, providing readers with commentary on their social reality and allowing for the possibility of reconceptualizing gender relationships.

Romance novels assist readers to question and challenge unacceptable power inequalities by presenting narratives that undermine patriarchy and promote a more diverse characterization of gender identities. Not only do "romance novels invert the power structure of a patriarchal society because they show women exerting enormous

power over men” (Krentz, 1992, p. 5), they also have an ability to fulfill readers’ needs for nurturing, escapism, entertainment and provide pleasure and empowerment due to role-playing and identification. In addition to the four main reasons presented for women’s attraction to romance reading, I would like to propose a fifth: as women may also read romances in order to explore and examine personal feelings of identity dissonance.

### ***Chapter VII: Romance Novels - Media that Reflects the Dissonant Nature of Identity Development***

A number of romance theorists such as Janice Radway, Leslie Rabine, and Susan Juhasz have postulated that romance novels document real problems or characteristics associated with female identity. Following their lead, it is my assumption that romances are distinguished by the presence of identity dissonance. Its presence in these novels may be therapeutic, instructional, or just simply pleasurable. Unfortunately, without a comprehensive dedicated study it is impossible to conclude why in particular identity dissonance’s existence within literature would hold appeal for readers. Though there are some clues as to why its presence is particularly compelling, effects or uses to be derived from its appearance are only speculative. The gendered characterizations of the hero and heroine along with a plot line dedicated to the resolution or acceptance of identity dissonance in the heroine’s life, strongly indicate that romance novels provide an excellent environment in which to explore for this psychological phenomenon.

### **The Gender Dissonant Hero:**

Romance novels present masculinity as transformable. Traditional stereotypes and characteristics are manipulated and removed from their assigned gender. In romance novels

the masculine and feminine roles suggested in a standard plot summary are not so simple. The hero is never finally represented as being as brutal as he may at first appear to be; the heroine is fulfilled not through his cruelty but through his transformation. The turning point of the novel is often a moment of collapse through which power relations are reversed. (Jones, A., 1986, p. 200)

Character development, where the hero's alienating qualities are either reinterpreted or eliminated, is very important to the women who read romances. Janice Radway notes that "the romances [that Dot] most values and recommends for her readers are those with 'strong,' 'fiery' heroines who are capable of 'defying the hero,' softening him, and showing him the value of loving and caring for another" (1991, p. 54). Romance novels are characterized by a particular narrative feature: the blatant transformation of the hero into a more suitable mate for the heroine. The hero and heroine of these novels begin their relationship in conflict, and, as the plot unfolds, a resolution is reached when the heroine comes to understand her hero -- as he has now finally learned to communicate his feelings. In Daphne Clair's Flame on the Horizon, the hero, by the final few pages of the novel, has learned to be as emotionally receptive and vulnerable as the heroine:

'We should have grieved together,' she said, looking up at him, this time not trying to hide her tears.

'Yes,' Reid agreed huskily. Tears glittering in his own eyes, he took her in his arms again. (1993, p. 184)

These novels resolve only once the heroine gains recognition and acceptance from her hero; a validation that is based upon his sharing of her feelings and concerns.

Romance novel plot lines are based upon the presumption that men and women relate to the world, and each other, very differently. Carol Gilligan's book In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development identifies variations in the way that North American males and females conceptualize relationships (1993). She suggests that women's lives are marked by a 'struggle for connection', a need to establish and develop meaningful relationships with Others. On the other hand, Gilligan suggests that men are valued for their independence, their ability to function on their own. It seems very possible that the reason that women read romances is to fantasize about men wanting the same kind of interconnected relationships that women thrive within. Leslie Rabine observes: "Harlequins, unlike 'real life,' provide a solution: the hero adopts the feminine form of the self, recognizes it as valid, and gives the heroine the same tender devotion she gives to him" (1985, p. 52). Radway (1991) also concludes that

as a result of [the heroine's] effort, [the hero] will be transformed into an ideal figure possessing both masculine power and prestige and the more 'effeminate' ability to discern her needs and to attend to their fulfillment in a tender, solicitous way. (p. 127-128)

Caring for the heroine transforms the masculine hero into a feminized version of his previous self. It is a 'feminized hero' that the heroine ultimately encounters in romance novels, as this walking paradox is the only type of man truly worthy of her love.

The practice/process of feminization, where the hero assumes many feminine characteristics, may be vital to the romance novel's appeal. As Carol Thurston observes,

“romance readers appear to have created their fantasy heroes in their own image” (1987, p. 101). John Fiske, examining Radway’s investigation of romance novels and their readers, concludes that there was an apparent

feminization of the hero: at the start he was cruel, unfeeling, remote (a feminine view of masculinity), but by the end he had become sensitized enough to the heroine’s finer feminine sensibility for him to be fit for her to marry. (1987, p. 70)

According to Radway (1991), women romance readers want their men to relate to them as they themselves relate to men, with emotional openness and caring. Radway identifies the presence of a symbolic restructuring of the hero (therefore masculinity) by the heroine (therefore femininity). Radway proposes that the Smithton women are looking for a “man who is capable of the same attentive observation and intuitive ‘understanding’ that they believe women regularly accord to men” (1991, p. 83), and, the romance novel provides such a ‘hero’. Romance novels’ seem to assert the supreme value of femininity -- found in the typical ending where patriarchy itself (embodied in the hero) is feminized. In the Harlequin romance Wishes the hero, a man who has spent the whole novel trying to distance himself from the heroine -- “I resented your intrusion in my private thoughts. I didn’t know what to do, so I backed off” (Estrada, 1997, p. 212) -- is finally found to be pursuing the heroine while she retreats:

In a low voice thick with emotion, he said, “Show me how. Teach me.”  
 “You don’t know what you’re saying.”  
 He laughed derisively. “Oh yes I do. I’m asking you to rescue me from a fate worse than death.”  
 “Which is?”  
 “Living without you.”

Virginia gave Wilder a disbelieving look. "You're just full of it, aren't you?"

Her comment didn't faze him. "If you're talking about love, the answer is yes. I love you, Virginia Gallagher. I need you in my life. I need you in my heart. Please come back to me." (Estrada, 1997, p. 211)

Here is a hero who is fully open and vulnerable in the face of the heroine. He is emotionally receptive and pleads with her to teach him how to be more like her, explaining that the pain that he caused her was because he "was running scared" (p. 212). I propose to call this final state a 'feminized patriarchy' believing this term accurately describes a solution to an important cause of narrative conflict in romance novels -- the unsuitability of the hero. Once he becomes feminized, in touch with his feminine identity, he is finally worthy of the heroine's love.

Romance novel heroes are consistently described in contradictory terms. In the Harlequin romance novel Outrageous by Lori Foster (1997), the hero had a "firm but gentle" (p. 11) hold on the heroine who describes him as "the most beautiful man she'd ever seen. Raw, sexual, but also...gentle" (p. 15). This dichotomy in self-defining characteristics, or identity, seems to be a defining feature of the hero. Radway observes

the Smithton readers' tendency to describe the ideal hero in paired terms. When asked in the interviews to provide an account of the perfect romantic hero, Dot and her customers replied with such phrases as 'strong but gentle,' 'masculine but caring,' 'protective of her and tender,' 'a he-man but a lover-boy, too.' (1991, p. 129-130)

A gender dissonant hero may be part of the romantic fantasy for readers, as they seem to seek out heroes who, while displaying very traditional North American stereotypes regarding masculine identity, also contain many feminine qualities and characteristics.

The romance novel's narrative appears to express this dichotomy clearly as the adoption of newly acquired, or the heightened display of previously repressed, feminine characteristics by the hero seems to be a fundamental part of the romance novel's appeal.

According to Krentz (1992), herself a romance novel writer, these novels

make it clear that women value the warrior qualities in men as well as their protective, nurturing qualities. The trick is to teach the hero to integrate and control the two warring halves of himself so that he can function as a reliable mate and as a father. The journey of the novel, many writers say, is the civilization of the male. (p. 6)

The fact that these novels are identified by the presence of an identity conflict, by an attempt by the hero to 'integrate and control' a dissonant Self, reinforces my assertion that identity dissonance most likely is present in romance novels. Therefore, a major theme seems to be how the hero learns both to cope, and to come to terms with, gender identity dissonance.

The hero must embrace and incorporate feminine qualities, consequently creating a gender identity based upon the maintenance of oppositional gender traits. Stereotypical gender dichotomies have been documented by theorists such as Sandra Bem (1981) whose sex role inventory concludes that a masculine gender identity is marked by 'instrumentality' (i.e. self-reliance) while feminine identity is defined by 'expressiveness' (i.e. yielding qualities), (Santrock & Yussen, 1992). Accordingly, a hero who is both assertive and gentle is demonstrating identity characteristics from both sides of the stereotypical gender spectrum. The hero must learn to accept a Self-concept encompassing contradictory gender characteristics; and, it seems that the presence or

recognition of his love for the heroine, who both embraces and requires these contradictions, assists him to understand the usefulness or necessity for him to maintain an identity paradox.

“I think you’re probably a real-life hero, Judd, and unlike any man I’ve ever known.”

The words hit him like a blow. He stared into her dark eyes, dumbfounded. He saw her acceptance, her giving. He was a man with no family, no ties, a cop out to do a job, and willing to use her to do it. He was certainly no hero. But if that was what Emily wanted...

...It would be only too easy to get wrapped up in Emily’s problems. *It would be much too easy to get wrapped up in Emily.* But he wouldn’t. Judd was afraid Emily could easily make him reevaluate himself and his purpose. Arresting Donner and seeing him prosecuted had to remain a priority. But he was beginning to feel like a juggler in a circus, wanting his time with Emily, and still needing to seek vengeance on Donner. (Foster, 1997, p. 153-155)

In the end, the hero decides to have his cake and eat it too. He asserts his extreme masculine identity by hunting down and arresting the criminal Donner while at the same time nurturing and protecting the heroine, Emily. Ultimately, the feeling of being a ‘juggler in a circus’ is what defines the ideal hero; a man who must learn how to maintain both an assertively masculine and assertively feminine identity to attain his final goal -- the love of the heroine. Thus, the presence of this ‘Feminized Hero’ reinforces my assertion that gender identity dissonance is present in romance novels.

