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COLLEGE-AGED WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS ON HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY ROMANTIC BEHAVIORS AND HOW REALITY TV INFLUENCED THEIR VIEWS ON RELATIONSHIPS: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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COLLEGE-AGED WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS ON HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY

ROMANTIC BEHAVIORS AND HOW REALITY TV INFLUENCED THEIR VIEWS ON

RELATIONSHIPS: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

By

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STUDY

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Corine Cotton. Your faith, strength, and love have inspired me my entire life. There were many days during the dissertation journey when I didn't know if you would live or die. To watch God heal you of both breast and pancreatic cancer has been nothing short of amazing. It was my extreme pleasure to care for you during the very difficult time. My faith was challenged but ultimately strengthened because of you. I love you more than words can say. I would also like to say thank you to my siblings, Franklin Cotton, Jr. and Dr. Marcia Cotton. Your belief and confidence in me far surpass anything I deserve. Your prayers, pep talks, and laughter kept me sane through it all. I'm the luckiest little sister in the world!

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Abstract

Women between the ages of 18-24 experience intimate partner violence at a higher rate than any other group. Physical violence can be easily identified as an unacceptable practice. However, recognizing different aspects of abusive behavior is not as easy to identify. The purpose of the case study was to examine how college-aged women perceive which behaviors were healthy and unhealthy in a romantic relationship and how reality TV influenced their views. The two central themes of the study were healthy relationship behaviors and unhealthy relationship behaviors. The subcategories for healthy relationship behaviors were communication, love, and support. The subcategories for unhealthy relationship behaviors were aggression, lying/dishonesty, and manipulation/gaslighting. Results of the study indicated that college-aged women take social cues from the reality TV programming they watch. Findings suggested that consistent exposure to relationship-based reality TV shows directly influenced college-aged women's perceptions of romantic relationship behaviors.

*Keyword*s: romantic relationships, healthy relationship behaviors, unhealthy relationship behaviors, reality TV

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

I. INTRODUCTION

Attending college is an exciting time in a young person's life. Getting a degree, pledging a sorority, attending football games, and meeting lifelong friends are all part of what many students dream of when planning for college. The first semester in college is often the first time a student is away from parental supervision. Having the level of freedom opens individuals up to testing the boundaries and limits of what they can handle. Staying out late, going to parties, and dating are just a few new opportunities a student encounters. College tours highlight the best of what the school has to offer. However, hidden dangers are rarely discussed and, therefore, remain hidden. One of those dangers is relationship abuse. Relationship abuse is a pattern of behaviors used to intimidate, harm, or exert power or control over one's partner. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), women between the ages of 18-24 experience intimate partner violence at a higher rate than any other group (Black et al., 2011).

Romantic bonds in college relationships form quickly. In their study of relationships among college students, Harrison and Shortall (2011) reported that male students said "I love you" within a few weeks to a few months of beginning a romantic relationship, and female students reported knowing they were in love within the first few months. Romantic relationships are an important social construct of college life. College-aged students are still forming their identities and rely on social cues when making decisions about a relationship. Peer groups provide context on how to select romantic partners and how to determine which relationship

behaviors are appropriate (Wisnieski et al., 2013).

College-aged students take social cues from media and popular culture, often incorporating what they observe into their personal relationships. Exposure to reality TV shows can affect how individuals interact and respond to situations in relationships. In his study, Burt (2018) noted that viewers were influenced by popular characters in the way they made decisions and acted in romantic relationships. What viewers valued in relationships was affected by the characters they watched on TV. As a result, it appeared that media choices placed unrealistic expectations on romantic partners.

Background of the Study

The foundation of what an individual believes about relationships is formed during childhood. The type of communication a child experiences in the home can affect their views on appropriate communication later in life. Children may conform to conflict as a normal or expected way of communicating if they are exposed to intense familial conflict on a regular basis (Aloia & Solomon, 2015). Early messaging can impact an individual's ability to communicate effectively in relationships. Effective communication is evidenced by an individual clearly expressing their feelings and communicating directly with their partner to find a solution that is mutually beneficial. Ineffective communication is marred by hostility, anger, avoidance, and fear (James-Kangal & Whitton, 2019).

As individuals become older, they are influenced by friends and popular culture. Additionally, the images seen in media, e.g., reality television, can sometimes override a person's core values. According to Lippman et al. (2014), "Romantic love was portrayed as powerful, magical (literally), and transformative, with characters frequently defying their culture, parents, or their very selves to embrace this love" (p. 129). Concerning relationship behaviors are often

normalized based on how the relationships are portrayed in popular reality TV series. Dysfunction and drama are running themes in relationship-based reality TV shows. Presenting media images as the ideal relationship can prove to be harmful to viewers who feel that their relationships cannot compare to the observed images (Reizer & Hetsroni, 2014). College-aged students take social cues from media and popular culture, often incorporating what they observe into their personal relationships. Unrealistic expectations can lead to dissatisfaction, which can result in unrealistic relationship behaviors.

Surveillance reality TV is a subgenre of reality TV in which individuals are filmed conducting their everyday activities (Aubrey et al., 2012; Riddle & De Simone, 2013). The hallmarks of the subgenre include displaying high levels of relational aggression and depicting tension and drama within romantic relationships (Riddle & De Simone, 2013). Shows like *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* and *Real Housewives* allow viewers a look inside the lives of wealthy individuals. Watching reality show stars at work and in their personal relationships can alter what viewers believe is happening in the real world (Gibson et al., 2016; Lippman et al., 2014; Riddle & De Simone, 2013). Heavy viewers of reality TV may take on the characteristics of the individuals they admire.

Theoretical Foundation

Social constructivism is the framework for the study. In social constructivism, individuals seek to understand the world through their lived experiences. Meaning is constructed through interaction with others and the introduction of new information. An individual's cultural and personal background shapes how individuals filter and interpret experiences. Social constructivism does not begin with a theory like other frameworks. Rather, the theory is derived only after the meaning has been constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Social constructivism was developed by psychologist Lev Vygotsky. The theory's main principle is the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). The zone of proximal development is the difference between what an individual can accomplish or learn independently and what they can accomplish or learn through the assistance of a more capable individual (Vygotsky, 1978). More capable individuals provide guidance and collaboration in problem-solving. Trained student leaders serve as the more capable individuals assisting college-aged women in recognizing and identifying unhealthy relationship behaviors. Being able to recognize unhealthy relationship behaviors aids in limiting potentially unsafe relationship interactions.

Problem Statement

Physical violence in a dating relationship can be widely understood as an unacceptable practice. Relationship abuse, however, includes more than the physical element. The common elements of abusive or unhealthy relationships are power, control, and manipulation. Nonphysical issues such as verbal aggression or controlling what someone wears or who they can talk to are often downplayed and not deemed as serious as the physical aspect of abuse. Recognizing the different aspects of abuse is not always easy, resulting in many women denying the abusive behaviors they have experienced (García-Díaz et al., 2017).

Forty years ago, television programming consisted of family sitcoms and family-friendly programming. Today, television programming is dominated by reality television. Conflict and drama are promoted over family values. It is normal to turn on any reality television show and witness a fight or discord of any kind. Unhealthy behaviors such as yelling, cursing, destroying property, fighting, or sleeping around are normal themes of reality TV shows. Healthy communication is rarely shown. Unhealthy romantic behaviors are normalized, especially if they are nonphysical in nature. These unhealthy relationships are glamorized and portrayed as ideal

love. The viewers of these shows are impressionable and often mimic what they see on television, in movies, and in print (Chock, 2011; Fogel & Kovalenko, 2013; Glascock, 2021; Nuñez, 2018).

The more often college students view relationship behaviors on reality TV, the more they commit these behaviors to memory (Kretz, 2019). Heavy exposure to romantic-themed media in television and movies influences college students' perceptions of relationships. Heavy viewing of romantic-themed shows influences romantic beliefs and causes viewers to idealize those relationships (Lippman et al., 2014). Romantic comedies often have themes of stalking and manipulation until the lead character finally wins over the object of their affection. Classic movies such as *Beauty and the Beast* show the lead actor being cruel and holding the lead actress against her will. However, in cinema, those behaviors are forgotten once the characters fall in love (Bonomi et al., 2016).

Future research should extend the understanding of how abuse is identified and the level at which the violence is tolerated (García-Díaz et al., 2017). The normalizing of unacceptable behavior through media can hinder a young person's ability to recognize potentially harmful situations. Research should consider the early messaging received in childhood, the influence of peer groups, and the impact of pop culture and the media, as well as the use of social media and technology. Exposure to the aforementioned factors influences a young person's views on what constitutes healthy or unhealthy behavior.

Media portrayals of romantic relationships include deceit, manipulation, jealousy, and control. These negative characteristics are often hidden in an all-consuming love. The media's representation of romantic relationships is unrealistic compared to real-life relationships (Burt, 2018). Burt (2018) pointed out that the consequences of poor behavior are rarely shown on

reality television. The lack of accountability can give individuals a false sense of comfort when engaging in questionable behavior. The cloak of safety does not transfer from the broadcast to those watching. Previous research has debated the strengths and weaknesses of the Violence Against Women Act (Bridgett, 2020; Messing et al., 2015; Schmidt, 2015). Overwhelmingly, college campuses have focused on sexual violence, while issues of stalking or dating violence receive less attention (Banyard, 2014). Although prevention efforts are widely viewed as successful, providing training may help reduce the incidents of dating violence. This study provides prevention and training efforts to students, faculty, and staff on college campuses.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the case study was to examine how college-aged sorority women perceive which behaviors are healthy or unhealthy in a romantic relationship and how watching reality TV influences their views. The study was developed to educate student leaders on how to identify unhealthy relationship behaviors and provide the necessary support and resources to the student body. For the purposes of this research, healthy relationship behaviors were those based on equality and respect. The characteristics of healthy relationship behaviors include security, respect, good communication, and positive regard (Davila et al., 2017). Unhealthy relationship behaviors are based on power and control. Characteristics of unhealthy relationship behaviors include coercion, possessiveness, ownership, and a demanding attitude (Abbott et al., 2021),

Overview of Methodology

The qualitative approach used for the research was a case study. Case studies are used to explore and understand real-life issues (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A single instrumental case study focuses on an issue and uses a single case in order to gain insight into the issue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The chosen issue for the research was relationship behaviors. The research explored

how college-aged women determine which behaviors are healthy or unhealthy in a romantic relationship and how reality TV influences those views. The participants were college-aged women between the ages of 18-24 from universities in Florida. The chosen participants were those who have been in a relationship since entering college.

Research Question

The study addressed a single research question: What are the perceptions of college-aged women regarding healthy and unhealthy behaviors in romantic relationships?

Research Design

A case study approach was chosen due to the study being bound by place and time. Study participants attended colleges in Florida during one academic year. The researcher utilized the case study method to gain insight into the single issue of relationship behaviors. The research question reflected the research of the topic of how relationship-based reality TV influences the viewer's relationship behaviors. Eight Zoom interviews were conducted.

Data Collection

Data collection for the study was done through Zoom interviews. The interviews were conducted with college-aged women at universities in Florida. Eight interviews were conducted via Zoom. Each interviewee participated on a volunteer basis. Prior to starting the interview, the purpose of the research was explained. Interviewees had an opportunity to ask questions and were informed that consent could be withdrawn at any time. Interviewees gave verbal consent to participate, and the informed consent was emailed for the participant's signature. Interviewees were advised that the interview would be recorded via Zoom and that the researcher would take notes during the interview. The interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai, and each interviewee was emailed their signed consent form and the transcribed interview notes. Interviewees were

asked to verify that the transcribed notes were an accurate depiction of the interview. All participants have been referred to by a randomly assigned number.

Procedures

The Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted permission for the research to be conducted. Surveys on reality TV viewing habits were sent by email. Survey participants who expressed interest in being interviewed provided their email addresses on the survey form. The researcher reviewed the survey forms and contacted participants to set up Zoom interviews. All interviews for the study were recorded via Zoom. A transcript of the interview was sent to participants to validate the accuracy of the responses. All recordings and transcripts were kept private. Names were not used to maintain privacy. All identifying information was removed. The data were analyzed and coded based on the themes that arose. All data will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the study.

Limitations

One of the limitations of the research is that the results were from metropolitan colleges in one state and may not be transferrable to rural colleges or colleges in a different region. A second limitation is gender. The results may not represent male college-aged individuals who view reality TV. Thirdly, the results may not reflect the views of college-aged women who are not viewers of reality TV.

Definition of Key Terms

The following words and phrases are key terms for the study.

- **healthy relationship behaviors**: behaviors based on equality and respect with characteristics including security, respect, good communication, and positive regard (Davila et al., 2017)

- **unhealthy relationship behaviors**: behaviors based on power and control with characteristics that include coercion, possessiveness, ownership, and demanding attitude (Abbott et al., 2021).

