

Feeling Men:  
Masculinity, Sexuality, and Emotion in the  
Contemporary Romance

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# Abstract

This thesis examines the masculinity of the male protagonists, the heroes, in the romance novels *Tribute* by Nora Roberts and *Match Me if You Can* by Susan Elizabeth Phillips. The two heroes from these novels are seen as representations of the two main prototypes of romance heroes. Through close reading and a comparison and contrast of the two heroes, I show that romance heroes conform to many aspects of conventional masculinity, including professional success, physical appearance and sexuality. However, my argument is equally that when it comes to emotionality, romance heroes defy gender expectations, and this is an important element to their attractiveness. Although they differ from each other, both of the romance heroes I study conform to hegemonic masculinity by being successful, self-made men, within the limits of the contemporary male beauty standard, and sexually potent. Conversely, they both diverge from conventional masculinity when it comes to emotionality. Although in different ways, both exhibit a distinctly feminine style of emotional expression. Significantly, neither hero is punished for his feminine display of emotion, but rather are rewarded for it. In fact, the success of the romantic relationships depicted in these novels depends on the hero's ability to express his emotions in a feminine manner.



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# 1 Introduction

*A romance can survive a bland or even bitchy heroine, but it cannot succeed with a weak hero. (Putney 100)*

*She deserved to love openly and joyously – no holds barred – and to be loved the same way in return. (Phillips 368)*

For several decades now gender studies has influenced literary criticism and shown us how society's beliefs about gender are reflected in literature and how literature in turn, affects society's beliefs. Decades of the women's movement has also brought awareness of how gender beliefs have colored literary reception and criticism – mainly to the disadvantage and devaluation of women. From the 1970s onwards, feminist critics have highlighted women's position in literature, both within a given work and in the literary canon. Still, I would venture to claim that the least respected literary genre is still the literature most closely associated with women: the popular romance.<sup>1</sup> It has been one the highest grossing and most widely distributed genre of literature for decades now, and is still going strong despite the frequent scorn for its content and readers that romance writer Jayne Ann Krentz has described in the following manner:

Few people realize how much courage it takes for a woman to open a romance novel on an airplane. She knows what everyone around her will think about both her and her choice of reading material. When it comes to romance novels, society has always felt free to sit in judgment not only on the literature but on the reader herself. (*Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women* 1)

The romance is possibly the most gender-skewed genre in literature: both writers and readers are mainly women, and the stories always feature at least one woman at the center of the narrative. According to Romance Writers of America (RWA), the world's leading association for romance writers, which currently has more than 10,200 members, there are two elements that define every romance novel: “a central love story and an emotionally

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars, researchers and romance writers themselves operate with several terms to refer to this genre, including “romance novels,” “the popular romance,” or simply “the romance,” and I will use these terms more or less interchangeably.

satisfying and optimistic ending” (RWA). Although it is not a defining element of the romance, I would add that most romance novels are stories of romantic love between a woman and a man. Romance novels, then, are usually stories about a heterosexual couple falling in love and establishing a relationship. As such, romance novels could be said to be about relationships not just between two individuals, but the two genders as well. Within the genre, the two central characters are known as the *heroine* and the *hero*, and I will use these terms to refer to the central couple of a romance novel throughout this thesis. I also wish to specify that I am referring to the genre as written in English and read both in original form and various translations, but that my focus is on American romance novels. This is because my specific interest is in the kind of men and ideas and ideals of manhood that are found in romance novels, and how these relate to the larger ideas and ideals of manhood that exist in contemporary American society.

I have already used terms such as gender, man, woman and heterosexual. As human beings we are committed to sorting, categorizing, differentiating and labelling in order to make sense of the world. One of the forms this sorting and differentiating takes is the division of our own species into two sexes, two genders: male and female, man and woman. But what does it mean to be a man, and what does it mean to be a woman? Gender studies aims to answer these questions. Scholars make the distinction between *sex* and *gender*, *sex* being the biologically defined categories of female and male, and *gender* the sets of cultural meanings and prescription that each culture attaches to one’s biological sex (Kimmel 2). Or, as E. Anthony Rotundo puts it: “sex is a matter of biology and gender is a matter of culture” (1).