### **The Gender Dissonant Heroine:**

Heroes are not the only ones to experience a shift in stereotypical temperament. Romance novel heroines are also characterized by the presence of both masculine and feminine gender characteristics. The qualities that characterize the heroine from the start

of the novel, or which she gradually attains through plot development, are not only progressive but distinctly feminist as they demonstrate the heroine's equality with, and sometimes superiority over, the hero. The egalitarian relationship between hero and heroine is often used to express how similar or equal they are to each other -- how both the hero and heroine share many of the same characteristics. The heroine is most often "experienced, confident, self-sufficient, assertive, and even daring - all traits traditionally assigned to men" (Thurston, 1987, p. 98). The presence of positive, stereotypically masculine, characteristics in the heroine's personality seems to be an important aspect of an effective heroine. Both the hero and the heroine in Flame on the Horizon (Clair, 1993) run successful businesses, and when another woman needs rescuing both equally assist in saving her. The heroine, Annys, is portrayed as the hero's physical equal and is often described as able to better his physical achievements (i.e. jump higher, swim stronger etc.). In this romance novel the heroine is loved because of her equality and masculine 'instrumentality', never forced to concede to any negative stereotype regarding women and their passive need for rescuing; for Annys, equality is presented as an asset rather than a hindrance to attaining love. Radway observes that the Smithton women's "repeated insistence on the need for strong and intelligent heroines attests to their wish to dissociate themselves from the stereotype of women as weak, passive, and foolish individuals" (1983, p. 69). Heroines in romance novels lead their heroes to wonder "whatever happened to male domination?" (Mather, A Secret Rebellion, 1993, p. 12). Within romance novels the institution of patriarchy is called into question, and heroines

adopt behaviors and qualities previously assumed to be only part of the masculine domain. Radway (1991) found that ideal romances, according to the romance readers she surveyed, were ones where the heroines displayed personalities or behaviors “usually identified with men” (p. 124). Ultimately heroines display traits and activities originating from a diversity of identity scripts. Therefore, romance readers encounter novels which present females in diverse gender roles and identities.

The heroines presented in romance novels are characterized by identities in dissonance, or in Leon Festinger’s words, by ‘paired oppositional elements’. According to Barlow & Krentz (1992) paradoxical wording and phrases are very common in the description of both heroine and hero; for example, the heroine’s ‘soft fierceness’ or hero’s ‘tender aggression’. Paradox seems to be a standard feature of the romance novel heroine. In Penny Jordan’s (1998) novel The Perfect Lover the female lead is depicted in the following manner:

‘Oh, but you are so cold,’ he had complained the last time she had refused him. ‘Cold outside, but I think *very*, very hot inside. *Very*, very hot...’ he had whispered as he attempted to deepen the passion of the kiss they were sharing. (p. 95)

Conflicting identities seems to be a goal or prerequisite for the heroine. According to one romance writer: “I try and give the heroines in my books the traits and qualities traditionally reserved for heroes in other types of fiction: honor, loyalty, integrity, courage, intelligence, and good old-fashioned grit” (Williamson, 1992, p. 128). It seems that much of the hero’s high estimation of the heroine is based upon her ability to emulate his qualities and characteristics:

The hero falls in love with the heroine because he sees something of himself in her - he sees the *hero* in her. It works the other way, as well. The heroine will not accept the hero completely until she has seen some evidence of her own gentleness and compassion in him. This business of hero and heroine reflecting each other's strongest and most admirable traits is an important element in the romance novel. (Krentz, 1992, p. 5)

In the Harlequin romance, Flame on the Horizon (Clair, 1993), the heroine is on equal footing with the hero, and her powerful identity is an asset: "From the first she'd known that was one of the things he liked about her, that she never asked for special concessions, and was always able to match him" (Clair, 1993, p. 86). Romance novel heroines do not necessarily represent the stereotypical assumption of the passive heroine/female in need of being rescued or saved by her hero. Instead, the heroine's personality displays the best characteristics to be found from either gender role, consequently the heroine displays a very dissonant gender identity.

Romances provide an environment where traditional gender boundaries are examined, and in significant ways, altered (Jensen, 1984). This quality can be attributed to the fact that "gender is at issue in romance not simply because romance is a gendered genre but because romance functions as a locus where the question of gendering is negotiated"

(Elam, 1992, p. 103). As Ann Jones illustrates:

Without any direct reference to feminism, the standard romance plot may nevertheless reconstruct relations between the sexes. By page 140 of the required 180, nurturant men and competent women occupy test situations that supersede conventional gender roles. (1986, p. 201)

Diane Elam makes an important point in her book Romancing the Postmodern (1992)

when she discusses the characteristics of the romance genre in relation to the creation of

new social realities. She points out that “romance threatens to expose ‘reality’ as a constructed referent rather than...a ‘natural’ state of existence” (1992, p. 8). Within these novels there is a noticeable blending and reconstructing of gender boundaries (Jones, A., 1986; Juhasz, 1988, Crane, 1994); a combining or removal of the bipolar dichotomy differentiating identity characteristics according to gender, which sees male on one end of the spectrum and female on the other. Paradoxes to be found within the gender identity of romance novel heroes and heroines may have to do with extreme differences to be found between stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity. Consequently, when a heroine displays characteristics traditionally attributed to males she can be seen to be adopting an identity that is contrary to others already embedded. By embodying both traditionally male and female gender traits the heroines (and heroes) are presenting contradictory (bipolar) attributes that are typically expected to be exclusionary of each other<sup>9</sup>. Cultural expectations are that individuals either act according to feminine gender schemata or masculine schemata, but not both. The characterizations of heroines in romance novels purposefully include both poles of the gender spectrum, consequently their personalities are marked by contradictions and gender identity dissonance. Ultimately, heroines document the consequences of desiring, acquiring, and embodying contradictory gender identities.

### **Identity Dissonance and its Function in Romance Novels:**

Identity dissonance is present in romance novels; in particular, it may function to drive the narrative forward and assist in the construction of the mandatory conflict between

hero and heroine. Though there are specific external scenarios that are part of the plot which create the necessary conflict i.e. saving a mutual friend, being stranded in the wilderness together, solving a crime etc., there is also an accompanying internal, psychological struggle which the heroine wrestles with throughout the novel. According to Hubbard (1985) romance novels “concentrate on the heroine’s decision-making” (p. 124), proposing that the plotlines of romance novels center around answering questions and making choices such as: “Does she want a career first and love later? Is love without marriage a better choice? How can she handle a long-distance relationship? Does she dare to love again after a painful divorce? Will the new man in her life be suitable as a father for her children?” (p. 121). All of these emotional conflicts seem to revolve around resolving issues that could, and ultimately do, produce identity dissonance. Lowery (1995), asks the uninitiated romance writer to consider the following question in order to flesh out the characterization of the heroine: “What goal in life is she working toward, or what problem is she trying to sort through?” (p. 217). Therefore, the writer’s objective is to set up a tension between the heroine’s present life circumstances or identity and what the heroine is striving towards -- thus producing a possible identity dilemma or dissonance.

According to Radway (1991), romance novel plots depict the re-establishment of the heroine’s identity. She proposes that at the beginning of the romance the heroine’s social identity is thrown into question and by the resolution of the novel, once heroine and hero are bonded as a couple, the heroine’s identity is restored. What I propose is a

development of this observation, as I argue that what occurs is not a re-establishment of the heroine's identity, as in fact it has never been removed from her possession. Rather, what begins the romance novel is the heroine's confrontation with a circumstance or emotional condition (i.e. falling in love) that leads her to experience the effects of identities in opposition. My assumption is that romance novels present an identity conflict, a plot that places the heroine in circumstances that call into question her previous understanding of Self. The romance novel plot line presents the heroine with a choice between two competing identities which both prove important and worthwhile to her Self-concept. Ultimately, by the end of the romance novel, she has either learned how to embrace the two competing identities and their dissonance, or has restructured her priorities in order to remove or minimize the resulting dissonance. As Barlow observes:

At some subliminal level, the narrative teaches a woman how to reconcile the various aspects of her own psyche that may be at war with one another so that she can feel herself to be a truly integrated, competent, and emotionally whole individual who is able to perform her various functions in the world. (1992, p. 46)

Ultimately, the romance novel concludes with the resolution of the external conflict and solidification of relationship between hero and heroine; thus, the heroine's internal conflict and feelings pertaining to identity dissonance ('her psyche at war') are reconciled. Referring to the paradoxical nature of romance novel plots Barlow & Krentz (1992) conclude that "contradictory elements must be integrated in a happy ending for a romance novel to be deemed successful. It is the promise of integration and reconciliation which captures the reader's imagination" (p. 18). The heroine often

experiences contradictory feelings regarding what constitutes appropriate behaviors and emotions for females (i.e. Foster, 1997), the safety of isolation versus the danger in intimacy (i.e. Craven, 1999), between her desire to be self-sufficient and self-supporting and the pleasure of being taken care of (i.e. Lee, 1998; Estrada, 1997; Mather, 1993); these stereotypes, role expectations and relationship assumptions, fuel the plot line which depicts the Heroine's struggle to come to terms with her Self-concept and identity dissonance.

Festinger (1957) identifies a number of ways to specifically reduce dissonance: 1) eliminate offending behavior, 2) modify schemata/Self-concept, and 3) removal from the social environment that reinforces the dissonance. Ultimately, each of these solutions is utilized by heroines in Harlequin romance novels. Though not all Harlequin novels necessarily depict a heroine suffering from identity dissonance, it is a major theme in the majority (over 80%) of novels I encountered; and, in those novels that don't concentrate on the heroine's identity conflict, it seems to be the hero who experiences the dissonance instead (i.e. Estrada (1997); Michaels (1997)). My presumption is that the presence of identity dissonance on the part of the heroine is both a standard, and welcomed, part of the romance novel experience. Romance novels are stories about falling in love, thus most often it is the introduction of the hero into the heroine's life that provokes the internal struggle between conflicting identities. Though it may well be the heroine's desire for relationship that causes her dissonance, it is also the solidification of her

relationship with her hero and the resulting love and acceptance that follows, which often provides the re-establishment of an acceptable sense of Self for the heroine.