Significance

Unhealthy romantic relationships are prevalent on college campuses (Hayden et al., 2016; Prather et al., 2012; Vrangalova, 2015). The significance of the study was to provide tools for student leaders to recognize and mitigate unhealthy relationship behaviors. Heavy viewers of reality TV often discuss the characters and consider their relationships as an extension of their own lives (Bond & Drogos, 2014; Jahng, 2019). Viewers shared that when making relationship decisions, they often thought about what their favorite character would do (Burt, 2018). The unhealthy relationship behaviors of favorite reality TV characters have been normalized and duplicated. The research examined how college-aged sorority women's perceptions of healthy and unhealthy romantic relationship behaviors are influenced by viewing reality television shows that involve relationships. The research can be utilized to extend current knowledge in the field and to train student leaders on how to identify, address, and provide assistance and resources to students experiencing unhealthy relationship behaviors.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of the case study was to examine how college-aged sorority women perceive which behaviors are healthy or unhealthy in a romantic relationship and how watching reality TV influences their views. The study was developed to educate student leaders on how to identify unhealthy relationship behaviors and provide the necessary support and resources to the student body. For the purposes of this research, healthy relationship behaviors are based on equality and respect. The characteristics of healthy relationship behaviors include security, respect, good communication, and positive regard (Davila et al., 2017). Unhealthy relationship behaviors are based on power and control. Characteristics of unhealthy relationship behaviors include coercion, possessiveness, ownership, and a demanding attitude (Abbott et al., 2021).

College-aged women's perceptions of romantic relationship behaviors and the influence reality TV has on their views are the basis of the study. The first section of the literature review explores healthy relationship behaviors. The relevant literature revealed the relationship behaviors needed to maintain a healthy romantic relationship and increase relationship satisfaction. The second section explores unhealthy relationship behaviors. A review of the literature exposes the unhealthy behaviors that cause relational conflict and decrease relationship satisfaction. The third section provides a review of relevant literature on reality TV viewing and the influence reality TV has on the viewers.

Healthy Relationship Behaviors

In their study, Bannon et al. (2020) examined whether collaborative communication efficiency and self-reported problem-solving skills were positively linked to relationship satisfaction among romantic partners. Participants consisted of 56 dating couples recruited from an undergraduate psychology course at a large northwestern university. The eligibility criteria included being 18 years old or older, having at least one partner being a current student, being a romantic couple in a current relationship for at least 3 months, having no history of physical injury by the partner, and having both partners fluent in English. The average age of the female participants was 20.22 years, and the average age of the male participants was 20.95 years, with 51.7% identifying as White/Caucasian, 23.3% as Hispanic/Latino, 19% as Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander, 7.8% as Black/African American, and 0.9% as Native American. The average relationship length was 1.67 years. After completing an initial phone screening, couples attended an in-person laboratory session. In the session, the couples were placed in separate rooms to complete an online questionnaire that assessed their characteristics individually as well as the characteristics of their relationships with a focus on personality traits, communication, conflict, and satisfaction. The couples' cognitive functions were also assessed by completing two computer tasks. The couples were then brought back together to participate collaboratively in a card-matching task. For their participation, the couples were given the choice of two research credits or $20.

In the card-matching task in Bannon et al.'s (2020) study, the couples were given playing cards that contained abstract images. The couples' collaborative communication efficiency was assessed as they were tasked to work together to match 12 out of the 17 cards. Participants' problem-solving skills were assessed using a scale, where individuals self-reported how they

effectively resolved conflict in their relationship. Relationship satisfaction was measured with a Likert scale to assess how frequently couples worked together and communicated their ideas with one another. The data were analyzed using a multilevel structural equation model for individual and couple responses. The multilevel structural equation model was used to determine the extent to which relationship satisfaction was connected to the couples' collaborative communication and self-reported problem-solving skills. The results of the study showed that both efficient collaborative communication and self-reported problem-solving skills had a significantly positive impact on relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction increased in romantic relationships with both variables; however, collaborative communication efficiency was a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction. The study is relevant to the current research in showing collaborative communication and problem-solving as positive relationship behaviors that influence relationship satisfaction. Bannon et al.'s study showed that close relationships were formed through communication.

In their study, Xia et al. (2018) investigated the influence that family processes and adolescent interpersonal skills had on the development of romantic relationship functioning in young adults. Family processes referred to parenting practices and family climate, and adolescent interpersonal skills referred to positive engagement and assertiveness. The sample population was 974 early adolescents residing in rural and semi-rural areas in Pennsylvania and Iowa, beginning in sixth grade and following until early adulthood. The average age at the start of the study was 12.4 years old, with 62.1% identifying as female and the average age in early adulthood being 19.5 years. Participants were measured on four occasions: the fall of 6th grade, the spring of 7th grade, the spring of 9th grade, and as a young adult with a mean age of 19.52 years.

Participants in Xia et al.'s (2018) study completed assessments that evaluated family climate, effective parenting practices, adolescent assertiveness, adolescent positive engagement, romantic relationship love, romantic relationship problem-solving, and romantic relationship violence. The seven covariates included in the study were free and reduced-price lunch (family income), family of origin (two-parent households), gender, sexual orientation, ages at young adult assessment, relationship duration, and cohabitation. Cross-lagged models were used to test the study's hypothesis and the effect of interpersonal skills and family processes on young adult romantic relationship functioning.

Xia et al.'s (2018) findings suggested that young adults who experienced a positive family climate and effective parenting skills developed better problem-solving skills and engaged in less relational violence. The findings further indicated that adolescent interpersonal skills were an important factor in maintaining romantic relationship quality. Adolescents who were more assertive possessed the skills to advocate for themselves and engage in effective problem-solving. Additional findings revealed that adolescents were able to form loving romantic relationships because of positive family engagement. These results are significant because they supported previous research that showed that positive interpersonal skills and family climate improved young adult romantic functioning (Xia et al., 2018).

Epstein et al. (2013) explored the relationship competencies of communication, conflict resolution, knowledge of partner, life skills, self-management, sex and romance, and stress management as predictors of self-reported positive relationship outcomes. The competencies were measured for success based on the ability to increase longevity and satisfaction in relationships as well as the ability to decrease conflict. After reviewing relevant literature, Epstein et al. created the Epstein Love Competencies Inventory (ELCI) to measure these

competencies and their importance to long-term romantic relationship maintenance. The ELCI was an online test consisting of 10 items for each of the seven subscales (competencies). The test was designed for self-evaluation of relationship competencies in existing relationships. Participants were recruited through an online newsletter catered toward counselors and therapists. The ELCI was taken by 2,201 participants referred by over 18 counselors and therapists. The sample population consisted of 65 % female and 35% male. The average age of participants was 36.6 years old, with 84% White, 4.5% Hispanic, 3.5% Black, 3.9 % Asian, 0.3% Native American, and the remaining as other. Seventy-four percent of participants were in a current relationship.

Epstein et al. (2013) used linear regression to examine how well the subscales predicted relationship satisfaction. Their findings determined that communication was the best predictor of self-reported positive outcomes in relationships, followed by knowledge of partner and life skills. Communication was viewed in terms of sharing thoughts honestly and listening to a partner without criticizing. Knowledge of partner referred to knowing and caring about the partner's desires, a skill that requires spending time supporting a partner's dreams and learning what they like and do not like. Life skills included maintaining a healthy lifestyle, working consistently, and being able to manage finances appropriately. These basic life skills demonstrate a person's consistency and can directly impact relationship satisfaction.

Epstein et al.'s (2013) study supports previous research that acknowledged communication skills as vital to maintaining a successful relationship. The median age of study participants was 35 years old. Epstein et al. (2013) showed that relationship skills improve over time and get better as individuals age. An implication of the study on the current research is that as college-aged women gain more relationship experience, they will acquire the skills needed to

increase relationship satisfaction and decrease relational conflict.

In their study, Jamison and Sanner (2021) explored how young adults used prior relationship experiences to promote romantic development. Participants were recruited through social media and flyers hung in public places. The 35 study participants consisted of 20 women, 14 men, and one transgender individual, with 26 identifying as White, four as Asians, three as Black, and two as Latino/a. Eligible participants were between 25 and 40 years old and had been engaged in at least one romantic or sexual experience. Grounded theory methods were used to collect and analyze data. In-depth relationship history interviews were conducted to explore romantic development through relational experiences in casual dating, casual sex, and committed relationships. The relationship history interviews were audio recorded, with 17 taking place in person and 18 via Skype, with an average length of 1.51 hours. Romantic involvements were analyzed beginning at 11 years old, with participants reporting an average of 7.4 romantic and sexual experiences. Initial coding was used on the qualitative data to create 59 codes. Focused coding was then used to provide insight into the different relationships. The data set included 256 relationships. The four main relationship forms that were included in the final code book were romantic experimenting, committed partnering, hooking up, and casual dating, with two secondary forms of crushing and time-bounded dating (Jamison & Sanner, 2021).

Jamison and Sanner's (2021) participants reported learning more about themselves, their desired relationship role, and future expectations through their different partner experiences. Gaining experiences, identifying partner preferences, and creating and maintaining relational boundaries framed their participants' relationship development. Gaining experience allowed the individuals to experiment romantically. Jamison and Sanner's study showed that when young adults learn who they are, they have the ability to identify what they desire in a romantic partner.

The researchers shared that when creating and maintaining boundaries, there should be a balance of independence and interdependence in romantic relationships. Their findings suggest that forming supportive romantic relationships is an important function of young adult relationship experiences. An individual's relationship history provides insight into their development and relationship outcomes. Relationship experience provides the opportunity for individuals to build the skills needed to maintain a healthy romantic relationship. The study is worth noting because it shows romantic development within different relationship types. The relationship histories that were collected provided insight into developing the skills needed to achieve positive romantic outcomes.

In their study on how African American adolescent girls described healthy relationship characteristics, Debnam et al. (2014) examined the characteristics identified by participants with the CDC's 12 healthy dating relationship qualities. Participants were 33 African American girls ages 15-18 years from public and private high schools in the mid-Atlantic region. Research leaders met with school principals to explain the study's objectives. Students were recruited through information sessions during school assemblies, class sessions, and lunch periods. Parental consent was given for students 15 to 17 years old to participate, and students who were 18 years old signed an informed consent form. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and audio recorded, with each interview lasting 1 to 1.5 hours. All interviews were entered into the qualitative data management program Atlas.ti, and a coding dictionary was created to coincide with the characteristics of healthy relationships that were identified by the CDC.

Debnam et al.'s (2014) interview guide consisted of questions about the terms the youth used to describe dating, how healthy and unhealthy relationships are perceived, and what influenced the participants' perceptions of relationships. Participants were not given a list of the

CDC's 12 healthy dating relationship qualities; however, 12 queries were run on the interview transcripts to pull out any codes related to the CDC list. Of the 12 CDC healthy dating relationship qualities, the eight healthy relationship characteristics that were independently identified by study participants included good communication, honesty, trust, respect, compromise, understanding, individuality, and self-confidence (Debnam et al., 2014). The top characteristics described by participants were trust, good communication, and honesty. Role model, problem-solving, anger control, and fighting fair were four CDC characteristics that did not undergo further analyses because they did not receive frequent mentions by study participants. Debnam et al. (2014) believed these four characteristics were mentioned less due to the participants; ages and relationship experiences, recognizing the need for these characteristics will increase as participants become older and engage in more serious and longer-term relationships.

It is worth noting that Debnam et al.'s (2014) participants' definitions of key characteristics differed from the definitions provided by the CDC. Debnam et al. specifically identified good communication, respect, and compromise as presenting an alternate description to that of the CDC. In detailing good communication, their participants desired for communication to happen immediately, but the CDC description gave individuals space to gather their thoughts before talking about a situation. The participants viewed respect in terms of their sexual boundaries being respected compared to the CDC's definition of respect being appreciating the other person for who they are. Lastly, a compromise was viewed by the participants in terms of future relationships versus a relationship they were currently in. The importance of Debnam et al.'s study is that it can inform the preventative work around teen dating violence by increasing youth's understanding of healthy relationship behaviors. However,

the study is limited in scope due to participants belonging to one race from a singular regional location and would benefit from a more diverse group of participants from different regional locations.

Unhealthy Relationship Behaviors

Hayden et al. (2016) examined the extent to which female university students experienced unwanted sexual attention and unhealthy intimate relationships. Their cross-sectional study took place at one university in Australia. The participants included 465 female students between the ages of 18 to 25 years. The students were recruited and informed about the study via email and completed an anonymous online questionnaire via Survey Monkey. The questionnaire was derived from preexisting assessments and was used to measure participant experiences with unwanted sexual attention during their lifetime and the unhealthy relationship behaviors experienced within the previous 12 months (Hayden et al., 2016). The Statistical Package for Social Sciences was utilized to analyze the data.

The variables for Hayden et al.'s (2016) study included demographic information, unwanted sexual attention experiences, and unhealthy relationship behaviors. Their findings indicated that 67% of the participants reported receiving at least one occurrence of unwanted sexual attention, and 30% reported experiencing at least one aspect of unhealthy relationships. Unwanted sexual attention included unwanted touch on top of clothing, unwanted sexual contact under the clothes, and unwanted penetration (Hayden et al., 2016). Forty-three percent of participants reported that their protests were ignored prior to the unwanted sexual activity. The elements of unhealthy relationships that participants experienced with their sexual partner included being put down, being afraid to disagree with their partner, not being allowed to visit family, and threats of harm if they ended the relationship. The relevance of the study is that it

shows specific examples of unwanted sexual attention and unhealthy intimate relationship behaviors experienced by female college students. Hayden et al.'s findings can be used to develop prevention and educational programming as well as provide support resources to students affected by unwanted sexual attention and unhealthy relationship behaviors.