As Michael Kimmel points out, the women’s movement made gender visible, but mainly as something that concerned women (2). Kimmel’s claim is that American men have no history of themselves *as men*, because the male has always been the standard in differentiating between the genders (1-2). To illustrate this, Kimmel tells a story from his own life, where, upon hearing an exchange between two women on how they experienced themselves as women, he realized that he had never consider his own gender part of his identity: “As a middle-class white man, I have no identity, no class, no race, no gender. I’m the generic person!” (3). Manhood is thought of as “eternal, a timeless essence,” says Kimmel. When charting the history of manhood in America, though, it is revealed as “a constantly changing collection of meanings” (3). While Kimmel points out that the history of American manhood is more correctly the history of both “the changing ‘ideal’ version of masculinity and the parallel and competing versions that coexist with it,” he also emphasizes

that the “ideal” manhood is the model against which all American men measure themselves (4). A description of this ideal is provided by Erving Goffman:

In an important sense there is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, father, of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports. . . . Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself – during moments at least – as unworthy, incomplete and inferior. (Goffman qtd. in Kimmel 4)

According to Kimmel, proving and testing his manhood against this norm of “hegemonic” masculinity has been and continues to be a dominant theme in the life of the American man (1).

Tracing the changing ideals of masculinity in America from the revolution to the modern era, Rotundo has divided manhood in America into three phases: communal manhood, self-made manhood and passionate manhood. Communal manhood, where man’s identity was inseparable from his duties to his community, was eclipsed by self-made manhood in the early decades of the nineteenth century (Rotundo 2-3). This change is contextualized by broader societal changes, such as the new republican government, the spreading market economy and a growing middle class. The self-made man’s identity was based on his individual achievements, with his work role as the essence of his identity (3). When governed by the male trait of reason, the “male” passions, such as ambition, rivalry and aggression, were appreciated as driving forces to succeed in business and the professions, and an urge for dominance was viewed as a male virtue (3-4). During this phase women became “guardians of civilization,” being viewed as inherently more virtuous and having a stronger moral sense than men (4). Rotundo’s third phase, passionate manhood, begins in the late nineteenth century, and though it was in many ways a continuation of self-made manhood, “it stretched those beliefs in directions that would have shocked the old individualists of the early 1800s” (5). Ambition and combativeness were now seen as male virtues, competitiveness and aggression as ends in themselves, toughness was admired and tenderness scorned (5). This is the heritage that American manhood in the modern era is built on. Rotundo identifies four ideals of manhood that have offered an outlet for “male” passions in the twentieth century: the team player; the existential hero; the pleasure seeker, and the spiritual warrior (286-287). What is common for all four ideals is a turning away from women, both in interpersonal relationships, as well as traits associated with women (289).

Where Rotundo makes a distinction between self-made manhood and passionate manhood, Kimmel uses the term self-made man to signify the ideal American man from the

early nineteenth century to present-day (6). According to Kimmel the self-made man was defined by his success in the market, individual achievement, mobility and wealth, but he was also constantly plagued by anxiety, restlessness and loneliness because his manhood has to be proved constantly (17). The proving ground for self-made manhood was the public sphere, specifically the workplace, which was exclusively a man's world (19). This was where manhood had to be proved, in the eyes of other men, and Kimmel states that "[f]rom the early nineteenth century until the present day, most of men's relentless efforts to prove their manhood contain this core element of homosociality" (19). According to Kimmel, American men were increasingly anxious at the turn of the twenty-first century, because they felt their ability to prove their manhood threatened (216). The industrialization and deindustrialization of the American economy meant it was harder to prove manhood in the most defining way: by being a self-made success (216). In addition to economic developments the self-made man faced increased competition from newly arrived immigrants and women who had now "invaded" even the last all-male bastions like sports and the military (216). The promise of the American self-made masculinity was the possibility of unlimited upward mobility, but as the foundation for this masculinity eroded, the self-made man found himself faced with the possibility of an equally unstoppable downward mobility (218). While this might have given good grounds to question the self-made ideal, American white men "fall back upon those same traditional notions of manhood – physical strength, self-control, power –, . . . as if the solution to their problem was simply 'more' masculinity" (218). Now American men prove their manhood by making their bodies "impervious masculine machines" and adorn themselves with "signifiers of a bygone era of unchallenged masculinity, donning Stetson cologne, Chaps clothing, and Timberland boots as we drive in our Cherokees and Denalis to conquer the urban jungle" (216).

When these sociological perspectives on manhood are brought into literary studies they are usually referred to as masculinity studies. The aim of masculinity studies is "to expose the damaging impact of patriarchy on men (as well as women) . . . through an analysis of male protagonists" (Hobbs 383). The essence of literary masculinity studies is considering how representations of men in literature fit and relate to hegemonic ideals of masculinity (Hobbs 390). In exploring what literary criticism has long neglected, there are two main applications of masculinity studies to literature: "to consider the more private realms in which masculine identity may be formed and performed; and to isolate and examine positive examples of male protagonists who do not conform to masculine stereotypes" (Hobbs 390) . I

believe that this is a very interesting perspective to bring into the analysis of the romance genre, precisely because it is a genre mainly associated with women, while at the same time these novels almost invariably portray a man as one of the two protagonists. The hero in romance novels should be examined through the lens of masculinity studies, and that is what I aim to do in this thesis.