Identity dissonance can be removed by abandoning one of the offending identities. Often with the arrival of the hero onto the scene, an identity that the heroine is currently holding is challenged. In the Harlequin romance Forbidden by Janelle Denison (1999) the heroine Paige, who was previously in a bad marriage to an undercover detective, re-orders her life and Self-concept in order to ensure that she will never define herself as a police officer's wife again. Unfortunately, once she is thrown into an external conflict with the hero (finding her deceased husband's murderer), she finds herself suffering from internal dissonance due to her growing love for the hero, a police detective:

“Josh, about last night—”

“Do you regret what happened?” he interrupted.

“No, I don't.” She couldn't lie. She'd needed him in ways she couldn't explain. A part of her still did, but she didn't take the time to analyze those feelings. “But it happened for all the wrong reasons.”

He set his empty coffee mug on the round glass table then pinned her with a direct look. “I'd like to think it happened for a few *right* reasons.”

Like the need they had for each other. She pushed that thought aside and focused on the future, which didn't include giving her heart to another man who risked his life on a daily basis. “Josh, please don't do this.”

(Denison, 1999, p. 52)

As the romance progresses and the love between the hero and heroine rises to the surface and becomes more obvious to the heroine, she comes to realize that she cannot successfully define herself as being in love with a police officer while vowing to maintain an identity that completely excluded the possibility of ever again being a police officer's wife:

For weeks she'd resisted him--for years, really--and denying something so intrinsic was becoming more difficult with each passing day. Yet wanting him held so many risks, and the thought of loving him inundated her with so many fears. (Denison, 1999, p. 154)

A critical feature of all romance novels seem to be how the heroines constantly question their understanding of who they are and how they are feeling, and, throughout the novel, spend significant time either discussing or thinking about the discomfort they are experiencing. Ultimately Paige resolves her identity dissonance by deciding to abandon who she once believed herself to be: "It's what I *thought* I wanted" (Denison, 1999, p. 215) and embrace her identity as a police officer's wife and a life with her hero.

A common reason for the abandonment of one of the identities responsible for dissonance is the realization by the heroine that she is clinging to an old Self-conception out of fear, and that this identity is not serving a useful function in her life anymore, a dilemma which seems to highlight the ever-present theme of independence versus dependence or interdependence (i.e. Craven, 1999; Lee, 1998; Mather, 1993). At first the heroine constructs an identity that completely excludes the possibility of love from her hero, and then through circumstances, her identity based on isolation and the absence of love, is called into question. For example Penny Jordan's The Perfect Lover (1998) where the heroine muses:

What had happened to the young woman who had declared that if she couldn't have Saul then all she wanted in compensation was to be materially successful, to make her mark in the world? Why was she suddenly beginning to feel that there might be something missing from her life, that there might be *someone* missing from it? (p. 100)

The pain and confusion that marks the heroine's progress through the romance novel's narrative is often a result of identity dissonance that arises as her love for her hero grows. Aronson (1997) proposes that dissonance is most prevalent when the Self-concept is threatened, and therefore more likely to occur when "an individual performs a behavior that is inconsistent with his or her sense of self" (p. 24). And in romance novels, the behavior that is often inconsistent with the heroine's previous sense of Self, is the act of being loved by the hero.

Ultimately, the heroine abandons the identity that defines her as not welcoming the hero's love, as she realizes that she is clinging to an old redundant Self-concept out of reluctance and fear. As the heroine from Penny Jordan's The Perfect Lover (1998) explains:

'I knew that I'd...enjoyed...what happened, and that you'd made me feel things...do things...I'd no idea I could feel or do. But it wasn't until the following Christmas that I realized what had happened to me. I'd told myself that I hated you, that I was glad you weren't my tutor any longer and that there was no contact between us....It must have been a protective reflex,' Louise told him softly, achingly. 'A way of trying to pretend to myself that you weren't...that I wasn't...'. (Jordan, 1998, p. 174-175)

Once the heroine has the love of her hero the previous identity of isolation and functionality (i.e. I am defined only by my work; I don't want a relationship with a man), often the result of fear due to a previous bad experience, causes significant discomfort due to its conflict with her sense of being in love. Consequently, the heroine's independent or isolating identity is no longer useful to her and thus dismissed away as a 'protective reflex' and removed from her Self-concept. In addition, occasionally, it is an

external conflict which provides the impetus for identity dissonance. For example the Harlequin romance The Getaway Bride (Wilkins, 1997), where the heroine feels it necessary to run away from her husband in order to save him from being murdered by someone who is stalking her. Thus, the heroine is forced by circumstances to assume an identity of independence and isolation in addition to her previous understanding of Self as wife and nurturer. Once the external conflict, and the mystery of the stalker is resolved, the heroine is finally free to abandon her isolating identity while maintaining her preferred interdependent Self-definition and identity as the hero's wife.

Another method of dealing with dissonance is to modify schemata which define those identities as being in opposition. Thus, instead of interpreting them as combating each other, regard them as mutually compatible. In the Harlequin romance novel Outrageous (Foster, 1997) the heroine Emily is wrestling with what could be referred to as the Madonna-Whore dichotomy. She comes from a family that has given her very strict instructions regarding how to be a lady, and the heroine identifies with this Self-description. The desire to be 'ladylike', to embody what her family defines as proper behavior for a wealthy and socially prominent female, is very much linked to the heroine's understanding of Self as derived from social comparison. The heroine's identity as 'lady', should reside in her 'Me' Self-structure, and consequently would reflect her adoption of an identity influenced by personal experiences and social exposure; its presence would be the result of her absorption of social norms and protocols deemed relevant to her Self-concept. At the beginning of the novel Emily's aspiration to

recognize and define herself as a sexual woman, an identity that would reside in her 'I' Self-structure, was deemed inappropriate as she regarded it as directly opposing her identity as 'lady'. Consequently, though Emily has an equal need to recognize and explore her sexuality, she cannot help but derogate her desires: "A lady never lost her head to something as primal as lust" (Foster, 1997, p. 28). Regardless of her attempts to deny her identity, she is a very sexual woman, and her hero recognizes the presence of both of these identities in his heroine:

"That dress of hers...so feminine, so deceiving. He'd always heard other men joke about having a lady in the parlor and a wanton in the bedroom. The dress had looked innocent enough, but her eyes... He knew, even though he wasn't happy knowing, that Emily fit the descriptive mix of lady and wanton to a tee. It was an explosive fantasy, the thought of having a woman who would unleash her passion for just one man, that no one would ever guess unless they were with her..." (Foster, 1997, p. 54)

It is the hero's pleasure and appreciation of both of her identities that helps the heroine to begin to view their presence as welcome and not exclusionary of each other. Once the heroine recognizes the attraction and value in maintaining both identities and concedes that her sexual identity located in her 'I' Self-structure is not diametrically opposed to the identity of 'lady', located in her 'Me' Self-structure, identity dissonance would be resolved. With her hero, "for the first time in her life, Emily was able to indulge in her sensual nature" (Foster, 1997, p. 176). And though her behavior may have been improper according to her previous conception of appropriateness for a respectable lady, she "simply couldn't feel any shame in loving Judd" (Foster, 1997, p. 189). Over the length of the novel the heroine reconciles herself to her needs and embraces both of her

identities, accepting how integral they are to her overall Self-concept. In the final scene the heroine, embracing her sexuality, strips for her hero, and immediately after, requests that they live in her house thus ensuring that she will be able to maintain her social and community position. Her hero accepts her conditions and she falls happily into his arms promising him the rest of her life and many more strip shows to come. Thus the heroine, by redefining her conception of the dissonance producing identities, is able to change her perception of them from being oppositional to being consonant and consequently would no longer experience identity dissonance.

According to Festinger (1957), by defining distinct environments, scenarios, or boundaries in which oppositional identities may display themselves, exclusive of the other's influence or impact, identity dissonance can be minimalized. Miranda Lee's The Millionaire's Mistress (1998) features a woman who is very inexperienced sexually as she has

always made it quite clear on the first date that if the boy thought she was going to come across at the end of the night, he could find himself someone else to take out. She had no intention of giving a man sex just because he bought her dinner, or took her to a movie. Only true love, she reasoned loftily, would make such an intimate and yukky act bearable. (Lee, 1998, p. 12)

At the beginning of the novel, Justine, does not regard her sexuality as either pleasurable or worthwhile and regards marriage and love as a very asexual experience. Nevertheless, so that she may save herself and her mother from financial trouble, she adopts a very sexual persona in order to entice the bank manager and secure a loan. As a result, Justine begins to both develop and explore her very real identity as a sexual woman, witnessed in

her proposal to the hero: “She drew herself up tall and set uncompromising eyes upon him. ‘you want to be my friend? Fine. I’d like that. You want to be my boyfriend? That’s fine too. I’ll bet you’re great in bed” (Lee, 1998, p. 97). As Justine develops this new side to her personality she sets in motion the ensuing identity conflict, between defining herself as a woman who is non-sexual, and her sense of herself as a woman who is very forthcoming with her sexuality finding it both functional and pleasurable. This contradictoriness creates quite a lot of dissonance in the heroine, dissonance that is not resolved by the end of the novel. Instead, Justine embraces the roles of both non-sexual/demure wife to her one ‘true love’ and, highly sexualized/sexy woman by making clear distinctions between when and where these identities may be expressed. In the closing lines of the romance novel there is a fast forwarding of the hero and heroine’s lives in order to describe their future together:

None of [the children] believed for a moment the stories their father told of their mother being a wild child who had played hookey from school, been an outrageous flirt and who’d worn tight, sexy dresses. That wasn’t *their* mother. No way. That had to be some other person.