Hall and Knox (2019) examined how undergraduate college students perceived relationship power in dating relationships. Their study consisted of 1098 students from one university located in the Midwest and one university in the Southeast region. Students who attended the Midwest university made up 67.4 % of study participants, and female students represented 72.4% of the total population. Study participants self-identified as 85% White, 5.6% Hispanic, and 4.5% Black. Hall and Knox recruited study participants through courses in marriage and family disciplines. Students did not receive any form of compensation for their participation.

Hall and Knox (2019) used the equity theory and the power within relationships theory to identify and examine three power profiles in participants' current romantic relationships: less power, equal power, and more power. The three levels of characteristics for the power within relationships theory were identified as individual, relationship, and physical and social environment. Individual characteristics included personality traits and gender; relationship characteristics referred to rules and norms that frame decision-making; and characteristics of physical and social environment consisted of financial resources, proximity to family, and social support. These characteristics revealed the power differences between romantic partners. Drawing from equity theory, Hall and Knox explained that partners experience more positive relationship outcomes when they share equal power as opposed to the power imbalances they experience when one partner has less or more power.

Findings from Hall and Knox's (2019) study showed that partners who reported possessing less power in the relationship experienced less relationship satisfaction. Higher levels of relationship satisfaction were expected for partners who share equal power based on the equity theory. Although their findings followed the pattern, there was no statistical significance between equal power and more power. The research conducted by Hall and Knox is relevant to the current study, considering that healthy and unhealthy romantic relationship behaviors are affected by power imbalances between romantic partners. Understanding the characteristics displayed when romantic partners have less, more, or equal power can guide the programming that addresses relationship behaviors on college campuses.

In their study, Hayes et al. (2021) explored the association between risk factors, relationship type, and type of aggression. Their study examined if an underlying risk profile existed that could be effective in predicting aggression across relationship types. Hayes et al. recruited 147 student participants from undergraduate psychology courses at a midsize Northeastern university utilizing a web-based system. Participants consisted of 110 females with a median age of 18.86 years, with 67.6% identifying as White, 9.5% as Black, 9.5% as Hispanic, 6.8% as Asian/Pacific Islander, 4.1% as other, and 2.7% as multiracial. They used Survey Monkey to administer the online survey. Partial course credit was awarded for participation in the study.

Hayes et al.'s (2021) description of relationship type refers to a dating/romantic relationship or a peer relationship. They identified types of aggression as dating physical aggression, dating relational aggression, peer physical aggression, and peer relational aggression. The risk factors included normative beliefs about aggression, exclusivity, rumination, callous-unemotional (CU) traits, and emotional dysregulation (Hayes et al., 2021). The online survey

included measures to assess these risk factors. Relational and physical aggression was assessed to determine if participants viewed those behaviors as normal and acceptable. Exclusivity was assessed to determine how bothered participants become with the relationships their romantic partner or peers have with others. Rumination assessed how to determine how often participants deal with negative moods by rehearsing repetitive, negative thoughts. CU traits were assessed to measure factors related to participants being uncaring, unemotional, and callous. Emotional dysregulation was assessed for issues such as impulse control, nonacceptance of emotional responses, and access to strategies that regulate emotions (Hayes et al., 2021).

The findings from Hayes et al.'s (2021) study showed that peer exclusivity, CU traits, and normative beliefs about relational and physical aggression were predictors for peer relational and physical aggression. Significant predictors for dating relational aggression were peer relational aggression, romantic exclusivity, and normative beliefs about relational aggression. The risk factors that were predictive of dating physical aggression were romantic exclusivity and peer physical aggression. Hayes et al. determined that engaging in relational and physical aggression with peers is significantly correlated with using those same behaviors in dating relationships. CU traits served as a predictor for peer relational and peer physical aggression; however, there was no significance for CU traits for dating relational and dating physical aggression. Rumination did not present significance across any factors. The findings of Hayes et al.'s study are relevant to the current research and can be utilized to develop programming that helps students identify the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviors. Understanding peer and dating aggression, along with the impacts of common risk factors, can improve prevention efforts and safety among college-aged students.

Prather et al. (2012) examined romantic relational aggression among college students

using the variables of gender, sex roles, acceptance of couple violence, and trait anger. There were 260 study participants with a mean age of 20.03 years. Women made up 70% of the sample population, with 58.5% of all participants identifying as White, 35.4% as African American, 1.9% as Asian, 1.5% as American Indian/Alaskan Native, 0.8% as Hispanic, and 1.9% as other. Participants attended a midsized public university in Southeastern United States, were recruited from a psychology subject pool, and received one research credit. Participant criteria included being in a current or previous romantic relationship within the past year.

Prather et al. (2012) utilized online assessments to measure the variables of aggression, sex role attitudes, trait anger, and acceptance of couple violence. Dating relational aggression was measured due to its significance to the occurrence of intimate partner violence. Sex role attitudes were assessed in terms of participant's beliefs on traditional male and female roles. The scale for assessing trait anger measured the frequency in which participants experienced angry feelings. Lastly, the acceptance of couple violence was assessed to examine the degree to which participants accepted dating relationship violence (Prather et al., 2012).

The results of Prather et al.'s (2012) study showed that engagement in relational aggression leads to intimate partner violence. They pointed out that the finding was consistent with previous research addressing relation aggression among college students. It is worth noting that in their study, romantic relational aggression was impacted more by the acceptance of couple violence than the variables of trait anger and sex role attitudes. Prather et al. connected the fact to previous research that determined that the more accepting individuals are of violence, the more likely they are to partake in violence either as a victim or perpetrator. The findings showed that sex roles and gender were predictors of romantic relational aggression; however, there was no significant difference between men and women as it relates to the perpetration of relational

aggression (Prather et al., 2012). Like acceptance of couple violence, trait anger was a predictor of the perpetration of relational violence due to those with trait anger experiencing anger at a greater level than others and deeming it as acceptable behavior. Like other literature shared in the chapter, the findings presented by Prather et al. (2012) can be used to inform the work on college campuses addressing relational aggression in romantic relationships.

Reality TV

Burt (2018) conducted a qualitative study to determine if college-aged individual's decision-making in romantic relationships is affected by the media they watch. Interviews were conducted with eight undergraduate students from a large metropolitan university. Burt presented the background of the study to undergraduate college classes and used maximum variation sampling to choose participants who met the target age and represented varied backgrounds and television preferences. The participants consisted of seven females and one male, with one identifying as Hispanic/Latino, three identifying as White, and four identifying as Black/African American. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Burt used open coding to place participant responses into shared themes.

The results of Burt's (2018) study indicated that the media's portrayal of successful people influenced the participants' choice of the type of person they chose to date. The study also showed that when participants could not connect with others, they relied on a popular character they watched for romantic decision-making (Burt, 2018). The process can be problematic because, as Burt (2018) pointed out, the media's representation of romantic relationships is unrealistic compared to real-life relationships. Additionally, the consequences of bad behavior are rarely shown on reality television. The results of the study were significant because the lack of accountability can give individuals a false sense of comfort when engaging in questionable

behavior. However, the sense of safety does not transfer from the broadcast to those watching.

Lippman et al. (2014) studied the correlation between romantic-themed media and romantic belief endorsement. The researchers predicted that strong beliefs in love at first sight would be associated with heavy exposure to marriage-based reality TV. Participants for the study were 625 undergraduate students from a Midwestern university; 392 identified as female. The students were selected from those enrolled in an introduction to psychology class. The average age of the participants was 18.66 years, with 68.9 % identifying as White, 16.7% as Asian, 6.3% as Black, 4.5% as Middle Eastern, 3.1% as Latino/Hispanic, and 0.5% as multiracial. Participants completed a survey in a research lab and were given course credit for participation in the study. The survey explored participants' exposure to romantic-themed media. The media variables were romantic-themed, and subthemes were movies, marriage-themed reality TV, sitcoms, and perceived realism. The survey also addressed participants' romantic beliefs with variables of love finding a way, one and only, idealization, and love at first sight.

Lippman et al. (2014) showed that heavy viewers of marriage-themed reality TV held strong beliefs of love at first sight and idealization. Study participants who endorsed love at first sight believed they would instantly know when they met the right person and would fall in love immediately. Study participants who endorsed idealization believed in the perfection of true love. When viewers believed that relationships on TV were portrayed realistically, they tended to endorse idealized notions of romance that may not match up to reality (Lippman et al., 2014). The belief calls attention to the normalizing of poor behaviors, which causes individuals to remain in unhealthy situations.

Gibson et al.'s (2016) study used an experimental method to determine if viewer aggression was increased as a result of exposure to reality TV. They believed that aggression

24

would increase for those watching reality TV shows that included relational and verbal aggression when compared to shows that did not include that type of behavior. The participants consisted of 127 college students, with 54% of the sample being female. Students received extra credit in their course for their participation. Participants were assigned randomly to watch surveillance reality TV programming in three different categories: shows with minimal to no aggression, shows with verbal or relational aggression, and shows consisting of dramas with violent crime. Each category contained two shows. Prior to the study's beginning, each show was coded for physical, verbal, and relational aggression to ensure each show differed in dimension. Participants rated the shows based on how much they normally watched the program, their level of enjoyment, and their desire to continue watching. Two one-way analyses of variance were used to assess if any of the shows were more popular or more enjoyable among the participants. The researchers used Tukey's honestly significant difference test, which showed that participants who watched shows with aggression or violence reported watching and enjoying these shows more than participants who were assigned to the non-aggressive reality TV shows. Therefore, past viewing frequency and show enjoyment were used as covariates in the analyses (Gibson et al., 2016). The researchers included ego threat manipulation and noise intensity to measure aggression. Participants were instructed to write an essay, and they received feedback that was either positive or negative ego-threatening from someone they believed was a peer. Noise intensity consisted of their "peer" blasting a loud noise through the headphones when they were the winner during a 25-trial competitive reaction time task. Participants did not respond to the ego threat; however, the noise intensity was correlated with aggressive behavior.

Gibson et al.'s (2016) data showed that there was an increase in physical aggression due to exposure to surveillance reality TV programs that included relational and verbal aggression.

25

The finding held true when compared to shows with non-violent themes and violent crimes. The result is significant because it shows the influence the behaviors portrayed in reality TV programming had on viewer behavior. Viewers engage in experiencing taking when they take on the character's behavior, actions, and mindset (Gibson et al., 2016), which illustrates the level of influence popular characters have over their viewers.

Riddle and De Simone (2013) studied the effects that surveillance reality TV has on what viewers believe is happening in the real world. Participants were chosen from a convenience sampling of undergraduates completing an online survey at a Midwestern university. The study consisted of 145 participants receiving credit in their communication course. Participants were 73.8% female and 80% Caucasian, with 32.6% having a family income of $50,000-$100,000 per year. A cultivation framework was used for controlling the variables of gender, family income, and total TV viewing. The study focused on shows in the genre of *Jersey Shore* and *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* (Riddle & De Simone, 2013). The key elements that created drama for these shows were characters with wealthy lifestyles, relational aggression at a high level, and romantic relationships with tension (Riddle & De Simone, 2013).

Riddle and De Simone (2013) presented participants with a list of 45 top-rated reality TV shows. From the list, 16 shows fit into the reality TV surveillance subgenre. One show was removed due to a lack of viewership. These 15 shows were analyzed based on real-world beliefs of wealth, bad behavior, and romantic relationships. The data showed that exposure to surveillance reality TV influenced the belief in antisocial behavior and strife in romantic relationships. Viewers of these shows overestimated discord within a romantic relationship (Riddle & De Simone, 2013). The result is worth noting because as young adults try to make sense of the world around them, they may adopt behaviors they believe are the social norm.

Riddle and De Simone (2013) made a very valid point that heavy viewers of surveillance reality TV can easily access imagery relating to gossiping, arguing, and drama. Importantly, the conclusion suggested that if young adults believed that the poor behavior they view in reality TV is a normal part of a romantic relationship, they may incorporate these behaviors into their own relationships.

Aubrey et al. (2013) explored how relational conflict and relational control are connected. Their study examined the relationship between exposure to TV shows displaying high levels of interpersonal conflict and the rate at which viewers adopted controlling behaviors in their romantic relationships. There were 592 undergraduate participants from a large Midwestern university, with 67.6% being female and 32.4% being male. The average age was 19.83 years, with 86.3% identifying as European American, 7.4% as African American, 2.5% as Asian American, and 0.5% as Latino. Students received extra credit in the course for their participation. To measure relational control, participants completed the Control Scale based on their current or most recent romantic partner. The study examined viewers' exposure to TV programs displaying interpersonal conflict, hours watched per week, perceived realism, and viewing to learn about life situations. Viewers disclosed their exposure to 100 popular TV shows. Subsequently, impartial judges rated each show based on the perceived amount of interpersonal conflict they believed the shows contained.