For the purposes of this thesis there is a complimentary perspective on gender I wish to bring into the discussion: the relationship between gender and emotion. In *Speaking from the Heart*, Stephanie Shields brings attention to the lack of interaction between gender studies and the psychology of emotion, and offers a reformulation of the relationship between gender and emotion. Her proposition is that “beliefs about emotion play an important role in defining and maintaining the beliefs we have about gender differences” (16). She states further that “[w]hether explicitly represented in statements of beliefs about emotion or more subtly transmitted via judgements about the appropriateness of others’ emotions and emotional display, gender limits are clearly delineated by emotional standards” (63). The emotional gender stereotypes boils down to this: “He *has* emotions; she *is* emotional” (“Gender and Emotion” 425). One example of how this manifests itself is illustrated by gender differences in emotion being much less significant when people are asked to report on their emotions immediately, or about specific emotion events, than in retrospective self-reports (425). Retrospectively, men report more emotional control and less emotional understanding than women, adhering to the gender stereotypes (425).

In *Speaking from the Heart*, Shields traces these contemporary beliefs about what is appropriate emotional behavior back to nineteenth century scientists’ exploration of gender differences, which held female emotionality to be a “weaker, more narrowly focused counterpart to male passion” (79), far more likely to be out of control and lacking male passion’s powerful productivity when coupled with male reason (77-83). Shields asserts that what emerged as an emotional ideal is emotion that is well-managed, and that this ideal, while no longer considered a natural manifestation of one’s sex, is still seen as a manly quality (84). In much the same way as Kimmel and Rotundo show how “ideal manhood” in America can be traced back and has a history, Shields points out that this is the case for our beliefs about emotional differences between genders as well. I believe this complementary perspective on gender and emotion that Shields’ theory presents is worth bringing into this thesis, because the romance genre is a place where gender and emotion are very much present, as the heroine and hero’s emotional involvement with each other is what the romance is primarily concerned

with. As romance writer Julie Tetel Andresen has said, the romance “foregrounds emotionality – makes it subject matter” (qtd. in Regis 114).

I have stated that I wish to examine the male protagonists, the heroes, in romance novels, but in order for that undertaking to be successful, I believe it is vital to understand more fully the genre they inhabit as well. To start with some basics about the romance genre, there are two different ways of categorizing romance novels: by format and by subgenres. Romance novels known as “category” or series romances are short novels released at a set interval, often monthly, by a publishing house that determines the profile for each of its lines, of which the by far largest publisher is Toronto-based Harlequin. To give an impression of Harlequin’s size and importance in the romance fiction market, they publish “more than 110 titles a month in 34 languages in 110 international markets on six continents,” with half of their total sales in North America (Harlequin). The other format for romance novels is the single-title romance, which is longer and released individually. Both single-title romances and category romances are divided into subgenres. Of the many subgenres in existence, “contemporary romance” is the “largest and most inclusive,” and is thought of as the “generic Romance novel” (Ramsdell 47). To illustrate the variety of romance fiction there are nine other major subgenres featured in Ramsdell’s *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*: Romantic Mysteries, Historical Romances, Traditional Regency Romance, Alternative Reality Romances, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Romance, Inspirational Romance, Ethnic/Multicultural Romance, Linked Romances and Erotic Romance. A subgenre can then again be divided into sub-subgenres, for example Fantasy Romance, Futuristic Romance, Paranormal Romance, Urban Fantasy Romance and Time Travel Romance are all subsets of the Alternative Reality Romances in Ramsdell’s guide.

When it comes to the reading of romance novels, the numbers are staggering and sometimes surprising. According to statistics reported by RWA, the estimated annual total sales value of romance in 2013 was \$1.08 billion, making up 13 percent of the adult fiction market. Regarding who reads romances, a survey commissioned by the RWA in 2014 showed that women made up 84 percent of romance readers, and men 16 percent. The number of male readers had increased considerably from a study made in 2009, where the percentage of male readers was 9.5 (Ramsdell 20). The 2014 survey also found that romance readers were most likely to be aged between 30 and 54 years, with an average income of \$55,000. A 2005 survey included educational information, finding 66 percent of romance readers to have attended college and 42 percent to have earned a bachelor’s or advanced degree (Ramsdell 21). The

popular stereotype of the romance reader may paint a picture of her as an “undereducated, uninformed, frustrated housewife” (Ramsdell 21), but clearly, this is not the case.