But when their parents found the privacy of their bedroom at night, and the children were fast asleep, something happened to their mother. In Marcus’s arms she became a different woman, a woman who knew she was very lucky to have found her true love in her life. They would have been very surprised to see the woman she became then. Very surprised indeed! (Lee, 1998, p. 184-185)

Thus the heroine Justine would be able to minimize the negative feelings associated with identity dissonance due her ability to make very clear and distinct boundaries defining when and where she will express either of her oppositional identities.

Romance novels are not always clear regarding how the heroine plans to resolve her identity dissonance. In the Harlequin novel Double Take (Kaiser, 1997), the heroine struggles between defining herself either entirely through her work or her relationship. And, though the hero gives her an ultimatum telling her that she can either choose her dynamic and risky career/identity or ensure his permanent presence in her life, by the closing lines of the novel she is still unsure regarding what direction she wants to take:

“And since you’ll be sworn to secrecy, I’ll never know what’s real and not real, when you’re being honest and when you’re lying for the sake of your country.”

“Afraid so.”

Arianna bit her lip. “That’s sort of like making me decide which kid to sacrifice to the wolf.”

“Life can be difficult,” he said. “The price of fame is eternal uncertainty.”

She rubbed her chin.

“So what’s it going to be Arianna?” he asked “Shall I call George Almquist and have him send me a disk with a copy of the Corsi book, or do you want to know where I *really* am every night?”

Her eyes narrowed. “You’re a nice guy, Mark, but you truly are a bastard.”

He laughed “You can always pick...like Ernie said.”

She shook her head. “You’re loving this, aren’t you?”

“Hey, I’m just curious what you’re going to do.”

Arianna gave him a coy look. “I’ll let you know later. After I have dinner and check out that futon.” (Kaiser, 1997, p. 216)

And so the novel ends, with the promise of love and romance between the hero and heroine and the presumption that regardless of what the heroine ultimately chooses to do, she will nevertheless maintain the love and support of her hero. Identity dissonance, a fundamental part of the romance novel, never presents a true threat to the happiness or bond that will be, or has been, established between the couple. As so often in the ‘real’

world, concessions must be made and dissonance lived with. Multiplicity is a fundamental quality of the Self-concept, therefore it should not be assumed that dissonance is necessarily removable. Ultimately, identity dissonance is present in the characterization of the female protagonist and the romance novel narrative.

Romance novels chronicle the effects of identity dissonance in the lives of fictional characters. According to Barlow & Krentz (1992) the goal of the romance novel is to achieve “the integration of opposites that results in a happy ending” (p. 20). In order to reinforce the assertion that the heroes and heroines of romance novels are marked by contradictory characterizations, a pilot study was conducted. Four women who were not regular readers of romance novels were asked to fill out a questionnaire (See Appendix). The goal was to explore whether subjects would be able to detect the presence of dissonant characterizations in a hero and heroine taken from the same Harlequin romance novel<sup>10</sup>. I predicted that if subjects were able to recognize contradictory characteristics manifested in either the hero or heroine between novel excerpts, that the presence of gender identity dissonance or contradictory characterizations may be present within romance novels. The results from the questionnaire are quite promising. All subjects were able to distinguish that the heroine, to a varying degree, was demonstrating qualities in one excerpt that were contrary to characteristics displayed in the other. For example, subjects who described the heroine as insecure in one passage would have identified her as self-assured in the subsequent section<sup>11</sup>. Three out of the four subjects when asked whether the passages they read depicted the same heroes/heroines, remarked that they

believed that they were not describing the same people at all, asserting instead that the heroines and heroes described in the passages were taken from separate novels. Thus overall, each of the four subjects concluded that they were reading descriptions that were disparate from each other<sup>12</sup>, demonstrating that within this romance novel the heroine's depiction was marked by a high degree of variance. Subjects also reported that the passages describing the hero also presented contrasting temperaments<sup>13</sup>. Though assumptions regarding the romance novel genre may have influenced responses, (as one subject reported that she "enjoyed seeing the different traits I automatically attributed. i.e. → men crying = independent whereas the woman agitated was emotional. Annoyed at my own stereotypes really!"), overall the subjects seemed very able to point to instances that made them attribute paradoxical characteristics to the heroes and heroines depicted in the excerpts. Therefore, results indicate that a properly designed and implemented research project that was comprised of a suitably larger number of subjects may indeed lead to a valid and reliable demonstration of the presence of identity dissonance within the characterizations of romance novel heroes and heroines.

The depiction of opposites, of emotional distress on the part of the heroine, her ever-present psychological conflict, all point to the presence of identity dissonance in the romance novel. Heroines are consistently depicted as torn between two different Self-definitions; for example, the heroine from Hoffmann's (1999) Harlequin romance "was stuck in some strange limbo, between the person she'd been and the person she'd almost become" (p. 168-169). Heroines struggle with an identity conflict -- Who should she be?

It seems that most often the answer to this question is to become the person that best serves her desire to maintain or obtain the love of her hero. Nevertheless, the period of identity dissonance is depicted as a time of positive emotional growth and strengthening in her life. In addition to the romance novel's ability to fulfill readers' nurture deprived lives, to provide entertainment or escapism, to allow its readers to feel empowered or experience the productivity of role-playing, or to critique or redefine patriarchy, I propose one more reason for readers to seek out romances: to vicariously experience and explore, within the narrative environment of the romance novel, the impact or effects to be derived from identity dissonance. Kinsale (1992), a writer of romance novels, asserts that these novels may provide

not an external reality check, at any rate, but perhaps an internal one. I suspect that for a woman a romance may be a working-through of her own interior conflicts and passions, her own "maleness" if you will, that resists and resists giving in to what is desired above all, and yet feared above all, after the decisive climax, arrives at a resolution, a choice that carries with it the relief and pleasure of internal harmony. (p. 39)

I argue that what scholars and writers of romance novels are noticing, is the effects of identity dissonance and coping strategies for dealing with its presence, fictionally depicted by the characters and plots in romance novels. Romance novels portray a gender dissonant hero and heroine and a plot that pivots around the resolution of the heroine's identity dissonance. I suggest that readers are drawn to romance novels because they recognize their own feelings of identity dissonance reflected in the narrative lives of the hero and heroine.

***Conclusion: Women's Lives and Portrayals -- a Rebuttal to the "Schizophrenic" Diagnosis, and Implications for Identity Dissonance***

[Social Psychology], as a field, [has] focused almost exclusively on the nature of the representation (i.e., how the world makes up the mind) and on the divergence between representation and reality. This perspective, however, highlights only a portion of the interdependence between representation and reality, or between the mind and the world. The way in which the mind makes up the world -- that is, the way in which representation creates reality -- has been undeniably neglected. (Markus & Kitayama, 1992, p. 359)

What this paper ultimately proposes is that the particular manner in which individuals construct identity should manifest itself in cultural products (i.e. books, television programs, films etc.). The way that we conceptualize or organize our internal Selves, cannot help but be mirrored in how and what we create in our external world -- as the psychological constructs the social. Thus, identity dissonance, a byproduct of our paradoxical Self-concept, should, and can, be found to exist within mediums of mass communication.

Women are constantly exposed to contradictory media messages regarding their identities. Mass culture is extremely inconsistent, functioning in a highly antithetical manner, reinforcing meanings and messages that are characterized by their opposition to each other (Modleski, 1982). For example, media images propose contradictory versions of the ideal woman (compare once again the advertisements presented in Figures 4 and 5). The presence of inconsistent or oppositional images of identity (such as those found in romance novels and magazine advertising) may be the result of a drive that individuals exhibit towards dissonant identity construction derived from their paradoxical Self-

concept. Identity dissonance, a psychological disequilibrium that individuals experience when they uphold roughly equal commitment to two or more identities which contain information and values that are oppositionally related, is caused by implementation/utilization of conflicting identities. The fact that contradictory identities are found daily in North American media seems a strong testament to the fact that women seek out these diverse representations of Self. The case study of non-romance readers was conducted in order to provide supplemental support and verification for the conclusions reached from my personal assessment and textual analysis of Harlequin romance novels. The description and documentation of the struggle to manage identity dissonance within romance novels was necessary in order to reinforce my assertion that if identity dissonance is both a real and influential phenomenon in people's lives it will be present within mass media. I critique the assumption that mass communication or cultural configurations (i.e. postmodernism) has caused a shift from a previous state of unified cohesiveness to a new indeterminate, discordant, and dissociated identity state (Gergen (1991); Jameson (1983)). Instead, I propose that what these theorists are recognizing is in fact identity dissonance, a manifestation of a normal, healthy, and coherent, sense of Self.

The presence of dissonant media images and meanings has led some theorists to conclude that mass communication products may cause psychological distress in audience members. Rabine (1985) proposes that women living in today's emotional reality cannot help but feel "schizophrenic". Unfortunately, the mental illness of

schizophrenia has been inappropriately used by a number of theorists to identify the outcome of exposure to conflictual cultural dialogues, demands, and media images.

Susan Douglas explains how media help construct paradoxical female Self-concepts:

Most women take for granted their own conflicted relationships to the mass media. They assume they are the only ones who love and hate *Vogue* at the same time, the only ones riddled with internal contradictions about whether to be assertive or diplomatic, gentle or tough. And too many assume that such contradictory feelings are unusual, abnormal. They aren't. Most women feel this because they've been socialized by the mass media, and women should know that feeling these contradictions on a daily basis is what it means to be an American woman. (1994, p. 20)

Mass media present very dissonant representations of identity to their viewers, and it is the presence of paradoxical information that has led some theorists to raise concerns over its possible effect on the viewing audience. Gergen (1991) refers to the "multiphrenic condition of the self", a negative state of 'vertigo' brought on by the presence of unlimited multiplicity. Where I disagree with the observations and conclusions of these theorists is in *why* media images are dissonant. Theorists such as Douglas, S. (1994), Gergen (1991), and Thurston (1987), credit technology, media, or social configurations, for the presence of 'schizophrenic' images of women and the subsequent 'schizoid' feelings that arise in the viewer due to exposure. Instead, what I propose is that the images to be found in media (particularly in romance novels) are most likely the result of psychological characteristics and processes that have made their way into the social realm of mass communication.

