Romantic Beliefs: The Impact on Relationship Satisfaction and Well-Being

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Introduction
Romantic beliefs are characterized by holding ideas such as love finds a way, one and only partners, and that love at first sight is possible. Insufficient research has been conducted concerning the extent to which one’s romantic beliefs correlate with relationship satisfaction and overall well-being. Romantic beliefs could promote healthy relationship stability. Research supports the idea that increased partner idealization, in particular, does correlate with increased emotional well being and increasing relationship satisfaction over the course of one year (Murray, et.al, 1996).

Relationship satisfaction is an interpersonal evaluation of whether or not one’s romantic partner is a positive addition to one’s life. Being in a relationship that is high in satisfaction can improve one’s emotional well-being. Research demonstrates that the quality of one’s marriage and personal well-being share a strong, positive correlation (Proulx, Helms & Buehler 2007). This suggests that learning how to improve the quality and satisfaction of one’s romantic relationship in college can help provide long term improvement to overall mental health.

The current study further explored the extent to which romanticism and relationship satisfaction interact with one’s emotional well-being. The study hypothesized that students in relationships will report greater relationship satisfaction if they have hold more romantic beliefs. Additionally, the study predicted that students in relationships will also have improved well-being, as measured with scales assessing depression, anxiety, neuroticism and perceived stress.

Methods

A sample of 432 undergraduate students at a primarily undergraduate private institution completed this study in a supervised lab setting using the online survey tool “Qualtrics.”
Participants received extra credit in their psychology courses for completing the study and ranged in ages from 18 to 24. Out of all participants, 72.5% identified as female and 27.5% identified as male. In all, 85% of participants identified as White, 5% as Black, 8.1% as Hispanic or Latinx, 4.4% as Asian or Pacific Islander, 3.8% as American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 1.9% as other. Subjects completed the Romantic Beliefs Scale (RBS) which included the subscales “idealization”, “one and only”, “love finds a way”, and “love at first sight”, also the Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RSS), the Zung Depression Scale (ZDS), the Zung Anxiety Scale, the Big 5 Neuroticism scale, and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). These scales were part of a larger study that assessed diverse constructs, thus minimizing demand characteristics. This survey was approved by the college’s Institutional Review Board.

Results

Romantic beliefs were positively correlated with relationship satisfaction, \((r^{(160)} = .31, p< .01)\). Romantic idealization was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction, \((r^{(160)} = .30, p< .01)\). Love finds a way was positively correlated with relationship satisfaction, \((r^{160} = .40, p<.01)\). There was a significant difference in the scores for single individuals (M= 67.13, SD= .80) and those in a relationship (M=71.98, SD =.80) for perceived stress \((t(-4.01) = 430, p<.001)\). Romantic beliefs had no significant relationships with depression, neuroticism, or anxiety.

Discussion

This study’s aim was to examine the relationship between romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction among college students in relationships. As hypothesized, there was a moderately strong, positive relationship between romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction.
Interestingly, when subscales of romantic beliefs were examined, only two of four scales, love finds a way and idealization, predicted relationship satisfaction. Men were found to have a stronger relationship between romantic beliefs and relationship satisfaction than women ($r(44) = .523, p<.001$). This suggests that men’s romantic beliefs are strongly associated with relationship satisfaction. In the future it may be beneficial to examine what other factors contribute to female relationship satisfaction.

The hypothesis that depression, neuroticism and anxiety would be lower for those in a relationship was not supported in this study. Rather, when an independent samples t-test was conducted, it showed that those in relationships reported higher levels of perceived stress than those who were single. The causes of this increased stress could be attributed to additional demands to maintain the relationship beyond additional roles. Further research should be conducted cross-culturally to determine if these effects are seen in college students around the world.

References


