

Unit 2 Assignment: Reflective Response

Alyssa Palmer (ID 3513585)
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My original research question was: “Will a reader’s views on relationships change after reading a romance novel, and if so, how do their views change?” Through the discussion that occurred, as well as my own further consideration, my question will change. I have recognized that the question is too broad to be effective. There are so many different subgenres of popular romance fiction that not limiting the variety would make it difficult to pinpoint whether or not a particular sort of book might change a participant’s view of relationships. For example, the Fifty Shades of Grey trilogy was brought up multiple times during the discussion, likely because that trilogy attained fame and notoriety beyond that of most popular romance fiction. The trilogy was worldwide news and the reach of the books and subsequent films has made the books a reference point for those outside of Romancelandia.¹ It has been often noted that the relationship portrayed by Christian Grey and Ana Steele is not a healthy one, nor is the portrayal of kink realistic or safe. Thus, I will need to narrow my focus and intent.

Given the range of experience and opinions on a research ethics board, which was illustrated by Balfour et al (2018) in their article on critical prison research, I may have to choose a book or series of books that do not contain potentially offensive material. It is likely that I would have to stay away from books that feature BDSM as the topic is not one that is more generally accepted. I would, however, look to choose a diverse selection of books from within a subgenre so that the participants would be able to choose a book with characters that may more closely reflect their own lives and experiences but also contain consistencies in story and theme. I am

¹ Romancelandia is a nickname for the world of those involved in popular romance fiction, whether they be readers, authors or reviewers. It is often used on social media.

strongly aware of Chalmers' (2017) statement that "[d]isciplinary boundaries must dissolve, though each distinct perspective should remain: we should feminise native studies, nativise feminist studies, genderfuck economics, racialise environmental studies, environmentalise film studies, and so on." (2017, 112-113) Any books selected would need to be cognizant of feminist, Indigenous, anti-ableist and anti-racist viewpoints and not cater to an audience that does not hold those viewpoints. Further research would need to be done to find books that are authored by non-white or BIPOC authors, as well as books that are romances (and thus have a happily ever after or happily for now ending with a central romance between characters) that may not otherwise ascribe to the typical Western expectations and tropes of the genre.

Balfour et al note that they wished to use a participatory research method (PAR) "that adopts a partnership approach to research; involving, community organization representatives, as well as community members" (2018, 240). My original research question did not contemplate a study where the participants were partners or co-collaborators in the research, nor did it contemplate involvement from various other disciplines. It imagined individual interviews or questionnaires, but a PAR method would enable greater discussion of the books and views through focus groups, where the co-collaborators could help direct the research with more specific questions and ideas. For example, would reading a book with queer protagonists be more likely to encourage a queer reader to have hope in relationships? Would queer protagonists provoke more discussion, given that historically queer people in fiction often met with untimely ends and did not achieve a happily ever after? Would reading a book with Indigenous protagonists have a similar reaction from Indigenous readers? If a non-Indigenous

person read that book, would they find that they could relate to protagonists who were not of the same ethnicity/race as them? There is some precedent of editors and publishing houses turning down books by BAME (Black and minority ethnic) authors and books that do not have the more stereotypical “Black experience” that publishers want. (Abraha, 2020) This consideration could change my focus from how readers are or are not affected in their views on relationships to that of questioning a reader’s relationship with romance novels instead. Chalmers notes that “academics can conduct research that highlights relationships instead of differences or categories.” (2017, 108) From focusing on a reader’s relationship with romance novels, the question about their changing thoughts on relationships could be a subsequent question for discussion within those parameters.

Each of the readings gave me ideas and examples from which I could adapt or change my question and research focus. I know I still have a lot of work to do to edit and clarify my question and decide if there is a specific group of readers to engage as participants and co-collaborators.

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