Identity dissonance's root cause is not media consumption, instead media products should be regarded as mirroring, amplifying, or distorting, this natural process by which

all individuals construct identity. Ultimately Susan Douglas' (1994) reference to women's 'schizophrenic' relationship to media may be an informal way of explaining the presence of identity dissonance, and her assumption that media images have the ability to effect powerful feelings of internal discord in women is compatible with the perspective put forth by this paper. Media not only reflect, but assist, in the development of identity dissonance due to their presentation of dissonance producing information. Media's representation of women encourages the development and process of identity dissonance (and gender identity dissonance). Nevertheless, the catalyst for dissonance lies in the psychological process of identity development, not in external institutions or products for consumption. Therefore, emerging technologies and new social configurations' amplification and exploitation of psychological characteristics such as identity dissonance, and the consequent presence of dissonance within media products pertaining to women's identity, is possibly inappropriately identified as proof for the new "schizophrenic" postmodern identity or women's "schizophrenic" sense of Self. Ultimately I conclude that the dissonant images found within media are *not* the primary cause of personal feelings of identity dissonance; rather, dissonance in media is most likely the sociocultural expression of the naturally ambiguous quality of identity construction.

I propose that one of the main reasons that romance novels attract such a large readership is that they present an environment that is familiar to women -- one that acknowledges the presence of identity dissonance in their lives. Paul Gilroy (1996)

recognizes that “difference exists within identities - within selves - as well as between them. This means that the longed-for integrity and unity of subjects is always fragile” (p. 40). Gilroy understands that though individuals pursue internal consistency or unity, this balance is often short-lived. Romance readers may actually recognize this reality, their reality, in the characterizations of heroes and heroines who strive throughout the novel in order to re-gain internal consistency or come to terms with the turmoil produced by identity dissonance. Thoits (1983) describes the importance of, and healthy necessity for, multiple identities, pointing to a possible link between too few identities and the risk of psychological disturbance. Romances depict the natural development of, and conflict between, identities; demonstrating how the process, though emotionally painful, provides great rewards. Romance novels seem to be based upon the assumption that the Self-concept is multifaceted, the same presumption made by Kenneth Gergen:

The individual has many potential selves. He [or she] carries with him [or her] the capacity to define himself [or herself], as warm or cold, dominant or submissive, sexy or plain. The social conditions around him [or her] help to determine which of these options are evoked. (1995, p. 142)

I would like to argue for the addition of the word ‘and’ into the above quote, as I believe that women and men can define themselves as warm and/or cold, dominant and/or submissive, sexy and/or plain. I propose that a dissonant Self is a coherent Self, thus both agreeing with theorists such as Erik Erikson (1968) who argue that a well adjusted human has a coherent sense of Self, at the same time as recognizing Gergen’s (1995) premise that individuals have a multifaceted Self-concept. In accordance with such theorists as Gilroy (1996) I assume that the reality of a disparate Self does not preclude coherency.

Rather, identity dissonance is part of a 'coherent Self' as multiplicity and diversity are integral elements of the Self-concept.

Romance novels contain dissonant characterizations, plot lines, values, and perspectives. Consequently, I propose that they most likely have the ability to assist readers with their own experiences with identity dissonance.

Almost from the beginning, I identified with the hero. I saw him as Self, not Other. And I dimly recognized him as one of the archetypal figures in my own inner landscape...The romantic hero, in fact, is not a man at all. He is a split-off portion of the heroine's own psyche which will be reintegrated at the end of the book. (Barlow, 1992, p. 49)

Barlow (1992) may not only recognize her own Self in the hero, triggering personal feelings of identity dissonance, but may also be able to identify how the heroine is going through the process of identity dissonance as she proceeds to integrate hero-like qualities/identities into her own Self-concept over the course of the narrative. The opinion that Barlow expresses, as both a reader and writer of romance novels, helps to exemplify my belief that romances provide a narrative discussion of how the hero and heroine live with identity dissonance, in addition to possibly triggering readers to explore/examine their own personal feelings of identity dissonance. With awareness comes the possibility of action and control. Thus, once women are consciously aware of both the presence and effect that identity dissonance has on their lives, they would possibly feel empowered and better able to make changes and re-define their relationship to those media institutions and social organizations that influence their Self-concept. My assumption is that identity dissonance is a very real, very active, part of the process of

identity development and has both a powerful and influential presence within mass communication. Consequently, I propose that the concept of identity dissonance could be a vital key to greater understanding of both Self and society.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> When the concepts detailed below are used within this paper it is the author's intention to imply the following:

"reader(s)" - refers to a North American audience of almost overwhelmingly female romance novel readers. A readership that represents all socio-economic segments of that female population.

"women" - refers to all North American females (as these are the women most described in the research and theory pertaining to the field of romance novel analysis as well as most often being the authors of this work).

"heroine" - the fictional female character which the romance novel's plot revolves around. Most often depicted as a Caucasian heterosexual, working-to-middle class North American woman.

"feminism" - a philosophy/social movement which embodies the general aim of disrupting current North American gender norms while advocating women's emancipation from patriarchy and subordination.

<sup>2</sup> I developed the theory of 'identity dissonance', an elaboration of Festinger's 'cognitive dissonance', in 1996 without prior knowledge of the term's usage by other theorists. Since embarking on this project I have found it referenced by Costello (1998) in her analysis of law students, though she operationalizes the process and effects of 'identity dissonance' far differently.

<sup>3</sup> My approach is similar to the work of 'Uses and Gratification' researchers such as Blumler & Katz (1974).

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Professor Cynthia Chataway for her assistance in the development of the physical depiction of my model.

<sup>5</sup> Burke's (1991) model of identities interrupting each other, though similar in a number of ways to my theorizing (due to his recognition that oppositional identities can be connected to each other and hamper how individuals effectively manage their relationship to their world) still strays from my conceptualization of identity dissonance. I argue that identity dissonance possesses the ability to motivate individual towards its removal or re-

ranking (which would decrease or eliminate dissonance), but until the individual performs that act it is assumed that the conflicting identities will be maintained and utilized as there is value in their presence. As it is presumed that these identities would be both active and useful to the individual in order to cause the dissonance, my theory does not make an assumption of interruption. Instead, I utilize separate conceptual tools (dissonance theory versus Burke's interference model) basing my analysis on a distinct mechanism, consequently, predicting different effects to arise from incongruent identities.

<sup>6</sup> Gerald Adams (1997), in a critique of Kerpelman, Pittman & Lamke's 'Identity Control' theory, concludes that a weakness of their model is its inability to explain how an 'identity standard' gets programmed or in what way the initial Self-definition settings are acquired. My model of the Self-concept may be able to be used to help explain how the information contained within the 'identity standard' originates. The 'identity standard' or the "taken-for-granted definition of self in the context of activity" (Kerpelman et al., 1997b, p. 365) needs to originate from some source, and according to my model, the interaction between the 'I', the 'Me', and the 'Contextually-Sensitive' Self-schemata could produce standards that might be able to be utilized by the individual in the development and evaluation of identities and information pertaining to identity.

<sup>7</sup> I am grateful once again to Professor Cynthia Chataway who's advice prompted my thinking in this direction.

<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, it may be very possible that particular personality types are specifically attracted to romance reading as an activity.

<sup>9</sup> For the purpose of this investigation dissonant traits are referred to as bipolar. Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that these traits are equal in weight. Instead, dissonant identity traits are those that are regarded by either an individual or society (as a general normative rule or stereotype) as antithetical.

<sup>10</sup> Each subject was paid \$10. Non-romance novel readers were chosen due to concern that romance readers could possibly anticipate characteristics that were not in the passages but would be a staple of the genre, or, would more likely to dismiss traits that were present due to an assumption that they were transient plot devices rather than ingrained characteristics. The questionnaire (see Appendix) is comprised of four excerpts from the Harlequin romance novel The Millionaire's Mistress by Miranda Lee (1998). Two passages feature the heroine, one where I presume her to be depicted as more instrumental (i.e. independent in comparison to dependent), the second where I propose she is behaving more expressive (i.e. more emotional rather than intellectual) -- I did the same for the hero. Each passage is followed by scales assessing the presence of six bipolar semantic differential pairs utilized by Carol Thurston (1987, p. 100) in her assessment of romance novels by romance readers. The following trait pairs were

utilized: independent-dependent, deceptive-straightforward, powerful-powerless, emotional-intellectual, passive-assertive, insecure-self-assured. Each trait from the six bipolar pairs was randomized and individually assessed for its presence in each passage. The four passages and sets of scales were followed by a number of open-ended questions.

<sup>11</sup> Two, out of the four subjects, concluded that five out of the six bipolar pairs were present, thus proposing that the heroines described in the two romance novel excerpts were very distinct in character. The third subject reported that three out of the six bipolar pairs were present, and the fourth subject believed that one pair was present between the two passages describing the heroine. In addition, all four subjects also reported recognizing a small degree of dissonance in characterization within an excerpt.

<sup>12</sup> Even the one subject who did not report a high degree of discrepancy between the two passages describing the heroine (as demonstrated in her account of only one bipolar pair of characteristics present) believed the women depicted in the passages were not the same person and therefore taken from separate novels. Thus even though this subject may have reported little dissimilarity between the two passages, her overall conclusion was that the two excerpts did not in actual fact depict the same woman.

<sup>13</sup> When evaluating the two excerpts pertaining to the hero, three out of the four subjects found 50% of the pairs to be in dissonance, and one subject concluding that two out of six, or 33% of the pairs, were in opposition. Once again all four subjects reported a small degree of dissonance in characterization within an excerpt in addition to the dissonance reported between the two depictions.

<sup>14</sup> I would like to thank Professor and Mrs. Fred Fletcher, Professor Cynthia Chataway, and Professor Louise Ripley for their advice and assistance in the construction of the questionnaire.

**Appendix<sup>14</sup>**

Questionnaire #: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much for taking the time to help in this study. I am a Masters student in Interdisciplinary Studies at York University. You will be assisting me in an examination of romance novels and mass media. Participation involves filling out scales assessing your perception of a number of passages taken from romance novels. This questionnaire should take you no longer than 20 minutes to complete. Please answer all the questions and read the instructions thoroughly. Your responses will be of great assistance and will be kept in the strictest confidence. Please answer as honestly as possible. Thank you again for your cooperation.