Feminist criticism of the popular romance has frequently been concerned with the ideology of romances and demeaning in its treatment of romance readers. In 1970, the prominent Second Wave feminist Germaine Greer was the first to cast the romance novel as “an enslaver of women” (Regis 4), saying that “The traits invented for [the hero in romance novel] have been invented by cherishing the chains of their bondage. . . . Such . . . creatures [heroes of their type] do not exist, but very young women in the astigmatism of sexual fantasy are apt to recognize them where they do not exist” (qtd. in Regis 4). This claim that romance novels enforced female bondage came to echo through subsequent criticism condemning the genre (Regis 4). Tania Modleski’s *Loving With a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* and Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* have been called “landmark publications [that] disrupted the commonsense feminist critique of romance” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 491). According to Gill and Herdieckerhoff “[b]oth books can be understood as part of a wider attempt to take popular cultural forms seriously, to resist double standards which operate to condemn or dismiss women’s genres, and to ‘rescue’ feminine forms as worthy of attention” (491).

In *Loving with a Vengeance* Modleski analyses three popular culture phenomena: Harlequin romances, Gothic novels for women and soap operas. She claimed that while popular culture has become at least semi-respectable as a field of academic studies, popular fiction that appeals primarily to women is still largely ignored, as the double critical standard that feminists have claimed biases literary studies still very much applies to this kind of fiction (1). Modleski’s self-declared aim was to learn from women through analysis of the texts women find appealing, arguing that feminist critics should not ignore or belittle the text women find entertaining, but engage female audiences and readers by taking those texts into account (xvi). Nevertheless, Modleski’s psychoanalytical analyses of Harlequin romance novels turns these into female fantasies of revenge on men. She also states that they “inevitably increase the reader’s own psychic conflicts, thus creating an even greater dependence on the literature” and goes on to compare these novels to narcotics (48). Radway’s *Reading the Romance* “combined textual analysis of Harlequin novels with an interview-based ethnographic study of committed romance readers, and a detailed examination of publishing and bookselling as economic enterprise” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 491). Based on her study of a group of forty-two female romance readers from the same

Midwestern town and the books they identify as “good” and “bad” romances, Radway concludes that women read romances to escape the emotional burden of their daily life as caregivers to the members of their family, finding temporary relief by identifying with the heroine and vicariously experience being nurtured by the hero. Her conclusions about the genre are sweeping:

Because the romance finally leaves unchallenged the male right to the public spheres of work, politics, and power, because it refurbishes the institution of marriage by suggesting how it might be viewed continuously as a courtship, because it represents female needs within the story and then depicts their satisfaction by traditional heterosexual relations, the romance avoids questioning the institutionalized basis of patriarchal control over women even as it serves as a locus of protest against some of its emotional consequences. (217)

Modleski and Radway, genuine though they are in their wish to understand the genre and its readers, and both attempting to defend the genre against critical condemnation, nevertheless end up expressing concern with the effect romance reading has on readers. Radway, for instance, laments the failure of the “romance-reading process” to provide the reader with “a comprehensive program for reorganizing her life in such a way that all needs might be met” (215). Why books from any literary genre (with the possible exception of self-help books) should be held to the standard of providing such a program is not explained. Ultimately, their work has served to reinforce many of the stereotypes and much of the critical condemnation of the genre. Another point of contention with some of the most prominent critics of the romance, Modleski and Radway among them, is that while they have frequently made conclusions about the whole genre, they actually study only a few examples (Regis 5). Pamela Regis asserts that “[h]asty generalization has become something of a habit among critics of the romance novel” (6) and adds that this “impoverished view of the genre results, in part, from a narrow acquaintance with it” (7). As exemplified by the two critics already mentioned, Radway’s single group of readers “favored one subgenre of the romance novel – the sensual long historical” and Modleski cites only nine Harlequins (Regis 6).

The incomplete and biased understanding of both the boundaries and the form of the romance novel is what Regis seeks to remedy in *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*. Tracing the history of the modern romance novel in English back to 1740 and Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, through other classics such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *A Room With a View* to a selection of twentieth- and twenty-first century bestselling romance novelists, Regis offers a strong defense of the romance genre and a definition of the genre based on a set of



specific narrative events. Summarizing previous definitions of the popular romance novel made by critics such as Radway, John Cawelti, Kay Mussel and Deborah Chappel, the two common elements of all those definitions are “first, love between a heroine and hero; second, the triumphant permanent, happy ending, usually in marriage” (21-22). These two elements are the equivalent of the definition provided by the RWA: “a central love story” with an “emotionally satisfying and uplifting ending.” Regis’s definition moves away from statement of theme (love relationship) to focus on narrative events and the heroine (22). Her definition is this: “The romance novel is a work of fiction that tells the story of the courtship and betrothal of one or more heroines” (22). Furthermore, she states that:

All romance novels contain eight narrative elements: a *definition of society*, always corrupt, that the romance novel will reform; the *meeting* between the heroine and hero; an account of their *attraction* for each other; the *barrier* between them, the *point of ritual death*; the *recognition* that fells the barrier; the *declaration* of heroine and hero that they love each other; and their *betrothal*. (Regis 14, italics in original)

This move towards defining the genre by identifying narrative elements in the novel allows Regis to argue that the overcoming of the barrier and the heroine’s escape from ritual death are “two narrative elements far more important than the ending in determining a romance novel’s meaning” (14-15).

This understanding of the romance novel is part of Regis’s defense of the genre against those critics who “claim that in equating marriage with success for the heroine, the romance novel reconciles readers, who are overwhelmingly women, to marriage which keeps women subservient” (12). It is also an explanation of the appeal of romance reading to readers: romance novels are not read primarily because of curiosity about how the story will end, as the happy ending is “the one formal feature . . . that virtually everyone can identify” (Regis 9), but for the process of getting there. Having suggested that romance novels are not read primarily for an interest in how it will end is not to say that the happy ending is not part of its appeal, though. Ramsdell cites the predictability of the romance novel’s ending as one of the genre’s attractive qualities, just as it is with other genres that adhere to certain genre conventions (22). Drawing on reader response theory, Mairead Owen explains how the reader’s prior knowledge and expectation of the “closed” romance plot means that the reader is, paradoxically, freer in his or her reading and able to project their own ideas and imagination into the text, as opposed to the reading of a high culture, “open” text, where the reader has to follow the writer’s course (538). Regis sees the heroine’s overcoming of the

obstacles to her union with the hero presented by the barrier and the point of ritual death, as a freeing of the heroine (16). Having achieved freedom, the heroine then chooses the hero (16). This is what makes Regis able to claim that “[r]eaders are not bound by the form [of the romance novel]; they rejoice because they are in love with freedom” (16).

Another element of the appeal of the romance genre is the reader’s own emotional response to the story and the characters, romance novels are “emotionally engaging” (Ramsdell 23). This aspect of the appeal of the romance, while recognized in the RWA’s definition, is not frequently conveyed. Ramsdell claims that this aspect of romance is part of why the genre is so widely denigrated and criticized. “One can only wonder,” she says, “why it is assumed by some that if a book makes you feel, it cannot also make you think – or that thinking and logic are inherently preferable to intuition and feeling” (23).

Female empowerment is a strong theme in *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*, a collection of essays discussing the appeal of the romance written by romance writers. According to romance writers, their books “celebrate female power,” as the heroine always comes out victorious, having forced “the most dangerous creature on earth, the human male, to his knees” in acknowledgment of her female power (Krentz “Introduction” 5). Another theme discussed in this collection is the integration of male and female, which some writers see as being an integration and celebration of the masculine elements that reside within all women, while others view it as an integration taking place within the hero as the heroine civilizes him “by teaching him to combine his warrior qualities with the protective, nurturing aspects of his nature” (Krentz 6).

One final insight into the nature of the romance genre that bears mentioning is stated by romance bloggers Sarah Wendell and Candy Tan in their book *Beyond Heaving Bosoms: The Smart Bitches’ Guide to Romance Novels*. As Wendell and Tan remark, there was a marked shift in popular romance which took place during the ’80s. They refer to books from from the 1970s and most of the ’80s as “Old Skool” romance, while the “New Skool” of romance started in the late 1980s and continues to the present (13). Among the distinctions of these two “Skools” is the prevalence of brutal, rapist heroes in Old Skool romance, as well as very young, innocent, heroines, while New Skool romance feature gentler heroes, more scenes from the hero’s point of view and older heroines that are more likely to be sexually experienced and financially independent (13-24).

Frequently, the heroine is seen as the central character in a romance. While that may be true, the hero is a crucial character as well. Where would the love story be if the heroine

had no one to love? In the opening quote, Putney suggests that the importance of the hero as a character in the romance is greater than that of the heroine. Recalling Germaine Greer's statements about the romance novel as an enslaver of women, the portrayal of the hero has even been linked with keeping female readers in bondage. Tying in with the acknowledged appeal of romance novels as sensual, sexual fantasies, I will argue that the hero needs to be the stuff of fantasies as well. The hero's attractiveness is vital for the romance novel to be appealing to the reader. What is it, then, in the portrayal of the hero that makes him so attractive? Being the stuff of fantasy, he must be something of an ideal man. But are romance heroes simply versions of society's ideal man, an embodiment of ideal, unambiguous masculinity? Or could it be that their attractiveness rests on a certain defiance of male gender expectations? Through close reading and a comparison and contrast of two heroes, I will show that romance heroes conform to many aspects of conventional masculinity, including professional success, physical appearance and sexuality. However, my argument is equally that when it comes to emotionality, romance heroes defy gender expectations, and this is an important element to their attractiveness.