Aubrey et al. (2013) used zero-order correlations to determine if potential control variables of demographics, romantic relationship characteristics, and personality characteristics were associated with relational control. Researchers also controlled for the correlation between exposure to interpersonal conflict in TV shows and relational control. The data showed that the use of relational control was positively affected by exposure to interpersonal conflict in

television programs. The research also showed that viewers perceived conflict and control as a normal, expected part of romantic relationships (Aubrey et al., 2013). Normalizing these behaviors illustrates that the more that viewers perceive these TV shows to be realistic, the more likely they are to display controlling, negative behaviors when engaging in conflict. It is noteworthy that when viewers witnessed a character they identified with receiving a positive outcome from engaging in conflict, the viewer would respond similarly in their personal relationship. Behaviors such as gaining control or attention or getting the upper hand in an argument became outcomes the viewers desired (Aubrey et al., 2013).

Scharrer and Blackburn (2018) examined how overall TV viewing and viewing of docusoap reality TV (DRTV) influenced viewers' approval of verbal and physical aggression as a normal and acceptable part of behavior. They believed that viewing DRTV served as a guide to what individuals perceived as the social and cultural norm. Scharrer and Blackburn's study consisted of 248 participants from across the United States, with an average age of 31.42 years. Participants were 58.6% male and 43.2% female, with 81.9% identifying as White, 8.9% as Asian/Asian American, 4.4% as African American, and 3.2% as Latino. Participants were selected from a survey distributed by Amazon's Mechanical Turk online crowdsourcing program, allowing for a diverse demographic and larger geographic area. Participants were prompted to engage in a research study outlining their viewing habits and giving their feedback on some shows. The prompt was vague to avoid docusoap fandom. Participants received compensation for participating in the study.

Scharrer and Blackburn (2018) measured overall TV viewing, DRTV viewing, perceived realism, approval of physical and verbal aggression, and gendered aggression. Overall, TV viewing accounted for DVRs and videos. DRTV viewing ranked popular docusoaps on a 5-point

scale ranging from *never watch* to *all of the time*. Perceived realism was measured by presenting participants with 12 statements and asking them to rate their level of agreement on a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The Normative Beliefs About Aggression Scale was used to measure viewers' approval of verbal and physical aggression as well as gendered aggression (Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018).

Scharrer and Blackburn's (2018) data did not show an approval of physical or verbal aggression for overall TV viewing. However, the data did reflect that viewing DRTV shows was a catalyst for approving verbal aggression. There were no significant indicators for approval of physical aggression from viewing DRTV from the entire sample population. However, males had a higher approval rate for physical aggression than females (Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018). The viewing of docusoaps portraying the daily lives of their characters, many of whom engage in behavior such as yelling and cursing, lends to the perceived realism of the stories that are shared. The more that viewers perceive the poor behavior as normal or routine, the more likely they are to mimic the behavior in their own lives (Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018). Although the average participant age for their study was 31.42, Sharrer and Blackburn's findings can be generalized for college-aged individuals.

Reizer and Hetsroni (2014) examined whether relationship quality was affected by media consumption. There were 188 undergraduate students from a public university who received extra credit in their social science class for agreeing to take part in the study. They completed a two-part questionnaire, with the first part measuring relationship quality and the second part assessing the control variables and the daily time used for media consumption. Participants consisted of 46 males and 142 females with an average age of 25 years old. Participants had to be in a current relationship with a duration of at least 3 months. The study explored how viewers

factor in messages received from media into their romantic relationships. Relationship quality was viewed in terms of commitment, satisfaction, and conflict. The study controlled for the variables of sex, relationship status, and how many previous romantic relationships the participants had. A multiple regression model was used to test the hypotheses that television viewing would contribute negatively to relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment and would conversely contribute positively to the level of conflict in the relationship (Reizer & Hetsroni, 2014).

The results of Reizer and Hetsroni's (2014) study showed that there was a significant correlation between the amount of time devoted to watching relationship programming and lower relationship satisfaction and higher conflicts. Lower commitment to the relationship was significantly connected to the total amount of time spent on overall TV viewing. Commitment was not related to a specific genre of TV, which indicated that commitment may be more associated with cognitive or behavioral factors. The study failed to account for what personalities or already failing relationships contributed to the time dedicated to TV viewing. There were no significant differences in the control variables of sex, relationship status, and the number of previous romantic relationships as they related to relationship quality (Reizer & Hetsroni, 2014). The study indicated that the more that viewers engage in watching relationship programming, the more likely they have lower satisfaction and increased conflicts in their romantic relationships. Importantly, the realization suggests that as viewers idolize the relationships they see on TV, they become disenchanted with what they are experiencing in their own relationships.

Tukachinsky and Dorros (2018) examined how romantic beliefs and relationship quality were impacted by the intensity of parasocial romantic relationships (PSRR). Parasocial relationships are the one-sided relationships viewers form with media figures. Parasocial

romantic relationships possess intense romantic emotions and a physical attraction to the media figure (Tukachinsky & Dorros, 2018). A two-study design was developed, with the first study utilizing a sample of adolescents 13-17 years old and the second study using college students. In Study 1, participants were selected using snowball sampling and a Qualtrics Panel. There were 153 participants with an average age of 15.39 years; 55.6% female and 41.2% male. Participants were 63.4% White, 14.4% Latino, 9.2% African American, 6.5% Asian, and 2.6% Native American. Parental consent was obtained, and compensation was provided. Study 2 consisted of 274 college students who received course credit for their participation. Participants were 79.8% female, with an average age of 20.24 years. Of those who took part in the study, 67.9% identified as White, 11.3% as Latino, 8.4% as Asian, and 1.1% as African American. Participants completed two online surveys 2 weeks apart. Both studies measured the intensity of parasocial romantic relationships and romantic beliefs while controlling for demographics, parental marital status, dating experience, and current relationship status. Additionally, Study 2 measured relationship satisfaction and partner perception while controlling for experience with relationships (Tukachinsky & Dorros, 2018).

Tukachinsky and Dorros's (2018) results of Study 1 showed that the intensity of the emotional connection with the media personality was a positive indicator of idealized romantic beliefs. Unrealistic relationship beliefs developed when the media figure was viewed as a romantic partner instead of a sexual object (Tukachinsky & Dorros, 2018). Study 2 showed no correlation between physical parasocial romantic relationships and relationship satisfaction or partner perception. Results indicated a negative association between relationship satisfaction and partner perception of emotional parasocial romantic relationships (Tukachinsky & Dorros, 2018). Both studies showed that intense emotional attachment to media personalities lowers

31

relationship satisfaction and how participants view their partners. The study is significant in that it shows how media figures influence the social development and romantic ideals of adolescents and young adults. The emotional attachment that viewers form with these media personalities results in viewers carrying what they learn in these imaginary relationships into their personal lives. Viewers are often left unsatisfied when their personal relationships cannot live up to the ideals of their media influences.

In their research on parasocial relationships, Dajches and Barbati (2022) formed the concept of para-couple relationships (PCRs). PCRs reflect on the long-term attachment to media couples that extend beyond program viewing. Dajches and Barbati created a scale to measure PCRs in emerging adults and to ascertain the association between relationship satisfaction and PCRs. The study consisted of 375 emerging adults from a university who received extra credit in their communication course. The average age of participants was 20.78 years, with 59.2% identifying as White, 68.2% as women, 84.2% as heterosexual, 55.7% as single, 37.3% as being in a committed relationship, and 6.9% as being in a casual relationship.

The four factors that structure Dajches and Barbati's (2022) PCRs scale are maintaining an enduring relationship, liking and admiration, emotional connection/friendship, and romantic modeling. Participants were asked to think of their favorite media couple, real or fictional, to carry throughout the study. Participants assessed statements based on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Participants rated statements such as thinking of the media couple they chose in their free time and expecting their relationship to be like the media couple to whom they have an emotional attachment. PCRs did not show a significant impact on relationship satisfaction. Importantly, the result appears to contradict previous research that contends that viewers take their social cues from the media they watch (e.g., Burt, 2018;

Gibson et al., 2016; Lippman et al., 2014).

Summary

The literature review included research on healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviors and the influence of reality TV on viewers. Previous research has shown that heavy exposure to romantic-themed reality TV programming influences college students' perception of relationships. How relationships were portrayed in romantic-themed reality TV shows directly impacted the way that viewers functioned in their own romantic relationships. When viewers believed that the relationships they saw on TV were real, it resulted in idealization (Lippman et al., 2014; Tukachinsky & Dorros, 2018), experience-taking (Gibson et al., 2016), and unrealistic expectations (Burt, 2018). The consequences of heavy exposure to reality TV were revealed in normalizing poor behavior (Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018), increased relational conflict (Aubrey et al., 2013), and lower relationship satisfaction (Reizer & Hetsroni, 2014). As college-aged students develop a sense of self, they take social cues from those they admire in the media. The messages that college-age students receive from the media characters they form an emotional attachment to are duplicated in what they value and expect in romantic relationships, as well as the behavior they display towards their partner (Dajches & Barbati, 2022). Romantic-themed reality TV shows and their popular characters influence how college-aged women determine which behaviors are healthy or unhealthy in their romantic relationships.

III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the case study was to examine how college-aged sorority women perceived which behaviors are healthy or unhealthy in a romantic relationship and how watching reality TV influences their views. The study was developed to educate student leaders on how to identify unhealthy relationship behaviors and provide the necessary support and resources to the student body. For the purposes of this research, healthy relationship behaviors are based on equality and respect. The characteristics of healthy relationship behaviors include security, respect, good communication, and positive regard (Davila et al., 2017). Unhealthy relationship behaviors are based on power and control. Characteristics of unhealthy relationship behaviors include coercion, possessiveness, ownership, and a demanding attitude (Abbott et al., 2021).

Description of Research Design

For the study, the researcher chose a qualitative case study approach. A case study is utilized to explore real-life issues to gain a better understanding of the problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A single case study was used to focus on the single issue of relationship behavior. The current study explored the perceptions of college-aged women regarding healthy and unhealthy behaviors in romantic relationships and how reality TV influenced their views. Cases can be bound by parameters such as the people involved, the time the study is conducted, and the location (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study was bound by participant gender (female), age (college-aged women), and location (colleges in Florida).

Participants

Participants were recruited through email and word of mouth. An email script was sent defining the study and included a link to a survey on reality TV viewing. The survey (Appendix A) served as a screening tool to engage participants who watch relationship-based reality TV and those who had been in a romantic relationship since entering college. Snowball sampling was employed for recruitment. Eight participants were chosen to complete an interview. All participants attended universities in Florida. The interviews were conducted via Zoom conferencing. Table 1 summarizes participant details.

Table 1

Participant Details

Participant Number	Age	Race	Relationship-based reality TV shows viewed
1	22	Hispanic	*Too Hot to Handle, The Bachelor, The Bachelorette, Love Island, 90 Day Fiancé*
2	23	Black	*The Bachelor, The Bachelorette, Love is Blind, The Ultimatum, Love & Hip Hop, Keeping Up With the Kardashians*
3	18	White	*Too Hot to Handle, Love Island*
4	24	Black	*Love & Hip Hop, Keeping Up With the Kardashians*
5	18	Black	*Love Island, Marriage Bootcamp, Love & Hip Hop, Married at First Sight, 90 Day Fiancé, Love & Hip Hop, Real Housewives, Keeping Up With the Kardashians, Basketball Wives, Love Island, Are You the One*
6	21	Black	*Basketball Wives, Love & Hip Hop, Real Housewives, Life After Lockup*
7	20	Black	*Love is Blind, Married at First Sight*
8	20	Black	*Love is Blind, Ready to Love*

Role of Researcher

      The researcher has 7 years of experience working as a victim advocate at a university, which exposed the researcher to dating violence on a college campus. In the role, the researcher met with countless college-aged women who experienced difficulty in their romantic relationships, such as verbal abuse, controlling behaviors, and physical violence. Most of the participants agreed that physical violence in a relationship was unhealthy. However, the majority of students downplayed any concerning behavior that was not physical in nature. These interactions prompted the researcher to explore how messaging from media, such as TV, music, and film, influenced how college-aged women interacted and responded to situations in romantic relationships. The researcher established rapport with each interviewee through introductory statements, explained the purpose of the study, and reviewed the consent form prior to beginning the interview. Each interview was conducted via Zoom. The researcher asked open-ended questions to allow the participants to freely share their experiences.

Measures for Ethical Protection

      The Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval for the research to be conducted prior to data collection. The researcher thoroughly reviewed the informed consent form (Appendix B) with each participant. The review outlined the potential risks and benefits of participating in the study. Participants were informed that their names or any other identifying information would not be used in the study. Each participant volunteered to participate and was informed that their consent could be withdrawn at any time without explanation or penalty. Each participant received a printed transcript of their interview to confirm it was an accurate depiction of their interview. All video-recorded interviews and transcripts were stored on a private computer that was password-protected. All files will be destroyed within 5

years of the completed study.