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

The purpose of this questionnaire is to measure how you personally feel about characters depicted in passages taken from romance novels. Your perceptions will be judged by your marks on a series of descriptive scales. Here is how to use these scales:

A) If you feel that the trait **was not** displayed by the character in the previous passage you place your mark as follows:

- 'personality trait': yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much: slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no   X

B) If you feel that the trait **was** displayed by the character in the previous passage you place your marks on both scales as follows:

- 'personality trait': yes   X   if yes, how much: slightly \_\_ : \_\_ :   X   : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_

**Note:** if you feel that the trait is present, you will need to fill out the corresponding scale assessing the degree of presence (from slight to extreme) you feel the trait had in the passage that you just finished reading.

- Important:**
- 1) Be sure that you respond to every trait for every passage, do not omit any.
  - 2) Never put more than one mark on a single scale.
  - 3) Do not flip through the pages.
  - 4) If necessary, you may turn back only to the passage that you are rating at the time to reexamine it.

**FINAL INSTRUCTIONS:**

Sometimes you may feel as though you have had the same items before. Do not try and remember how you checked similar items earlier in the questionnaire or look back and forth through the scales. Make each item a separate and independent judgment. Work at a fairly high speed through this test. Do not worry or puzzle over individual items. On the other hand, please do not be careless in your assessment, as I want your true evaluations.

Do not generalize qualities from one novel excerpt to the next, instead treat each excerpt as its own entity and evaluate it accordingly.

THANK YOU

Please read the following passage, paying particular attention to the characterization of the female heroine: **[expressive passage - i.e. more dependent than independent]**

He *was* late. Seven minutes. but it was enough for [the heroine] to have a taste of how she would feel if he never came, or if he ever decided to wipe her from his life altogether.

Devastation did not begin to describe her feelings. She spent those interminable seven minutes pacing to and fro across the lounge room and peering anxiously through the curtains, grateful that her mother was relaxing in a bath upstairs after her afternoon's gardening, unable to witness her daughter's uncharacteristic agitation.

[The heroine] tried telling herself that sexual frustration was the reason for her fear filled state, but somehow that didn't wash. Realization dawned once [he] pulled up in his Mercedes and she almost burst into tears with relief.

'Oh, my God, I *am* in love with him!' she wailed aloud.

Dropping the curtains, she clutched her bag to her chest and tried not to cry. Though whether it was from delight or dismay now, she wasn't sure.

Get a grip on yourself, girl, common sense demanded very quickly. So you're in love with him. That's nice. But he's not in love with you, so don't go winding romantic dreams around him. [Your friend] warned you good and proper. He's not going to marry you. All he wants is an affair. Right? Got that? Good!

An artificially composed [heroine] went to answer the doorbell at seven minutes past seven, having schooled her face into a perfectly understandable pout. She swung open the front door, ready to lambaste him for being late, but her words of reproach died at the sight of him.

He was wearing black. All over. Not the bleak, funeral black of that pin-striped suit he'd been sporting at their first meeting. A devilishly dark and sleek black, which screamed sin and sex from every angle.

She tried to keep the hunger out of her gaze as it swept over him, absorbing each wickedly elegant detail.

Lightweight woollen trousers proclaimed Italian tailoring. A black silk shirt, with long sleeves and an open neck. Shoes and belt fashioned in black leather. Combined with his flashing ebony eyes and sleek black hair. He looked like every woman's fantasy of a bad-boy lover come true.

It took several seconds for [the heroine] to appreciate that the sight of *her* in her red silk dress had rendered him just as speechless. She tried to guess what *he* was thinking as he took in every inch of her from her upswept hairdo down to her outrageously high red heels. By the look of the smoldering expression in those deeply set dark eyes of his, he was as aroused by her appearance as she was by his.

The thought sent her blood fizzing through her veins.

'I think the lime-green would have been preferable,' he muttered at last.

**'As would your pin-stripes,' she countered drily.**

**His eyes clashed with hers and a wry smile lifted the corners of his mouth. 'Shall we skip dinner in favour of a late supper?' he drawled. 'A late...*late* supper?'**

**[She] hesitated. It was one thing to plunge into an affair with him when it had just been a matter of sex. Would she survive giving him her body in true love? This was a new experience for her in more ways than one. Frankly, it terrified the life out of her. (Lee, 1998, p. 137-139)**

In your opinion was the **heroine** depicted in the previous passage:

- **deceptive:**      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- **self-assured:**    yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- **emotional:**      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- **dependent:**      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- **straightforward:** yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- **assertive:**        yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- **powerful:**        yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- **insecure:**        yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_



Please read the following passage, paying particular attention to the characterization of the female heroine: **[instrumental passage - i.e. more independent than dependent]**

And well deservedly, [the heroine had] thought at the time. She still did. But she also saw she had no alternative but to keep her appointment with the lecherous [man] or let the house be sold. All [her] other banking options had finally run out. After a myriad of phone calls, only one other loans officer had consented to see her during the past week, and he'd actually laughed at her idea.

The memory of that laughter hardened [the heroine's] resolve. Come ten o'clock tomorrow morning, she was going to sashay into [his] office, ready to do anything to achieve her goal and save her family home. If she had to humiliate herself a little, then she would. If she had to surrender some of her infernal pride, then too bad. If she had to beg, then...

No-no, she would *not* beg. That was going too far.

So was actually sleeping with the man. Good Lord! The very idea!

'What are you going to wear?' her mother asked.

'What?'

'For your appointment with this man in the bank. What are you going to wear?'

'I'm not sure. I haven't thought about it yet.'

'Then perhaps you should, before you sell off all your decent clothes.'

The word 'decent' struck a certain irony with [the heroine]. Decent was not the look she would be striving for tomorrow, not if she wanted [his] brains to be addled from the moment she walked into his office. She needed to wear something very bright, very tight and very sexy.

A certain...dress popped into her mind. She'd bought it whilst shopping with [her friend] - always a mistake. [Her friend] was a bad influence at the best of times. Admittedly, the girl did have an infallible taste for the kind of clothes which made men sit up and take notice.

This particular dress was made of a double knit material which clung...It had a modest enough neckline but was appallingly short, the tight, straight skirt curving provocatively around her derriere. [The heroine] had only worn it once, to lectures late last year. When she'd sat down and crossed her long tanned legs to one side of her cramped desk, the poor professor's eyes had nearly popped out of his head.

Would [his] eyes pop out as well?

[The heroine] cringed at the thought, but beggars couldn't be choosers, she'd found out. The rules of her life had changed. She was now playing a new game. It was called survival.

Oddly enough, the thought enthused her. She jumped up from the chair, full of new determination.

**'Come on, Mum. Time for us to go downstairs and have a hearty breakfast. We have a lot of work to do today!'**  
(Lee, 1998, p. 23-25)

In your opinion was the **heroine** depicted in the previous passage:

●emotional:      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_

●assertive:      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_

●powerful:      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_

●dependent:      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_

●intellectual:      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_

●straightforward:    yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_

●powerless:      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_

●self-assured:      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_



Please read the following passage, paying particular attention to the characterization of the male hero: **[expressive passage - i.e. more dependent than independent]**

[The hero] struggled to control the emotion welling up in his heart, but it was a struggle he was destined to lose.

‘No,’ he managed at last in a strangled fashion. ‘No, my darling, you’re not anything like [your friend]. And, no, I’m not angry with you, because I...I love you too. How could I not? Oh, God, [he said to the heroine], I’m getting all choked up here.’ He swallowed convulsively and dashed the wetness from the corners of his eyes. ‘Do you have any idea how many years it’s been since I cried?’

‘You’re crying?’ She sounded dazed. ‘Over me?’

‘Over you.’

‘You didn’t cry over [your ex-wife]?’

‘That bitch? God, no. Once I saw what she was made of I couldn’t wait to have done with her.’

‘What became of her, do you know?’

‘Funny you should ask. I had no idea...till last Tuesday. [My secretary] pointed out this article in the *Herald* to me about a New Zealand banker who was on trial for embezzlement. There was a photograph of his wife going into the court and it was [my ex-wife]. I was amused to read he claimed he’d be driven to the crime by his wife’s excesses. I almost felt sorry for the poor devil. Leopards don’t change their spots, do they? [My ex-wife will] go to her grave conning men out of their money. You don’t have to worry your pretty little head about her...I can’t stand the woman. If she stood naked in front of me I wouldn’t turn a hair.’

‘But...but you must have loved her to begin with....’

[The hero] heard the insecurity and was tempted to lie. But she’d said that she wanted everything to be open and above board between them. Best to start with the truth.

‘I thought I did. As a young lad growing up I had this dream of one day having this perfect life, which included the perfect wife on my arm. [The ex-wife] played the role of perfect wife-to-be to perfection - till the ring was on her finger. I fell in love with the illusion she created, not the real woman underneath. She fooled me completely with her flattering words and ways. She was also an accomplished actress in the bedroom. I won’t deny I was seriously infatuated in the beginning.

‘I began to suspect something was wrong right from the honeymoon, when all she wanted to do was shop. By the time the crunch came, and I found out what she really was, the wool had already started slipping from my eyes. Still, for a long time after I discovered the truth about her, I mistook the hurt and bitterness I was feeling for a broken heart. More a bruised ego, I think. Once I fell in love with you, sweet thing, I saw that what I’d felt for her hadn’t been true love at all, but a very poor copy.’

**'I'm your true love?'  
'The truest and the loveliest.'  
(Lee, 1998, p. 169-171)**



● powerful:      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_

● intellectual:    yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_

● assertive:      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_

● insecure:      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_

Please read the following passage, paying particular attention to the characterization of the male hero: **[instrumental passage - i.e. more independent than dependent]**

[The hero] slid his Merc into the spot next to the sporty Nissan and glared across at the sleekly silver lines. He knew exactly what such a car was worth, especially one so new. Hardly the sort of transport a girl needed when she was down to her last dollar, when that very morning she'd begged to be allowed to work as a cleaner because she needed the money. Even if she didn't own the car outright, the insurance alone would be quite high, much higher than an ordinary little runabout which would have sufficed for her needs.