While I wish I had the time and the space to examine a wide range of romance novels, the confines of this thesis will not allow that. I have instead chosen to analyze two novels by two of the most acclaimed authors of American romance: *Tribute* by Nora Roberts and *Match Me if You Can* by Susan Elizabeth Phillips. Both Phillips and Roberts have received numerous awards for their novels, including being inducted into the RWA's prestigious Hall of Fame (Roberts twice). The two novels were published within three years of each other and they are roughly equal in length, both being single-title releases. These two novels are from two different subgenres. *Match Me If You Can* is a traditional contemporary romance and *Tribute* a romantic suspense, but both have a contemporary American setting that makes the heroes of both novels portrayals of present-day American men.

The city of Chicago is the backdrop for *Match Me If You Can*, where the heroine Annabelle Granger has recently taken over her late grandmother's matchmaking business, and is now trying to make a living as a matchmaker. Unfortunately for Annabelle, the few existing clients are not nearly enough for her to make a living as a matchmaker. Fortunately for Annabelle, her friends include the owner of the Stars, a fictional Chicago football team, which gives her access to the hottest bachelor in town, sports agent Heath Champion. Heath, who already is successful in every other area of his life, is now, according to the back page of the novel, "searching for the ultimate symbol of success – the perfect wife." Heath and

Annabelle, like the hero and heroine of many romance novels, are seemingly opposites. While Heath is driven, polished, wealthy, and thoroughly in control of his life, Annabelle is still trying to find her way in life, struggling with everything from her uncontrollable, red curls to a family whose high expectations she feels she is failing to live up to. Using the narrative elements that Regis has defined, the barrier in this novel consists of both external and internal elements. An external element is the professional relationship between Annabelle as matchmaker and Heath as her client, as the rules of American society dictate that a romantic relationship between them would be inappropriate because of their professional involvement. One of the main internal elements of the barrier, that is, the circumstances preventing the relationship that comes from within the characters themselves, are Heath's specific criteria for a wife that Annabelle knows she cannot meet. This prevents Annabelle from considering herself and Heath as a potential match. Annabelle also has some fairly understandable issues with romantic partners in general, after her former fiancé told her he really felt he was a woman. Another important internal element to the barrier is Heath's conviction that he is incapable of trusting and loving a woman.

Set in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, *Tribute* is the story of heroine Cilla McGowan, a former child star turned contractor, returning to the home town of her estranged father to renovate her maternal grandmother's farmhouse. Cilla was raised in Los Angeles by a mother who was more concerned with fame than her daughter's well-being, and who is still trying in vain to measure up to Cilla's grandmother, a legendary actress and singer who died of an overdose in the Shenandoah Valley farmhouse before Cilla was born. Across the road from the old farmhouse lives the hero, Ford Sawyer. He is a successful graphic novelist who grew up in this town and moved back after a few years in New York, realizing he worked better in the quiet little town inhabited by old friends and family than in a big city surrounded by strangers. While the two are immediately attracted to each other, Cilla is initially not interested in a romantic relationship, but Ford gradually wins her over with steady persistence and a lot of southern charm. The mystery elements of the novel revolve around Cilla's grandmother, the affair she had with a local, married man and what really happened when she overdosed. These events cause someone to hold a grudge against Cilla in place of her grandmother, harassing and threatening Cilla and vandalizing her house.

I have chosen to examine the heroes from these two books, Heath and Ford, because they both personify many of the qualities of the ideal American male, while still being remarkably different from each other. Because they are both romance heroes, and as such

ideal, fantasy men, it is very interesting to examine exactly what their similarities and differences consist of. This thesis will be an analysis of the portrayal of these two heroes *as men*, an examination of their masculinity and how they relate to American ideals of manhood, as well as how they relate to stereotypes of romance heroes. As romance novels are undeniably sensual and sexual, I believe there will also be a good basis for considering how the sexuality of these two heroes relates to hegemonic male sexuality. Finally, I will consider how these two heroes are portrayed with regards to emotion.

On a final note, I wish to say that I realize that I run the risk of doing what others have been criticized for doing: generalizing about a genre on the basis of a very small selection from that genre. With that limitation in mind, I am only going to make strong suggestions about what *could be* true of the entire genre and its heroes. Claims for what *is* true would require more research than this thesis allows for.