Research Question

The study addressed a single research question: What are the perceptions of college-aged women regarding healthy and unhealthy behaviors in romantic relationships?

Data Collection

Instrument Used in Data Collection

A survey (Appendix A) was sent to potential participants to identify those who met the study criteria. The study criteria were college-aged women who watch relationship-based reality TV and have been in a romantic relationship since entering college. The survey consisted of five questions. The first question verified if participants watched relationship-based reality TV. Question 2 listed popular reality TV shows and asked participants to identify which shows they have watched. Question 3 allowed participants to write in any reality TV shows they watched that were not listed in Question 2. Question 4 asked participants to confirm if they had been in a romantic relationship since entering college. Question 5 asked if the participant would be willing to participate in an interview on relationship behaviors. Participants who were interested in participating in the interview provided their email addresses in their survey. Individual emails were sent to potential participants, inviting them to provide an available time to conduct the Zoom interview.

The interview protocol (Appendix C) consisted of six questions and was used to facilitate each interview. Follow-up questions were used to clarify answers as needed. A total of eight interviews were conducted. Each interview was recorded on Zoom and transcribed through Otter.ai. The researcher reviewed and corrected each interview to preserve the accuracy of the interview conversation. Each interview began with an explanation of the study, a review of the

informed consent form, and the participant providing verbal consent to participate. After the interview was completed, a copy of the consent form was emailed to the participant for their signature. Each participant was provided a copy of the signed informed consent form with signatures from the participant and the researcher. Each participant was also given a typed copy of their interview to verify its accuracy and to make corrections if needed.

Validity

Creswell and Poth (2018) provided nine strategies for validation in qualitative research. For the study, the researcher used triangulation, clarifying researcher bias, member checking, and peer review of the data and research process. The researcher corroborated the data through triangulation by conducting interviews with multiple sources. The triangulation process uses multiple sources to discover codes or themes within the data to validate the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All participants completed a survey on reality TV viewing and a Zoom-recorded interview about relationship behaviors.

To clarify researcher bias, the researcher should disclose any potential bias or experience at the onset of a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher disclosed her experience working as a victim advocate on a college campus for 7 years. In that role, the researcher worked with college-aged women who experienced both healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviors. Potential bias was minimized from the inception of the study with the disclosure of the researcher's role.

Member checking as a validation strategy incorporates the participants' review of the data for credibility and accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher sent transcripts to each participant to evaluate for accuracy. Participants confirmed accuracy and provided feedback as needed. Corrections to the transcript were made based on participant feedback to ensure the

credibility of the data. The participants also engaged in a peer review of the data. The researcher met regularly with the methodologist and dissertation committee to conduct a vigorous review of the data.

Reliability

Reliability can be addressed through an intercoder agreement. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), an intercoder agreement requires the transcript data to be analyzed by multiple coders. The procedures the researcher used in assessing intercoder agreement, as outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018), were developing an initial code list, sharing the codebook with the methodologist, applying the codebook to the transcript, and revising the codebook to inform further coding. The researcher read through the transcripts to develop the initial code list. From the list, the researcher developed a codebook with the major codes that were discovered. The codebook was shared with the methodologist for analysis. The codebook was applied to the transcripts to increase consistency. A final review and revision of the codebook were conducted to clarify the themes found within the data.

Procedures

The researcher utilized a script to recruit participants via email and word of mouth. The script included a link to a survey on reality TV viewing. Participants who agreed to be interviewed and met the criteria were sent an email to schedule the Zoom interview. All participant interviews were video recorded via Zoom. Prior to the recording, the informed consent form was reviewed, and participants gave verbal consent with the understanding that the form would be emailed for their written consent. Each interview was transcribed using Otter.ai and edited as needed for clarity. The researcher sent the transcript to each participant to verify its accuracy.

Data Analysis

A single research question was posed: What are the perceptions of college-aged women regarding healthy and unhealthy behaviors in romantic relationships?

The researcher followed Creswell and Poth's (2018) data analysis spiral for data coding. The process consisted of organizing the data, taking notes on emergent themes, identifying codes and constructing them into themes, developing interpretation of themes, and visualizing and reporting the data. The researcher read the transcripts multiple times and coded the data by color to identify themes. The data were analyzed and placed in a codebook using an Excel spreadsheet.

A within-case analysis was used to analyze the data for themes for each participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Between 20 and 35 codes were identified per participant. Further analysis was completed using cross-case analysis to discover common themes across all participants. The common themes that emerged for healthy relationship behavior were communication, love, and support. The themes that emerged for unhealthy relationship behaviors were aggression, lying/dishonesty, and manipulation/gaslighting.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the methodology used for the case study. The study examined college-aged women's perceptions of healthy and unhealthy behaviors in romantic relationships. The research design, ethical protections for participants, validation techniques, and reliability were among the processes described in the chapter. Chapter 4 will discuss the results of the data analysis.

IV. RESULTS

The purpose of the case study was to examine how college-aged sorority women perceived which behaviors are healthy or unhealthy in a romantic relationship and how watching reality TV influences their views. The study was developed to educate student leaders on how to identify unhealthy relationship behaviors and provide the necessary support and resources to the student body. For the purposes of this research, healthy relationship behaviors are based on equality and respect. The characteristics of healthy relationship behaviors include security, respect, good communication, and positive regard (Davila et al., 2017). Unhealthy relationship behaviors are based on power and control. Characteristics of unhealthy relationship behaviors include coercion, possessiveness, ownership, and a demanding attitude (Abbott et al., 2021).

Methods of Data Collection

The researcher received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Southeastern University to conduct the research. Research participants were then recruited through email and word of mouth at college campuses in Florida. Interested participants completed a survey on reality TV viewing and indicated if they had been in a romantic relationship since entering college. The researcher contacted potential participants via email to set up a Zoom interview. Eight participants completed a recorded interview via Zoom, and the interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai. The background for the study and the consent form were reviewed prior to recording the interview. Each participant gave verbal consent and was sent the consent form to

sign and a copy of the transcript to review for accuracy.

Findings by Research Question

A single research question was addressed: What are the perceptions of college-aged women regarding healthy and unhealthy behaviors in romantic relationships?

When determining if behaviors in a romantic relationship are healthy or unhealthy, college-aged women are influenced by their upbringing, peer relationships, and media exposure. The current study examined how college-aged women determined which behaviors were healthy or unhealthy in romantic relationships and how reality TV influenced their views.

Themes

The two central themes from the study are healthy relationship behaviors and unhealthy relationship behaviors. Participants described their ideal romantic relationship. Additionally, participants discussed what they considered as healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviors and identified those behaviors in the reality TV programming they viewed. Table 2 presents a summary of the themes and subcategories.

Table 2

Themes and Subcategories

Theme/Subcategory	Description
Theme 1	Healthy behaviors
Subcategory 1	Communication
Subcategory 2	Love
Subcategory 3	Support
Theme 2	Unhealthy behaviors
Subcategory 1	Aggression
Subcategory 2	Lying/dishonesty
Subcategory 3	Manipulation/gaslighting

Theme 1: Healthy Relationship Behaviors

Healthy relationship behaviors are behaviors based on equality and respect with characteristics including security, respect, good communication, and positive regard (Davila et al., 2017). Participants answered questions about their ideal romantic relationship and what behaviors they deemed healthy in romantic relationships. All participants were either in a current romantic relationship or verified they had been in a romantic relationship since entering college. The types of healthy relationship behaviors that were mentioned the most were grouped into subcategories of communication, love, and support.

Subcategory 1: Communication

When asked what behaviors they considered healthy in a romantic relationship, each participant mentioned communication. Participants viewed communication as the basis for building lasting relationships. Participants 1, 2, and 3 all relayed the importance of having open and honest communication with one's romantic partner. Although effective communication is important, it is not always easy to achieve. Participants 1, 2, and 3 believed that engaging in difficult conversations was vital to maintaining a healthy relationship. Participant 1 stated, "If something hurts your feelings, being able to tell them what happened" is key. Like Participant 1, Participant 2 expressed, "You got to argue. You got to have disagreements unless somebody is probably not sharing their perspective and being honest and open." She further explained that it was good to have disagreements and hard conversations, and it was healthy to ask each person what they needed. Participant 2 shared that one of her favorite couples from *Love is Blind* was not afraid to have hard conversations even while the cameras were rolling. She admired that they had conversations about kids, the type of lifestyle they wanted, and their sex life, and they were able to communicate openly about individual expectations. In a similar manner, Participant 3

supported the idea that difficult conversations are an indicator of a healthy relationship. She further explained,

> I think that open and effective communication is definitely something that is necessary for a healthy relationship to be able to happen. And, instead of just letting things build up when you feel like you're not being heard, it's really important to go to that person and communicate how you're feeling. And make sure that they know that they're able to communicate that with you as well.

The participants shared that communicating about daily experiences and being able to problem-solve aids in maintaining a healthy relationship. Participants 5 and 6 viewed communication as a top priority in their romantic relationships. Participant 5 expressed how good communication offers reassurance. She noted that it was important to communicate about personal values such as having a "good connection with God" and being family oriented. She also expressed the importance of being able to talk about future goals and what each person has to offer in the relationship. During the interview, Participant 5 reflected on how a couple on *Marriage Bootcamp* improved their relationship through proper communication that helped them understand previous mistakes in their relationship. She believed that their improved communication provided reassurance and support within the relationship. Participant 6 agreed that communicating about daily experiences aids in relationship maintenance. She shared how good communication can lead to individuals "genuinely being with a person for who they really are." She further expressed how crucial it is for romantic partners to communicate without the involvement of outside parties.

Several participants discussed communication in terms of establishing healthy boundaries and learning what is important to their partner. Participant 4 noted that communicating about

boundaries allows each person to have their own space. She shared how one of the TV couples she watched did not do anything without talking to each other first. She believed that their respectful communication was the reason they were successful as a couple. Participant 7 added, "We should have great communication, so whatever is going on between us, we should be able to communicate with each other." She stated that through communication, "You get to know your partner and how they function when they are sad, happy, or under stress." Similarly, Participant 8 believed that developing healthy boundaries required respectful interactions. She shared that sitting down and talking about problems was a healthy way to communicate and establish boundaries. She further shared that "talking about things instead of going back and forth arguing" helps in learning what is important to a partner.

Multiple participants connected honesty with communication. Participant 1 defined honesty as being able to express feelings openly. Participant 3 shared that honesty was an idea she valued in relationships. Participant 4 discussed keeping herself honest by not taking on toxic behaviors she observed and using them against her partner. Additionally, Participant 6 noted, "When you show complete honesty, you're not necessarily messing with anyone else or talking to anyone else. It's just you and that person, just the two of you." In comparing the relationships on reality TV, Participant 1 expressed her admiration for a couple on *Love Island* because the level of communication and honesty they displayed demonstrated the stability needed in a healthy romantic relationship.

Subcategory 2: Love

There are popular sayings that declare "love is an action word" and "love is what love does." Although love is a common word, how love is expressed and experienced can be different for each romantic partner. The current study participants did not always use the word love in

their descriptions. However, they did share the behaviors and actions that made them feel loved, such as gift-giving, being best friends, and their partner doing things for them without being asked. Participant 2 shared her appreciation for "gift giving, not just in a sense of the materialistic but probably like giving without needing to receive something in return." Multiple participants shared trust and loyalty as an act of love. As described by Participant 5, trust grows over time and can occur when "being together like best friends." Participant 6 shared going on dates and taking trips as examples of healthy expressions of love. Likewise, Participant 7 shared that spending quality time with her partner and having fun was a way that she experienced love in a romantic relationship.

Love is Blind is the reality TV show shared most by participants when discussing how love is expressed or experienced. Participants 2, 6, and 7 favored Love is Blind because couples communicated behind a wall and did not get to see each other until the end. Participant 2 shared that Love is Blind was her favorite show because she got to see who fell in love with the person based on who they were without knowing how they looked physically. She described the couples as "caring and loving to one another, asking each other what they need. They cook for one another. They set up romantic dates for each other." Participants 6 and 7 agreed that the couples fell in love due to the emotional connection instead of the physical aspect. They believed that the connection the couples formed was significant due to the time the couples spent listening to the other person and getting to know them.

Subcategory 3: Support

Study participants believed that supporting their romantic partner was reflective of a healthy relationship. Participants 2, 3, and 4 defined support in a romantic relationship as being there for their partner. Participant 2 shared the importance of "just being there and supporting

one another and understanding one another's personalities, boundaries, or at least making an effort to." Similarly, Participant 3 stated it was ideal for her partner to be the person she goes to for support as well as for her to provide the same support to her partner. Participant 4 further defined support as someone who was "mindful of the both of us."

Several participants described support as knowing and giving their partner what they needed. Participant 1 expressed support as independence and giving space for the other person to do their own thing. Participant 1 also expressed feeling supported when her partner did not give her a reason to doubt their intentions. Participant 5 felt supported when her partner checked in to make sure they were in a good place in their relationship. Likewise, Participant 8 felt supported and respected when her partner gave 100% "to make the relationship work." She stressed the importance of developing a friendship before establishing a romantic relationship. In discussing how couples on reality TV show support one another, Participant 6 reflected on several individuals who showed support for their partner by going through counseling to ensure the health of their relationship.