Clearly [the heroine] wasn't about to compromise the parts of her life which showed her status to the world at large. Her home. Her car. Her wardrobe.

There was no longer any doubt in [the hero's] mind that [the heroine] intended to put plan B into action in the not too distant future. Everything else she was doing were merely stop-gap measures, designed to keep the wolf from the door till she could land herself that sugar-daddy husband she'd seemingly scorned.

But was the object of her manipulations yours truly? he speculated caustically. She was certainly working hard to change his bad opinion of her.

[The hero] suspected, however, he was another stop-gap measure - someone to satisfy her highly sexed nature till a suitable marital candidate came along. She'd have to be a fool to think *he'd* marry her, given the manner of their initial meeting.

[The heroine] might be a lot of things, but not a fool.

No. She'd decided to kill two birds with one stone, supplying herself with a lover while conveniently keeping him sweet over the loan at the same time. Then, when plan B succeeded, she would have done with both in one fell swoop.

Or maybe not? [The hero] pondered darkly. Maybe, if he pleased her in bed, she might plan to keep him on as her lover. It would not be the first time an ambitious young woman had married one man to better her financial position while entertaining other males on the side.

[The hero] rode the elevator up to the seventh floor with fire in his eyes, and in his belly. If [the heroine] thought she could use him, then she had another think coming. It was *her* who was going to be used. Ruthlessly. Smoothly. Mercilessly.

(Lee, 1998, p. 112-113)

In your opinion was the **hero** depicted in the previous passage:

- powerful:      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- deceptive:    yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- dependent:    yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- intellectual:    yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- self-assured:    yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- insecure:      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- passive:        yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- straightforward:    yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
no \_\_\_\_\_

- emotional:      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
                         no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- powerless:      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
                         no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- assertive:      yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
                         no \_\_\_\_\_
  
- independent:    yes \_\_\_\_\_ if yes, how much:    slightly \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ : \_\_ extremely  
                         no \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a regular reader of romance novels? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

Your age is: \_\_\_\_\_

There were two separate excerpts depicting a heroine, do you believe that they both portrayed the same woman (were they taken from the same novel)? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

Why or Why Not?

---

---

---

---

There were two separate excerpts depicting a hero, do you believe that they both portrayed the same man (were they taken from the same novel)? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

Why or Why Not?

---

---

---

---

Did you enjoy reading the previous passages? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

Why or Why Not? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

Would you be interested in reading the remainder of the novel? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

Why or Why Not? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

What is your opinion of Romance Novels? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

What is your opinion of Romance Novel Readers? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

Thank you very much for your participation.  
Have a good day.

### Works Cited

- Abrams, D. (1989). Differential association: Social developments in gender identity and intergroup relations during adolescence. In S. Skevington & D. Baker (Eds.), The social identity of women (pp. 59-83). London: Sage Publications.
- Adams, G. R. (1997). Identity: A brief critique of a cybernetic model. Journal of Adolescent Research, 12(3), 358-362.
- Alcock, J. E., Carment, D. W., & Sadava, S. W. (1991). A textbook of social psychology (2nd ed.). Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc.
- Allen, V. L. (1968). Role theory and Consistency theory. In R. P. Abelson, E. Aronson, W. J. McGuire, T. M. Newcomb, M. J. Rosenberg, & P. H. Tannenbaum (Eds.), Theories of cognitive consistency: A sourcebook (pp. 201-209). Chicago: Rand McNally and Company.
- Aronson, E. (1969). The theory of cognitive dissonance: A current perspective. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), Advances in experimental psychology, (Vol. 4, pp. 1-34). New York: Academic Press.
- Aronson, E. (1992). The return of the repressed: Dissonance theory makes a comeback. Psychological Inquiry, 3(4), 303-311.
- Aronson, E. (1997). The theory of cognitive dissonance: The evolution and vicissitudes of an idea. In C. McGarty & S. A. Haslam (Eds.), The message of social psychology: Perspectives on mind in society (pp. 20-35). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

- Barlow, L. (1992). The androgynous writer: Another view of point of view. In J. A. Krentz (Ed.), Dangerous men & adventurous women: Romance writers on the appeal of the romance (pp. 45-52). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Barlow, L., & Krentz, J. A. (1992). Beneath the surface: The hidden codes of romance. In J. A. Krentz (Ed.), Dangerous men & adventurous women: Romance writers on the appeal of the romance (pp. 15-29). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Bartky, S. L. (1988). Foucault, femininity, and the modernization of patriarchal power. In I. Diamond & L. Quinby (Eds.), Feminism & Foucault: Reflections on resistance (pp. 61-86). Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Beauvois, J. L., & Joule, R. V. (1996). A radical dissonance theory. London: Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Bebe. (1999, April). [print magazine advertisement], Vanity Fair, 464, 263.
- Belsey, C. (1992). Critical practices. London: Routledge.
- Bem, S. L. (1981). Gender schema theory: A cognitive account of sex typing. Psychological Review, 88(4), 354-364.
- Bem, S. L. (1993). The lenses of gender: Transforming the debate on sexual inequality. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Berzonsky, M. D. (1990). Self-Construction over the life span: A process perspective on identity formation. In G. J. Neimeyer & R. A. Neimeyer (Eds.), Advances in personal construct psychology (Vol. 1, pp. 155-186). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press Inc.
- Berzonsky, M. D. (1992). Identity style and coping strategies. Journal of Personality,

60(4), 771-788.

Berzonsky, M. D. (1997). Identity development, control theory, and self-regulation: An individual differences perspective. Journal of Adolescent Research, 12(3), 347-353.

Blumler, J. G., & Katz, E. (Eds.) (1974). The uses of mass communications: Current perspectives on gratification research. London: Sage Publications.

Brehm, J. W. (1998). Leon Festinger: Beyond the obvious. In G. A. Kimble & M. Wertheimer (Eds.), Portraits of pioneers in psychology (Vol. 3, pp. 328-344). Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.

Burke, P. J. (1991). Identity processes and social stress. American Sociological Review, 56, 836-849.

Burkitt, I. (1991). Social selves: Theories of the social formation of personality. London: Sage Publications.

Calvin Klein. (1997, December). [print advertisement], Vanity Fair, 448, backcover.

Cooper, J., & Fazio R. H. (1984). A new look at dissonance theory. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), Advances in experimental social psychology (Vol. 17, pp. 229-266). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

Costello, C. Y. (1998). Identity dissonance: Gender, identity and professional socialization at law school. Paper presented at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco.

Crane, L. L. (1994). Romance novel readers: In search of feminist change? Women Studies, 23, 257-269.

- Craven, S. (1999). The seduction game. Toronto: Harlequin Enterprises Limited.
- Curran, J. (1996). The new revisionism in mass communication research: A reappraisal. In J. Curran, D. Morley, & V. Walkerdine (Eds.), Cultural studies and communications (pp. 256-278). London: Arnold.
- Davies, R. (1970). Fifth business. Toronto: Penguin Books.
- Denison, J. (1999). Forbidden. Toronto: Harlequin Enterprises Limited.
- DeVito, J. A. (1989). The interpersonal communication book (5th ed.). New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Douglas, A. (1980). Soft-Porn culture. New Republic, 30, 25-29.
- Douglas, S. J. (1994). Where the girls are: Growing up female with the mass media. New York: Times Books.
- Dubino, J. (1993). The Cinderella complex: Romance fiction, patriarchy and capitalism. Journal of Popular Culture, 27(1), 103-117.
- DuPlessis, R. B. (1985). Writing beyond the ending: Narrative strategies of Twentieth-Century women writers. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Elam, D. (1992). Romancing the postmodern. London: Routledge.
- Engelhardt, T. (1986). The shortcake strategy. In T. Gitlin (Ed.), Watching television: A Pantheon guide to popular culture (pp. 68-110). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Epstein, G. F. (1969). Machiavelli and the devil's advocate. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 11(1), 38-41.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). Identity: Youth and crisis. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

- Esprit. (1999, March). [print magazine advertisement], Jane, 2, 51.
- Estrada, R. C. (1997). Wishes. Toronto: Harlequin Enterprises Limited.
- Ewen, S. (1988). All consuming images: The politics of style in contemporary culture.  
New York: Basic Books, Inc.
- Festinger, L. (1957). A theory of cognitive dissonance. California: Stanford University Press.
- Fiske, J. (1987). Television culture. London: Routledge.
- Fiske, J. (1989). Understanding popular culture. London: Routledge.
- Fitzgerald, T. K. (1993). Metaphors of identity: A culture-communication dialogue.  
Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Foster, L. (1997). Outrageous. Toronto: Harlequin Enterprises Limited.
- Foucault, M. (1980). Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977. (C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham, & K. Soper, Trans.). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Freed, A. O. (1985). Comments on Dr. Liptzin's paper: Erikson's theory from the perspective of women's life cycle. Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, 18(1), 203-214.
- Freud, S. (1961). Female sexuality. In J. Strachey (Ed. and Trans.), The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud (Vol. 21, pp. 225-243).  
London: Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1905)
- Gergen, K. J. (1991). The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life.  
United States of America: BasicBooks.

- Gergen, K. J. (1995). The healthy, happy human being wears many masks. In W. T. Anderson (Ed.), The truth about the truth: De-confusing and re-confusing the postmodern world (pp. 136-144). New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Gilligan, C. (1993). In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gilligan, C., Ward, J. V., & Taylor, J. M. (Eds.). (1988). Mapping the moral domain: A contribution of women's thinking to psychological theory and education. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gilroy, P. (1996). British cultural studies and the pitfalls of identity. In J. Curran, D. Morley, & V. Walkerdine (Eds.), Cultural studies and communications (pp. 35-49). London: Arnold.
- Goffman, E. (1963). Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.
- Goffman, E. (1979). Gender advertisements. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Graafsma, T. L. G. (1994). A psychoanalytic perspective on the concept of identity. In H. A. Bosma, T. L. G. Graafsma, H. D. Grotevant, & D. J. de Levita (Eds.), Identity and development: An interdisciplinary approach (pp. 41-61). London: Sage Publications.
- Greer, G. (1970). The female eunuch. London: Flamingo.
- Grescoe, P. (1996). The merchants of Venus: Inside Harlequin and the empire of romance. Vancouver: Raincoast Books.