## 2 Heath, Ford, and the Unlikely Union of Masculinity and Emotionality

My interest going into this thesis is more in showing what these two heroes can tell us about romance heroes in general than in the literary merits or particulars of each of the chosen novels. Therefore, I have chosen not to divide this thesis into chapters for each book, but instead to present my argument as a continuous analysis and comparison of the two heroes. This comparison is then divided into three different sub-chapters based on a thematic approach. The first part is an analysis of the two chosen heroes with regards to markers of masculinity, such as type of work, professional success and physical appearance. This subsection also outlines the common types of romance heroes, and describes how each of the two heroes at hand relates to these stereotypes of men within the romance genre. The second subsection concerns the sexuality of the two chosen heroes, specifically how the portrayal of their sexuality corresponds to male sexual scripts and the way in which sexuality is commonly portrayed in romance. The third and final part is centered on the emotionality of these two heroes, with an outline of the standards for emotional expression that apply in contemporary American society and a discussion of how Heath and Ford fit into this picture.

### 2.1 The Two Heroes at Hand

Heath Champion and Ford Sawyer have that in common that they are both white, native-born American, college educated men in their early thirties. They also have that in common that they are self-made successes: Heath has built his own sports agent company from scratch and Ford has made a career for himself as a graphic novelist. Their professional success means they are both relatively wealthy. Ford owns a big house in rural Virginia, recently remodeled and equipped with both a private gym and a jacuzzi. Heath's sports management business is so lucrative that he pays his employee a six-figure salary, and his house is a luxury home in Chicago's expensive Lincoln Park neighborhood. In all these respects, they both answer well to the American manhood ideal as previously discussed.

Although both Heath and Ford are self-made successes, they have made their success in two very different professions. Heath's business is as masculine as they come. Kimmel has asserted that "The world of sports has long been a masculine refuge, a pristine homosocial world of male bonding" (246). As a sports agent, Heath spends his days taking care of his

various athlete clients, who are all male. Women may have ‘invaded’ the world of business, but Heath has still managed to carve out a section of the business world where women do not enter. Furthermore, most of his clients are football players, and so the sport Heath himself is most closely associated with is the hyper-masculine world of American football. Kimmel has remarked that it is not *doing* sports which has become exponentially more popular in American society, but *talking* about sports (246). Talking about sports has, according to Kimmel, become a way for men to exclude women. Women might be doing sports as much men, but because they do not like to talk about it as much “the emphasis on sports talk redraws the boundaries of sex segregation and keeps women out” (246). Heath does not make his money from direct involvement in sports; he is not an athlete himself, or even a coach. Rather, he makes his living from percentages of his clients’ incomes, which is only possible because the industry surrounding professional sports has grown so huge in America. The interest surrounding professional sports, that is, the interest in talking about sports, perhaps especially football, has resulted in both great fame and very considerable paychecks for many professional athletes. Considering this, it is not only sports that have provided Heath with an arena to make such a lucrative living, but the predominantly male interest in talking about sports.

Ford, on the other hand, is successful in a profession that probably would not be considered very masculine by most people. According to Kimmel, the liberal arts are considered feminine, and not “real work” (241). As a graphic novelist who both writes the stories and does the artwork, Ford is not just a liberal arts educated man, but an artist. He is also decidedly bookish and nerdy, to the extent that his friends joke about Ford being the president of the Nerd Club in high school (415). Ford freely admits this himself, for example when Cilla needs to study for her contractor’s exam and he eagerly exclaims: “You’ve got to take a test? I love tests. . . . Do you need a study buddy? And yes, I capitalize the *N* in nerd” (235). Although most American “[b]oys see academic success itself as a disconfirmation of their masculinity,” according to Kimmel (241), Ford is quite comfortable with his own nerdiness and book smarts. Likewise, he is not afraid to expose his geeky side to the woman he is courting and he takes every opportunity to sit down with Cilla for marathon runs of television shows such as *Buffy* and *Battlestar Galactica*, both old and new versions of the latter. It is very interesting how Ford can defy many masculine expectations by being a geeky, nerdy artist, and still appear in a romance novel as the hero. Being a romance hero, Ford is a man that women are supposed to find attractive. The novel was a number one *New York*

*Times* bestseller, so presumably they *did* find him attractive. Despite contradicting many of the signs of traditional American masculinity, Ford still manages to be a convincing romance hero, and as such an ideal man.