Theme 2: Unhealthy Relationship Behaviors

Unhealthy relationship behaviors are behaviors based on power and control with characteristics that include coercion, possessiveness, ownership, and a demanding attitude (Abbott et al., 2021). The participants answered questions about which behaviors they deemed unhealthy in a romantic relationship. Each participant based their answers on a romantic relationship they had been engaged in since entering college. The unhealthy relationship behaviors that were mentioned the most were grouped into subcategories of aggression, lying/dishonesty, and manipulation/gaslighting.

Subcategory 1: Aggression

As it relates to unhealthy relationship behaviors, aggression was easily identified as an undesired behavior. Common ways that aggression was discussed included physical, verbal, and emotional types of aggression. Participants 2, 4, and 5 shared that yelling and engaging in arguments was an indicator that aggression was present in romantic relationships. Participant 2 stated, "If you're just yelling at me, it's hard for me to honestly hear what you have to say because it's a trauma cue for me. So, I'm gonna block it out. I'm not really hearing you." Like Participant 2, Participants 4 and 5 acknowledged how constant unhealthy arguments can bring about aggression. Participant 4 further explained that aggression can become physical if partners "put their hands on each other." In the same light, Participants 6 and 8 discussed physical aggression and the negative effect it has on romantic relationships. Participant 6 shared that abuse is a sign that the relationship was unhealthy, and it created a toxic environment. Participant 8 went on to explain how verbal and physical abuse was tied to other unhealthy behaviors, such as being possessive and attempting to control one's partner. Participant 8 defined control as "trying to control what they wear or control who they hang around."

The aggression witnessed in the reality TV shows that participants watched was similar to what participants experienced in their personal relationships. When reflecting on the shows she watched, Participant 2 shared, "It was normal to break doors and punch holes in walls and be aggressive and have those aggressive outbursts even if you're not physically abusing the individual." Participants 3 and 5 reflected on the negative way reality TV couples talked to one another as unhealthy romantic behavior. Participant 5 shared that the couples were "arguing over little stuff that's not really relevant and making arguments out of anything. Like, when you are scared, you just start arguing, just to make them leave you alone, which isn't healthy at all."

Participant 7 shared similar instances of control as discussed earlier by pointing out how the male partner in a TV couple she followed exerted control over his partner by being the only one allowed to make decisions in the relationship.

Subcategory 2: Lying/Dishonesty

In contrast to the communication discussed in healthy relationship behaviors, lying and dishonesty point to communication that can be detrimental to a relationship. Several participants discussed how romantic relationships were negatively impacted by lying and dishonesty. Participant 1 shared that lying and invading a romantic partner's privacy showed signs of insecurity in the relationship. Likewise, Participant 3 believed that dishonesty was "disregarding the other party's emotions." Participant 1 further shared how couples on the reality TV show *Too Hot to Handle* demonstrated lying by leading dating partners on and not being honest about their intentions. Participant 6 echoed Participant 1's assessment that couples on reality TV often demonstrate dishonesty in their daily interactions with their romantic partner. She stated, "They're just not honest about it. Even though the cameras are rolling." Participants 2 and 4 had a slightly different take on lying and dishonesty. Participant 2 viewed lying and dishonesty in terms of "uncommunicated expectations," and Participant 4 viewed it as "twisting situations."

It is worth noting that while most study participants did not share personal experiences with cheating, the majority of participants mentioned cheating when discussing the couples they followed on reality TV. Participant 2 shared her thoughts on these couples, stating, "You're in an exclusive relationship, but you're outside at the club doing other things, ungodly things with other people." Participant 3 labeled this type of behavior as "disloyal" and "sexually driven," while Participant 4 noted that "there's just a lot of cheating going on and not being straightforward with one another." Participants 1 and 6 defined it as "talking to several girls at

once" and "infidelity," respectively. Participant 7 was the only participant to discuss cheating in reference to her personal experiences. She believed cheating showed that a person was not "treating their partner well."

Subcategory 3: Manipulation/Gaslighting

In discussing unhealthy relationship behaviors, participants often mentioned manipulation and gaslighting together. Participants 1 and 2 discussed how gaslighting devalues who they are and ignores the perspective they are attempting to bring forth in the relationship. Participant 1 defined gaslighting as,

> When you talk to the other person, when you bring up a concern, and then the other person makes you believe that that didn't happen or that you're crazy for bringing that up, or you're just too sensitive, or they were just joking. Yeah, I guess trying to make you think what happened didn't actually happen.

Likewise, Participant 2 provided a similar definition, stating,

> Manipulation tactics like gaslighting, things like that. You know, if I'm telling you how I feel about something, you're telling me that I shouldn't be feeling that way; my feelings aren't valid. Being negative about pretty much everything and anything. Like every little thing, even unnecessary things. That's unhealthy.

Participant 4 discussed manipulation in terms of not allowing their partner to have their own thoughts and "trying to downplay how they are feeling." Participant 5 further described manipulative behavior as starting pointless arguments with your romantic partner "just to make them leave you alone, which isn't healthy at all." Manipulation and gaslighting behaviors were also discussed as prevalent in the reality TV shows that study participants viewed. Participant 8 described manipulative behavior in reality TV as individuals "putting on a front for the TV and

for the person, but once they finally get with that person, they start to show their true colors, and it kind of ends badly." Like Participant 8, Participant 7 pointed out manipulative relationship behaviors shown in *Love is Blind,* describing it as acting one way when getting to know the person, then "they act another way when they finally meet them in person."

Evidence of Quality

The researcher utilized Creswell and Poth's (2018) data analysis spiral for data collection. The data were reviewed numerous times to identify themes. The researcher corroborated the data through triangulation by conducting interviews with multiple sources. Participants reviewed the data for credibility and accuracy as part of the validation process. A vigorous review of the data was conducted through regular meetings between the researcher and the dissertation committee.

Summary

Eight participants provided their perceptions of romantic relationship behaviors. Themes and subcategories were identified through cross-case analysis. The two themes for the study were healthy relationship behaviors and unhealthy relationship behaviors. The subcategories that emerged for healthy relationship behaviors were communication, love, and support. The subcategories that emerged for unhealthy relationship behaviors were aggression, lying/dishonesty, and manipulation/gaslighting. Chapter 5 will discuss the implications and findings of the study.

V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the case study was to examine how college-aged sorority women perceived which behaviors are healthy or unhealthy in a romantic relationship and how watching reality TV influences their views. The study was developed to educate student leaders on how to identify unhealthy relationship behaviors and provide the necessary support and resources to the student body. For the purposes of this research, healthy relationship behaviors are based on equality and respect. The characteristics of healthy relationship behaviors include security, respect, good communication, and positive regard (Davila et al., 2017). Unhealthy relationship behaviors are based on power and control. Characteristics of unhealthy relationship behaviors include coercion, possessiveness, ownership, and a demanding attitude (Abbott et al., 2021).

Methods of Data Collection

After the researcher received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Southeastern University, participants were recruited through email and word of mouth at college campuses in Florida. Interested participants completed a survey on reality TV viewing and indicated if they had been in a romantic relationship since entering college (See Appendix A). Potential participants were contacted via email to set up a Zoom interview. Eight participants completed a recorded interview via Zoom, and the interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai. The background for the study and the consent form were reviewed prior to recording the interview. Each participant provided verbal consent and was sent the consent form to sign and a

copy of the transcript to review for accuracy.

Summary of Results

Eight college-aged women were interviewed to explore their perceptions of romantic relationship behaviors. In the single case study, the two salient themes that emerged were healthy relationship behaviors and unhealthy relationship behaviors. Participants identified the three subcategories for healthy relationship behavior as communication, love, and support. The three subcategories for unhealthy relationship behavior that were identified by participants were aggression, lying/dishonesty, and manipulation/gaslighting.

Healthy Relationship Behaviors

The behaviors that participants perceived as healthy relationship behaviors were communication, love, and support. Participants shared the relationship behaviors they considered ideal in their romantic relationships as well as the behaviors they observed in the reality TV shows they watched. Each participant believed that communication was a primary factor in maintaining a healthy romantic relationship. Multiple participants shared the importance of having honest communication and being willing to engage in difficult conversations with their partners. Participants shared what makes them feel loved when they are in a romantic relationship and what type of healthy relationship behaviors they observed when viewing their favorite reality TV show couples. Participant 1 felt that giving gifts was an expression of love between her and her partner. Participant 6 shared that she felt loved when going on dates with her partner, and Participant 7 held similar views that spending quality time with her partner was an act of love. Several participants believed that the couples on *Love is Blind* were able to form an emotional connection with their partners and fall in love because of the time they invested in getting to know the other person. Participants believed that showing support for their romantic

partner was indicative of a healthy relationship. Participants viewed support as being there for their partner and providing what their partner needed in the relationship.

Unhealthy Relationship Behaviors

Each participant had experienced at least one unhealthy relationship behavior that impacted their romantic relationship in a negative manner. Aggression was identified by participants as one of the most undesired behaviors in a romantic relationship. Aggression was experienced and observed physically, verbally, and emotionally. Participants 2, 4, and 5 described aggression as yelling and having constant arguments. Participant 2 shared that punching holes in walls, breaking doors, and aggressive outbursts were acts of aggression she witnessed on reality TV. Lying/dishonesty was identified by participants as an unhealthy form of communication in a romantic relationship. Participant 3 described dishonesty as "disregarding the other party's emotions." Multiple participants recognized cheating as a dishonest behavior often highlighted on reality TV shows. Participant 3 described many of the shows as being "sexually driven." The subcategory of manipulation/gaslighting was defined by Participants 1 and 2 as a romantic partner making their significant other believe that what they are feeling and communicating was invalid.

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Discussion of Research Question

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A single research question was posed: What are the perceptions of college-aged women regarding healthy and unhealthy behaviors in a romantic relationship?

The current study focused on how college-aged women determined which behaviors were healthy and unhealthy in romantic relationships. The study explored how reality TV shows influenced the participants' views on healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviors. Each participant completed a survey on reality TV viewing prior to participating in a formal interview

via Zoom. The following discussion connects the participants' personal experiences with healthy

and unhealthy romantic relationship behaviors with the behaviors they viewed on the reality TV

programming they watched. Table 1 lists each participant's age, race, and the reality TV shows

they reported watching.

Table 1

Participant Details

Participant Number	Age	Race	Relationship-based reality TV shows viewed
1	22	Hispanic	*Too Hot to Handle, The Bachelor, The Bachelorette, Love Island, 90 Day Fiancé*
2	23	Black	*The Bachelor, The Bachelorette, Love is Blind, The Ultimatum, Love & Hip Hop, Keeping Up with the Kardashians*
3	18	White	*Too Hot to Handle, Love Island*
4	24	Black	*Love & Hip Hop, Keeping Up with the Kardashians*
5	18	Black	*Love Island, Marriage Bootcamp, Love & Hip Hop, Married at First Sight, 90 Day Fiancé, Love & Hip Hop, Real Housewives, Keeping up with the Kardashians, Basketball Wives, Love Island, Are You the One*
6	21	Black	*Basketball Wives, Love & Hip Hop, Real Housewives, Life After Lockup*
7	20	Black	*Love is Blind, Married at First Sight*
8	20	Black	*Love is Blind, Ready to Love*

Each participant watched at least two different reality TV shows. There were several

reality TV show franchises with multiple versions of the TV program, such as *Love & Hip Hop,*

Real Housewives, and Basketball Wives. These franchises feature different casts in popular cities

like Los Angeles, Miami, New York, and Atlanta. Many of the shows bring the cast back after the

season for a reunion show when many of the fans' questions about the season are answered. The

popular show *90 Day Fiancé* spurned additional shows with *90 Day Fiancé: Happily Ever After?* and *90 Day Fiancé: Before the 90 Days.* Extending these shows by giving viewers an inside look into the reality TV stars' lives creates what Participants 2 and 3 described as a sense of familiarity due to viewers feeling they know their favorite reality TV characters personally.

The data from the interviews were analyzed and coded to identify two themes and subcategories in each theme (see Table 2). The two themes that emerged in the study were healthy relationship behaviors and unhealthy relationship behaviors. The subcategories for healthy relationship behaviors were communication, love, and support. The subcategories for unhealthy relationship behaviors were aggression, lying/dishonesty, and manipulation/gaslighting.