- Grotevant, H. D. (1987). Towards a process model of identity formation. Journal of Adolescent Research, 2(3), 203-222.
- Hall, S. (1992). Encoding/decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, & P. Willis (Eds.), Culture, media, language: Working papers in cultural studies, 1972-79 (pp. 128-138). London: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1996). Introduction: Who needs 'identity'? In S. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds.), Questions of cultural identity (pp. 1-17). London: Sage Publications.
- Hare-Mustin, R. T., & Marecek, J. (1988). The meaning of difference: Gender theory, postmodernism, and psychology. American Psychologist, 43(6), 455-464.
- Heider, F. (1958). The psychology of interpersonal relations. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Hewitt, J. P. (1991). Self and society: A symbolic interactionist social psychology. (5th ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Hoffmann, K. (1999). Not in my bed! Toronto: Harlequin Enterprises Limited.
- Holland, N. N. (1980). Unity identity text self. In J. P. Tompkins (Ed.), Reader-Response criticism: From formalism to post-structuralism (pp. 118-133). London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Hollway, W. (1984). Gender difference and the production of subjectivity. In J. Henriques, W. Hollway, C. Urwin, C. Venn, & V. Walkerdine (Eds.), Changing the subject: Psychology, social relations and subjectivity (pp. 227-263). London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.

- Hubbard, R. C. (1985). Relationship styles in popular romance novels, 1950 to 1983. Communication Quarterly, 33(2), 113-125.
- Iser, W. (1980). The reading process: A phenomenological approach. In J. P. Tompkins (Ed.), Reader-Response criticism: From formalism to post-structuralism (pp. 50-69). London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Jensen, M. A. (1984). Love's Sweet return: The Harlequin story. Toronto: The Women's Press.
- Jones, E. (1981). Critique of empathic science: On Kohut and narcissism. Psychology and Social Theory, 2, 29-42.
- Jones, A. R. (1986). Mills & Boon meets feminism. In J. Radford (Ed.), The progress of romance: The politics of fiction (pp. 195-218). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Jordan, P. (1998). The perfect lover. Toronto: Harlequin Enterprises Limited.
- Juhasz, S. (1988). Texts to grow on: Reading women's romance fiction. Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature, 7, 239-259.
- Kaiser, J. (1997). Double take. Toronto: Harlequin Enterprises Limited.
- Kegan Gardiner, J. (1987). Self psychology as feminist theory. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 12(4), 761-780.
- Kerpelman, J. L., Pittman, J. F., & Lamke, L. K. (1997a). Towards a microprocess perspective on adolescent identity development: An identity control theory approach. Journal of Adolescent Research, 12(3), 325-346.
- Kerpelman, J. L., Pittman, J. F., & Lamke, L. K. (1997b). Revisiting the identity control

- theory approach: A rejoinder. Journal of Adolescent Research, 12(3), 363-371.
- Kinsale, L. (1992). The androgynous reader: Point of view in the romance. In J. A. Krentz (Ed.), Dangerous men & adventurous women: Romance writers on the appeal of the romance (pp. 31-44). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Kohut, H. (1977). The restoration of the self. New York: International Universities Press, Inc.
- Krentz, J. A. (Ed.). (1992). Dangerous men & adventurous women: Romance writers on the appeal of the romance. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Lee, M. (1998). The millionaire's mistress. Toronto: Harlequin Enterprises Limited.
- Lerner, G. (1993). The creation of feminist consciousness: From the middle ages to eighteen-seventy. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lips, H. M. (1993). Sex & gender: An introduction (2nd ed.). London: Mayfield Publishing Company.
- Lowery, M. M. (1995). The traditional romance formula. In G. Dines & J. M. Humez (Eds.), Gender, race and class in media: A text reader (pp. 215-222). London: Sage Publications.
- Lyons, N. P. (1988). Two perspectives: On self, relationships, and morality. In C. Gilligan, J. V. Ward, & J. M. Taylor (Eds.), Mapping the moral domain: A contribution of women's thinking to psychological theory and education (pp. 21-48). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Mahaffy, K. A. (1996). Cognitive dissonance and its resolution: A study of Lesbian

- Christians. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 35(4), 392-402.
- Mann, P. H. (1981). The romantic novel and its readers. Journal of Popular Culture, 15(1), 9-18.
- Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego-identity status. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3(5), 551-558.
- Markert, J. (1985). Romance publishing and the production of culture. Poetics, 14, 69-93.
- Markus, H. R. (1977). Self-schemata and processing information about the self. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 35(2), 63-78.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. Psychological Review, 98(2), 224-253.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1992). The what, why, and how of cultural psychology: A review of Shweder's *Thinking Through Cultures*. Psychological Inquiry, 3(4), 357-364.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1994). A collective fear of the collective: Implications for selves and theories of selves. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 20(5), 568-579.
- Mather, A. (1993). A secret rebellion. Toronto: Harlequin Enterprises Limited.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). Mind, self, and society: From the standpoint of a social behaviorist. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Michaels, L. (1997). The trouble with Tonya. Toronto: Harlequin Enterprises Limited.

- Mills, J., Aronson, E., & Robinson, H. (1959). Selectivity in exposure to information. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 59, 250-253.
- Modleski, T. (1982). Loving with a vengeance: Mass-produced fantasies for women. Hamden: Archon Books.
- Murphy, P. L., & Miller, C. T. (1997). Postdecisional dissonance and the commodified self-concept: A cross-cultural examination. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23(1), 50-62.
- Newcomb, T. M. (1953). An approach to the study of communicative acts. Psychological Review, 60(6), 393-404.
- Osgood, C. E., & Tannenbaum, P. H. (1955). The principle of congruity in the prediction of attitude change. Psychological Review, 62(1), 42-55.
- Pattern, J. (1986). Consuming passion. In M. Silvera (Ed.), Fireworks: The best of Fireweed (pp. 69-82). Toronto: The Women's Press.
- Pervin, L. A. (1989). Personality: Theory and research (5th ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Phillips, S. E. (1992). The romance and the empowerment of women. In J. A. Krentz (Ed.), Dangerous men & adventurous women: Romance writers on the appeal of the romance (pp. 53-59). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Rabine, L. W. (1985). Romance in the age of electronics: Harlequin enterprises. Feminist Studies, 11(1), 39-60.
- Radway, J. (1983). Women read the romance: The interaction of text and context.

Feminist Studies, 9(1), 53-78.

Radway, J. (1991). Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature.

London: The University of North Carolina Press.

Rosenberg, M. (1986). Self-Concept from middle childhood through adolescence. In

J. Suls & A. G. Greenwald (Eds.), Psychological perspectives on the self (Vol. 3, pp. 107-136). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Ruth, S. (1990). Issues in feminism: An introduction to women's studies (2nd ed.).

California: Mayfield Publishing Company.

Santrock, J. W., & Yussen, S. R. (1992). Child development: An introduction (5th ed.).

Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown Publishers.

Schachter, S., & Gazzaniga, M. (Eds.). (1989). Extending psychological frontiers:

Selected works of Leon Festinger. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Schlenker, B. R., & Trudeau, J. V. (1990). Impact of self-presentations on private self-

beliefs: Effects of prior self-beliefs and misattribution. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58(1), 22-32.

Simon, W. (1995). The postmodernization of sex and gender. In W. T. Anderson (Ed.),

The truth about the truth: De-confusing and re-confusing the postmodern world

(pp. 156-160). New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Skevington, S., & Baker, D. (Eds.). (1989). The social identity of women. London: Sage

Publication.

Snyder, M., & Tanke, E. D. (1976). Behavior and attitude: Some people are more

consistent than others. Journal of Personality, 44,(3), 501-517.

Steele, C. M., & Liu, T. J. (1983). Dissonance processes as self-affirmation. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45(1), 5-19.

Stets, J. E. & Burke, P. J. (1996). Gender, control, and interaction. Social Psychology Quarterly, 59(3), 193-220.

Stoffman, J. (1999, February 13). For the love of Harlequin. The Toronto Star, pp. M2, M14.

Tajfel, H. (1978). The social psychology of minorities. London: Minority Rights Group.

Tedeschi, J. T., Schlenker, B. R., & Bonoma, T. V. (1971). Cognitive dissonance: Private ratiocination or public spectacle. American Psychologist, 26, 685-695.

Thibodeau, R., & Aronson, E. (1992). Taking a closer look: Reasserting the role of the self-concept in dissonance theory. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 18(5), 591-602.

Thoits, P. A. (1983). Multiple identities and psychological well-being: A reformulation and test of the social isolation hypothesis. American Sociological Review, 48, 174-187.

Thurston C. (1987). The romance revolution: Erotic novels for women and the quest for a new sexual identity. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Tompkins, J. P. (1980a). An introduction to reader-response criticism. In J. P. Tompkins (Ed.), Reader-Response criticism: From formalism to post-structuralism (pp. ix-xxvi). London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Tompkins, J. P. (1980b). The reader in history: The changing shape of literary response.

- In J. P. Tompkins (Ed.), Reader-Response criticism: From formalism to post-structuralism (pp. 201-232). London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Wilkins, G. (1997). The getaway bride. Toronto: Harlequin Enterprises Limited.
- Williamson, J. (1986). Woman is an island: Femininity and colonization. In T. Modleski (Ed.), Studies in entertainment: Critical approaches to mass culture (pp. 99-118). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Williamson, P. (1992). By honor bound: The heroine as hero. In J. A. Krentz (Ed.), Dangerous men & adventurous women: Romance writers on the appeal of the romance (pp. 125-132). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Wood, J. T. (1996). Everyday encounters: An introduction to interpersonal communication. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.