Table 2

Themes and Subcategories

Theme/Subcategory	Description
Theme 1	Healthy behaviors
Subcategory 1	Communication
Subcategory 2	Love
Subcategory 3	Support
Theme 2	Unhealthy behaviors
Subcategory 1	Aggression
Subcategory 2	Lying/dishonesty
Subcategory 3	Manipulation/gaslighting

Social constructivism was the framework for the study. According to the framework, individuals attempt to gain an understanding of life as they engage in their daily experiences. A pattern of meaning is developed in the interpretive process as the researcher makes sense of how others see the world (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study revealed that college-aged women

often associated what they saw in reality TV programming with their personal relationships. The results from the study are consistent with previous literature, showing that college-aged students often incorporate what they see in media and pop culture into their personal relationships. Participants in the study seemed to relate to and connect with their favorite characters, and at times, they viewed reality television relationships as an extension of their own lives. For example, Participant 2 explained that following reality TV stars on social media makes her feel like she knows them because she not only has seen them on TV but also has seen them in different settings with their family and friends. Participants seeing their favorite characters in a friendly manner is similar to previous research that noted that heavy viewers of reality TV discuss the relationships of their favorite characters as an extension of their own lives (Bond & Drogos, 2014; Jahng, 2019).

The study's participants follow their favorite reality TV stars on social media to gain an inside look into their lives. Multiple participants shared that they discussed what was going on in their favorite reality TV couples' relationships as part of their daily conversation. Participant 2 explained that the connection on social media between viewers and their favorite reality TV stars makes viewers feel as if they know them personally. As participants seek to understand how to navigate their personal relationships, they filter their decision-making through the information presented in the reality TV shows they watch.

The process of decision-making is similar to Kretz's (2019) determination that the more that individuals view reality TV relationship behaviors, the more likely they are to commit these behaviors to memory. Kretz determined that the viewer's repeated exposure to reality TV couples' relationship behaviors resulted in viewers committing those behaviors to memory and incorporating said behaviors into their personal relationships. The current study is like the

research presented by Kretz (2019) in showing that participants take social cues from their favorite reality TV stars and often mimic what they see in their romantic relationships. Kretz further showed that participants with less relationship experience due to age or other factors experienced a higher impact on relationship satisfaction than those with more relationship experience. Coinciding with age and experience being a factor in relationship satisfaction, Participant 3 shared that when she was younger, she would replicate the relationship behaviors she saw on reality TV; however, as she got older and gained more relationship experience, she no longer wanted to replicate the same behaviors.

Theme 1: Healthy Relationship Behaviors

The study recognizes healthy relationship behaviors as behaviors based on equality and respect with characteristics including security, respect, good communication, and positive regard (Davila et al., 2017). Each participant shared their ideal romantic relationship and what behaviors they viewed as healthy in a romantic relationship. The subcategories that emerged for healthy relationship behaviors were communication, love, and support. In their study, Epstein et al. (2013) determined that communication was the best predictor of relationship satisfaction. The study also listed knowledge of partner and life skills as two skills that are good predictors of satisfaction in romantic relationships. Knowledge of partner was defined as knowing and caring about a partner's preferences, and life skills included maintaining employment, money management, and exercising (Epstein et al., 2013).

Subcategory 1: Communication

Each participant highlighted communication as vital to maintaining a healthy romantic relationship. Research has shown that the type of communication a young person experiences in the home can affect their views on appropriate communication later in life. Individuals who

experienced and possessed positive interpersonal skills, such as problem-solving and compromise, are more able to achieve a lasting relationship (Debnam et al., 2014). Participant 2 believed that having disagreements was important when engaging in open and honest communication. Participant 2 further shared that if couples are not having disagreements, they are not being honest or sharing their perspective. Open and honest communication requires romantic partners to share their thoughts and collaborate on setting the goals and behaviors they desire to see in their relationship. In their research, Bannon et al. (2020) showed that there was a significant connection between collaborative communication and relationship satisfaction. Their findings indicated that efficiency in collaborative communication between established romantic partners was a predictor of increased relationship satisfaction, which led to positive outcomes (Bannon et al., 2020).

Participant 4 explained that communication was key when setting boundaries that give each partner the space they need. Romantic partners must be willing to learn and be open to redefining relational expectations to establish healthy boundaries. Participant 7 shared that in her ideal relationship, she would communicate with her partner to learn how the partner functions under different conditions, such as being happy, sad, or under stress. She explained that learning these things about her partner would give her insight when establishing relational boundaries. Jamison and Sanner (2021) reported that when creating and maintaining boundaries, individuals must discover a balance of interdependence and independence in their relationships. Romantic partners must figure out how to set relational boundaries without losing themselves in the relationship. Jamison and Sanner (2021) discussed the importance of constructive communication strategies in developing and respecting relational boundaries while maintaining individuality. Similarly, Participant 8 believed that respectful interactions with a romantic partner

is required to develop healthy boundaries. Participant 8 further agreed with Participant 7's assessment of the importance of communicating to learn what is important to your partner as a means of establishing healthy boundaries.

Effective communication does not happen automatically; it requires time and effort. Participants 5 and 6 shared that communicating about daily experiences and being able to problem-solve were important aspects of healthy relationship behavior. Similarly, Bannon et al. (2020) shared that good communication involves sharing daily experiences and having the ability to problem-solve, which can lead to relationship satisfaction. Current study participants expressed being able to have hard conversations and not letting issues build up as essential components of communication. Conflict in and of itself is not a negative thing. Having hard conversations and engaging in conflict is a normal part of life that can be resolved through effective communication. Participants admired the couples on reality TV who were willing to address the issues they were facing by having difficult conversations when necessary. Participant 2 liked that the couples "asked for what they wanted." Similarly, Participant 3 understood that having hard conversations helped her favorite couple from *Marriage Bootcamp* analyze what had gone wrong in their relationship. Participant 1 shared that watching reality TV couples communicate prompted her to see things from the male perspective and incorporate what she learned in her romantic relationships. Current study participants incorporating behaviors they learned from their favorite reality TV stars in the personal relationships lines up with previous research that determined that viewers of reality TV take social cues from the media personalities they watch (Burt, 2018; Gibson et al., 2016; Lippman et al., 2014). In a similar manner, Participant 3 shared that when she was younger, she replicated the behaviors she saw on reality TV with the way she interacted with people she dated. She further explained that she replicated

the way the reality TV stars communicated "in ways like flirting and how I would talk to people."

Subcategory 2: Love

Study participants shared experiencing love with their romantic partner through gift-giving, building trust, and spending quality time. When discussing the reality TV shows they watched, the participants' descriptions of healthy relationship behaviors included buying expensive gifts, taking trips, and falling in love. Multiple participants shared that *Love is Blind* is ideal due to couples connecting emotionally before seeing what the other person looks like. Participant 8 shared that she admired how her favorite couple on *Love is Blind* fell in love, and she wanted to be a part of that journey.

In their study on what makes people feel loved, Xia et al. (2023) developed three core categories: positive responsiveness (to needs), authentic connections, and a sense of stability. The concepts derived from these categories included physical and verbal affection, prioritizing me, emotional support, doing things together, and doing anything for me without expectation. These demonstrations of love can be considered relationship maintenance. In the current study, participants identified similar actions that made them feel loved. Participant 5 expressed love as "being together like best friends," and Participant 7 described love as spending quality time together. These descriptions were akin to doing things together. Participants 1 and 8 shared actions of love witnessed on reality TV as forming a true connection and being stable, which highlights authentic connections and a sense of stability. Another important behavior identified by current participants was doing things for their partner without expecting to receive something in return.

Relationships on reality TV are often glamorized and depicted as the ideal love affair. In

their study, Lippman et al. (2014) showed that heavy viewers of relationship-based reality TV believed in love at first sight and tended to have idealized notions about romance that may not reflect reality. The study associated high levels of exposure to marriage-themed reality TV with increased romantic belief endorsement. Lippman et al. (2014) relayed that it was not only the exposure to relationship-based media that affected viewers' beliefs about romance but also the extent to which viewers perceived that what they were watching was realistic. Reality TV shows endorse the romantic belief of love at first sight by presenting shows where individuals fall in love quickly. Participant 2 described the results of having increased romantic belief endorsement as having unhealthy expectations and "wanting more than somebody can give and possibly missing out on a good thing because you're basing your relationship off of what you see other people doing." Participant 7 noted that reality TV shows "only show the ups, and we always see the happiness. We do not see the sadness, the heartbreak that you usually see in a relationship." Burt (2018) described the media's portrayal of romantic relationships as unrealistic compared to real life. Although multiple participants described reality TV shows as "fake," "entertainment," and "unrealistic," they also discussed following their favorite couples on social media to see if they are still dating and in love. Participant 1 shared that the shows are meant to be "juicy and full of drama," and Participant 5 believed that the show's producers tell the personalities what to do and how to behave.

Subcategory 3: Support

Multiple participants listed support as a valued healthy relationship behavior. Participants 2, 3, and 4 defined support as being there for a partner. Other descriptors of support given in the current study included giving their partner what they need, being mindful of their partner, and not giving their partner a reason to doubt their motives. Participants 5 and 6 described support as

putting in the work to make sure that the relationship was in a good place and giving 100% of themselves to make sure the relationship was successful.

In contrast to the current study in which the participants' focus was on relational support, previous literature reflected high levels of relational conflict as the norm in the romantic relationships that the participants followed (Aubrey et al., 2013; Gibson et al., 2016; Reizer & Hetsroni, 2014; Riddle & De Simone, 2013). In their study, Aubrey et al. (2013) revealed that conflict and control were perceived as a normal and expected part of romantic relationships. Most of the current study's participants did not report high levels of conflict within their personal relationships but were able to identify those behaviors in the relationships they followed on reality TV. Relational conflict that was identified by participants included checking their partner's phone, arguing, and being possessive. Most participants seemed to lack awareness of how these negative behaviors were normalized and the adverse impact they had on their personal relationships. Multiple participants discussed not wanting to mimic the negative behaviors they viewed on their favorite shows. However, previous research shows that as participants attempt to make sense of the world, they adopt the behaviors they believe to be the social norm (Riddle & De Simone, 2013). Participant 1 noted that there was an interesting dynamic between knowing that the reality TV shows are fake and still allowing the shows to affect the way she views relationships. Introspectively, Participant 5 revealed getting into an argument with her boyfriend after watching someone cheat on their partner. She shared, "It does kind of come into play in my relationship because I've been getting into it with him because of the person on TV that did somebody wrong."

Theme 2: Unhealthy Relationship Behaviors

Unhealthy relationship behaviors are behaviors based on power and control with characteristics that include coercion, possessiveness, ownership, and demanding attitude (Abbott et al., 2021). Oftentimes, concerning relationship behaviors are normalized in reality TV programming. The impact of nonphysical unhealthy relationship behaviors such as yelling, controlling what someone wears, or name-calling is minimized. Study participants discussed the relationship behaviors they deemed unhealthy in romantic relationships. The unhealthy relationship behaviors that emerged were aggression, lying/dishonesty, and manipulation/gaslighting.

Subcategory 1: Aggression

Aggression was listed as an unhealthy relationship behavior that manifested itself physically, verbally, and emotionally. Study participants witnessed the behavior in their personal relationships and in the reality TV shows they watched. Relational aggression is often seen as normal and justified and presents itself as nonphysical behaviors used to harm another person by damaging their social status or relationships (Hayes et al., 2021). Participants 2, 4, and 5 acknowledged experiencing verbal aggression through yelling and engaging in constant unhealthy arguments. Participant 2 described yelling as a trauma cue that caused her to block everything out. Participants 4 and 5 believed that constant yelling in arguments increased aggression within romantic relationships. In his study, Burt (2018) revealed that reality TV rarely showed the consequences of bad behavior. The finding is significant because when there is no accountability shown for poor choices, viewers gain a false sense of comfort when engaging in unhealthy relationship behaviors. The questionable nonphysical behavior that participants in the current study witnessed on their favorite reality TV shows included invasion of privacy, feeling

entitled, and not wanting their romantic partner to hang out with friends and family. Like the couples in reality TV, Participant 8 identified unhealthy relationship behaviors in her personal relationships as her romantic partner being overly possessive and attempting to control who she hung out with and the clothing she wore.

According to Gibson et al. (2016), physical aggression increased for viewers who were exposed to reality TV shows that displayed relational and verbal aggression. Participant 4 shared that any form of abuse was unhealthy and described physical aggression as romantic partners "putting their hands on each other." Participant 2 recalled that it was normal to see reality TV stars breaking doors, punching holes in walls, and having aggressive outbursts. According to Scharrer and Blackburn (2018), the more that viewers perceive the poor behavior as normal or routine, the more likely they are to mimic the behavior in their own lives. Participant 5 shared that she mimicked the behaviors she viewed on reality TV by starting arguments over small things. Gibson et al. (2016) defined the mimicking behavior as experience-taking when viewers take on the character's behavior, actions, and mindset. It is worth noting that when viewers witness reality TV personalities receive a positive outcome from engaging in negative behaviors, they will incorporate similar behaviors into their personal relationships (Aubrey et al., 2013). Participant 5 shared that reality TV influenced viewers due to the amount of TV programming viewers consumed and the belief that the negative behaviors displayed are how relationships should go. Participant 5 admitted that, at times, she has engaged in negative relationship behavior by not allowing her partner to have friends.

Subcategory 2: Lying/Dishonesty

Participants noted that lying and dishonesty had a negative impact on their romantic relationships. Participant 3 believed that lying showed a disregard for the other person's

emotions. The participants explained that lying and dishonesty presented themselves as leading someone on, not being truthful about their intentions, having uncommunicated expectations, and cheating. Participant 4 further described dishonest behaviors as a romantic partner "twisting the situation" for their own benefit. Multiple participants discussed how lying and dishonest behavior were portrayed through individuals dating more than one person at a time and not being truthful about it. Lying and dishonesty results in romantic partners having lower relationship satisfaction (Debnam et al., 2014).

In addition to lying, cheating was an issue that multiple participants viewed as prevalent in reality TV. Participant 3 reflected on the show *Too Hot to Handle,* where she believed the whole premise of the show was about sex and having multiple partners. Similarly, Participant 5 discussed *Love Island* and *Are You My Match* as shows that required participants to go through multiple people to find their romantic partner. Participant 3 believed that the hypersexualization of these shows negatively impacted younger audiences. Like Participant 3, Participant 5 felt that some reality TV stars were unable to stay committed due to being so sexually driven. In his study, Burt (2018) indicated that participants choose their dating partners based on the type of person media personalities portrayed as successful. His research further showed that viewers relied on their favorite characters for romantic decision-making. Study participants watch their favorite characters on reality TV shows, follow the characters on social media, and talk about the characters as an extension of their daily lives, which results in them spending a considerable amount of time under the social and behavioral influence of the reality TV stars they follow. The more that viewers perceive these relationship behaviors as real, the more likely they are to mimic these behaviors in their own relationships (Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018).

Subcategory 3: Manipulation/Gaslighting

Participants shared manipulation/gaslighting as a behavior aimed at downplaying how one's partner feels about a situation. It devalues the other person's perspective. Participants 1 and 2 defined gaslighting as one partner trying to make the other partner believe something did not happen, that their partner is crazy for bringing it up, or that the partner should not feel the way they feel. Participant 4 shared that manipulation in reality TV is shown when a person acts one way in the beginning but behaves differently once they get to know their partner. Riddle and De Simone (2013) pointed out that heavy viewers of reality TV can easily access programming that reflects drama and discord in romantic relationships. The more realistic that viewers perceive these TV shows to be, the more likely they are to see controlling, negative behaviors such as gaining control or getting the upper hand in an argument as the desired outcome. Participant 2 described manipulative behaviors in reality TV as individuals who engage in making nice gestures, expecting something in return, or making the gesture without actually meaning it. She believes that some reality TV stars do things for the cameras so they can be "perceived as good to the world."

Hall and Knox (2019) explored the power dynamics within romantic relationships. Their study showed that when there was a power imbalance, the individual with the most power could influence their partner's thoughts and behaviors. Participant 4 described the behavior as a romantic partner not being allowed to have or express their own thoughts and having their feelings downplayed. Likewise, Participant 7 described the power imbalance as everything being one-sided, with one partner making all the decisions. Manipulation and gaslighting fall into the study's definition of unhealthy relationship behaviors due to their characteristics of power and control.

Social Media Influence

In the study, social media emerged as a connector between participants and their favorite reality TV stars. Dajches and Barbati (2022) formed the concept of PCRs, which highlighted the long-term attachment to media couples that extend beyond program viewing. Participants shared that they followed their favorite reality TV show couples on social media sites, including TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Multiple participants stated they followed their favorite reality TV couples after the show ended to see who was still together romantically and what they were doing at that time. Participant 2 shared how following the couples on social media feels like "you know them personally." Participant 1 discussed using social media sites to see what goes on behind the scenes. Multiple participants shared that they gossiped with their friends about what reality TV stars were doing in their lives. Participant 3 believed that the social media aspect added to the impact reality TV stars have on viewers. This belief aligns with previous literature that showed that young adult's social development and romantic ideals were influenced by the media figures they followed (Tukachinsky & Dorros, 2018). Participant 5 was among the participants who shared that she and her friends talk about reality TV couples as a part of their daily conversations. The supposed connection supports the parasocial relationship concept as one-sided relationships that viewers form with media figures (Tukachinsky & Dorros, 2018). Furthermore, the research conducted by Tukachinsky and Dorros (2018) revealed that the emotional attachment that viewers form with the media personalities they follow shows the influence these personalities have on viewers' personal lives.

Study Limitations

The current study provides insight into how college-aged women perceived which behaviors are healthy and unhealthy in a romantic relationship. College-aged students take social

cues from the media they watch and will often incorporate the behaviors they see into their personal relationships (Burt, 2018; Chock, 2011; Lippman et al., 2014). One limitation of the study is that all participants are from colleges in one state. Therefore, the results may not be transferrable to all university populations or regions. A second limitation is gender. All participants in the current study are female. Moreover, the results may not represent male college-aged students who watch reality TV. Study participants were required to have been in a romantic relationship since entering college. Because of this limitation, the results might not be generalizable to individuals who have yet to engage in a romantic relationship while in college.

Implications for Future Practice

This qualitative study provided insight into how college-aged women perceived which behaviors were healthy and unhealthy in romantic relationships and how reality TV influenced their views. Social constructivism was the framework used for the study as college-aged women seek to understand the world through their lived experiences. Study participants not only discussed their personal, romantic relationships with their peers but also discussed the relationships of their favorite reality TV couples as a part of their daily conversations. The open dialogue amongst peers helped to shape what participants perceived as healthy and unhealthy romantic relationship behavior. According to Wisnieski et al. (2013), peer groups helped to provide context on selecting romantic partners and determining which relationship behaviors are appropriate. The current study's participants filtered through the input from their peers and the relationships they viewed on TV to establish their personal beliefs on what was acceptable and unacceptable to experience in romantic relationships.

Study participants shared the romantic relationship behaviors that they experienced in their personal relationships as well as those they observed in the reality TV shows they watched.

Communication, love, and support emerged as healthy relationship behaviors that were valued by current study participants. Communication was a top priority for each participant. Participants acknowledged that effective communication involved having difficult conversations and being able to problem-solve. Although love emerged as a desired behavior in healthy romantic relationships, participants did not express being in love. Instead, participants described what made them feel loved. It is worth noting that the love behaviors that participants admired in their favorite reality TV couples could cause discontent in their personal relationships. Participants cannot obtain the level of expensive gift-giving and lavish trips they witnessed their favorite reality TV show couples engaging in. Burt (2018) pointed out that the relationships on reality TV are unrealistic compared to real-life relationships. Participant 2 described it as expecting more than someone can give. Being supportive was regarded as a valuable, healthy relationship behavior. It is interesting to note that though support was important to participants, most of the reality TV they watch depict the opposite. Participant 1 described reality TV shows as being full of drama. The behaviors that are highlighted on the shows that keep participants watching are not typical of what current participants described as supportive behavior or being there for their partner.

The unhealthy relationship behaviors described in the study created undesired experiences for participants. Aggression was discussed in terms of physical, verbal, and emotional interactions. Actions such as yelling, hitting, and destroying property created what Participant 6 described as a toxic environment. Lying/dishonesty was viewed as an unhealthy way of communicating. Participant 2 made a significant point about dishonesty by describing it as having "uncommunicated expectations." Oftentimes, romantic partners are held to a standard of meeting expectations they were not aware of. The failure to communicate honestly can lead to

lower relationship satisfaction (Debnam et al., 2014). Disregarding a romantic partner's feelings or perspective through manipulation/gaslighting is a definite sign of unhealthy relationship behavior. Manipulation and gaslighting fall in line with power and control, which are characteristics of abusive behavior (Abbott et al., 2021; Hall & Knox, 2019).

The relationship behaviors identified by participants were either experienced in their personal relationships or viewed in the reality TV they watched, or both. The current study is in line with previous research that shows that college-aged individuals get social cues from the media personalities they follow (Aubrey et al., 2012; Burt, 2018; Gibson et al., 2016; Lippman et al., 2014; Riddle & De Simone, 2013). The results of the study build on existing evidence that indicate that heavy viewers of reality TV incorporate the behaviors they view into their personal relationships and discuss their favorite reality TV stars in their daily conversations as if they were personal friends (Burt, 2018; Chock, 2011; Lippman et al., 2014).

The implications of the study are to provide training for student leaders to recognize and mitigate concerning relationship behaviors through formal and informal discussions and workshops utilizing the engagement and popularity of the reality TV shows viewed by the student body. Using an informal approach, student leaders can serve as the more capable individuals to provide guidance in identifying unhealthy relationship behaviors in an effort to prevent potentially unsafe relationship behaviors in the campus community. Student leaders will facilitate the discussion of a favorite reality TV show or reality TV couple and highlight key behaviors and phrases that emerge from the discussion to determine whether these behaviors or phrases are healthy or unhealthy. The approach can be effective inside and outside a classroom setting. The approach can also be conducted within a large group or in small numbers. Student leaders can be trained on how to identify and address unhealthy relationship behaviors, as well as

71

provide assistance and resources to students experiencing these behaviors.

Recommendations for Future Research

Case studies are designed to explore and understand real-life issues (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The current study focused on relationship behaviors. Eight college-aged women were interviewed to gain an understanding of how they perceived which behaviors were healthy or unhealthy in romantic relationships. In addition to identifying these behaviors, participants discussed how their favorite reality TV shows influenced their views. It is significant that participants' ideal relationship behaviors do not coincide with the reality TV programming they watch. Participants are drawn to these shows based on the "drama" they provide. Many behaviors seen on reality TV are abusive in nature but not recognized as such due to the behaviors not being physical in nature (García-Díaz et al., 2017). It is recommended that future qualitative studies examine how the normalizing of unhealthy relationship behaviors can hinder young adults from identifying potentially harmful relationship behaviors.

Future research should also consider the role social media plays in influencing young people's behavior in romantic relationships. Participants shared that they followed their favorite reality TV characters on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Social media strengthens the connection viewers feel that they have with their favorite reality TV stars. Social media gives viewers 24/7 access to their favorite stars through content uploaded on the star's social media pages. Exploring the relationship viewers believe they have with their favorite stars through social media contact can extend the research conducted on PCRs.

Studies on relationships are often female-focused, with males portrayed as the agitators. Male victims of unhealthy relationship behaviors often suffer in silence. Future studies that focus on male relationship experiences and their perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationship

72

behaviors are recommended. Understanding how young men perceive and experience relationship behaviors can extend and inform the current knowledge of dating violence on college campuses.

Conclusion

The study focused on the behaviors that college-aged women perceived as healthy and unhealthy in romantic relationships and how reality TV influenced their views. The research contributed to previous literature concerning relationship behaviors and the influence of reality TV. The two central themes of the study were healthy relationship behaviors and unhealthy relationship behaviors. The subcategories that emerged for healthy relationship behaviors were communication, love, and support. The subcategories that emerged for unhealthy relationship behaviors were aggression, lying/dishonesty, and manipulation/gaslighting. The results of the study show that college-aged women's perceptions of healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviors have been influenced by the reality TV programming they watched, and the impact on their decision-making was further enhanced through their connection to the reality TV personalities on social media.

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Appendix A

Participant Survey

Reality TV Viewing

1. Do you watch relationship-based reality TV?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. Which of the following shows do you watch?

☐ Married at First Sight

☐ 90 Day Fiancé

☐ Love and Hip Hop

☐ Real Housewives

☐ Keeping up with the Kardashians

☐ Basketball Wives

☐ The Bachelor

☐ The Bachelorette

☐ Love Island

3. Are there any shows you watch that are not listed? Please list below.

4. Have you been in a romantic relationship since entering college?

☐ Yes

☐ No

5. Would you be willing to participate in an interview on relationship behaviors? If yes, please add your email address.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Appendix B

ADULT CONSENT FORM
SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: COLLEGE-AGED WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS ON HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY ROMANTIC BEHAVIORS AND HOW REALITY TV INFLUENCED THEIR VIEWS ON RELATIONSHIPS: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Kenneth Stephens, Principal Investigator

Coretta Cotton, Student Investigator

Dr. Janet Deck, Methodologist

PURPOSE:

This study will examine how college-aged women determine which behaviors are healthy and unhealthy in a romantic relationship and how reality TV influences those views.

PROCEDURES:

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in a Zoom-recorded interview lasting approximately 45 minutes.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION:

There is the minimal risk of psychological stress during this interview. If you feel stressed during the interview, you may stop at any time.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION:

There are no benefits to you from participating in this interview. If you are interested, we will send you a copy of the results of the study when it is finished.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The records of this study will be kept private. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this study. The researcher will not include your name of anything else that could identify you in any reports of the interview.

COMPENSATION:

There is no compensation for participating in this interview.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS:

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty.

CONSENT DOCUMENTATION:

I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and of the benefits of my participation. I also understand the following statements:

I affirm that I am 18 years of age or older.

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be given to me. I hereby give permission for my participation in this study.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

_____   _____

Signature of Researcher   Date

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

1. Describe your ideal relationship.
2. What behaviors do you consider healthy in a romantic relationship?
3. What behaviors do you consider unhealthy in a romantic relationship?
4. Consider the reality TV shows you watch. Provide examples of how romantic relationships are portrayed and discuss whether these behaviors are healthy or unhealthy.
5. In what ways, if any, do you seek to pattern your romantic relationships after the relationships you see on reality TV?
6. Is there anything you would like to add that we have not discussed?