### 2.1.1 The Look of a Hero

Another area where the differences between Heath and Ford become obvious is their looks. Heath would apparently have been “unbearably gorgeous,” but a slight irregularity of his features relegates him to “merely drop-dead good-looking” (7). The description of Heath’s looks given when Annabelle and he first meet emphasizes his masculinity:

He was square-jawed and tough, everything about him proclaiming a brash, self-made man – a roughneck who’d flunked charm school the first couple of times around but had finally gotten it right on the third pass. His hair was thick and crisp, its rich color a cross between a leather portfolio and a bottle of bud. He had a straight, confident nose and bold dark eyebrows, one of which was bisected near the end with a thin, pale scar. The firm set of his well-moulded mouth proclaimed a low tolerance for fools, a passion for hard work that bordered on obsession, and possibly – although this might be her imagination – a determination to own a small chalet near St. Tropez before he was fifty. (7)

Everything about Heath’s appearance is manly. The adjectives used to describe him emphasize his masculinity: confident, bold, dark, firm, well-moulded. Even his hair, which could have been described as “a rich, brown color” is instead compared to “a leather portfolio and a bottle of bud.” To further underline Heath’s manly toughness, he is given a facial scar. It is only a small scar, though, enough to make Heath bad-ass, but not something that will detract from his good looks. As this scar is not mentioned again it seems to only serve as an indicator of Heath’s toughness. His mouth is given the power to proclaim the superior professional qualities that has secured Heath as a self-made success. In addition to this initial description, his hands are described as “broad” and his chest is “impressive” (8).

Being able to display a perfectly sculpted and muscular body has since the 1990s been an increasingly important way for American men to prove their manhood, according to Kimmel (222). American men set out to be the “hardest, strongest and most powerful” in order to prove their manliness, but the standards of muscularity have also increased (Kimmel 223). One example of this is the proportions of G.I. Joe action figure, which in 1974 was 5 feet 10 inches, had a 31-inch waist, a 44-inch chest, and 12-inch bicep (Kimmel 223). In 2002, G.I. Joe’s height is the same, but his waist is a mere 28 inches, his chest 50 inches and his biceps an incredible 22 inches (Kimmel 223). Although presumably not to the proportions



of G.I. Joe, Heath is absolutely able to prove his manhood through his body. For instance, his shoulders are demonstratively masculine, proven by his shirt which “could only have been custom-made to accommodate the width of his shoulders before tapering toward his waist” (8) and his abs will contract “into the gold standard of six-packs” (212). Even though Heath is not an athlete himself, his body could fool you: “He had a lean-muscled athlete’s body. If you liked your men swimming in testosterone and your sex life dangerous, he’d be number one on your automatic dial (11).”

The golden standard of muscularity might now be difficult to reach for most men, but improving your body and your manliness by increasing your muscularity is still possible for anyone. Height, on the other hand, is not something anyone can change by working out. Luckily for Heath, he is genetically blessed in the height-department. Heath’s exact height is not specified, he is described as “more than a head taller” than Annabelle (12), and this physical feature makes him able to assert his power and masculinity by simply towering over others. Masculine to the point that he “swimming in testosterone,” Heath sex appeal seems to stem directly from his fulfillment of the physical masculinity ideal in contemporary America.

Ford is also good looking, but in a less overtly masculine way. When Ford and Cilla first meet, her impression of him is not the overpowering, testosterone-soaked impact of pure masculinity that Annabelle experiences with Heath, but a disarmingly charming, down to earth, and authentically cool guy:

The faded, frayed-at-the-hem jeans and baggy gray sweat-shirt covered what she judged to be about six feet, four inches of lanky, long-legged male. He wore wire-framed sunglasses, and the jeans had a horizontal tear in one knee. A day or two’s worth of stubble prickled over his cheeks and jaw in a look she’d always found too studied to be hip. Still, it fit with the abundance of brown streaky hair that curled messily over his ears. (16)

Cilla initially suspects Ford of having his hair streaked and getting a tan at a salon, which she does not find attractive, but soon revises her opinion of him when it becomes clear that his tan and sun-streaked hair are the result of a vacation in Caymans. To Cilla, it would seem that highlights and a tan are attractive on a man, but only if they are come by naturally. The look needs to be authentic to be winning. The same is true for Ford’s stubbly beard. The second time Ford and Cilla meet, he has shaved. Cilla then muses that “the scruffy look might have been laziness, rather than design” (32), and this is preferable in her opinion. Again, a little bit of laziness means that Ford’s “scruffy looks” are authentic and charming, and not, as it turns out, “too studied to be hip.”

This is important because if Ford's casually cool look was intentional, if it was the result of a conscious styling, it would make him distinctly metrosexual. The 'metrosexual' is a straight guy with gay sensibility and style, according to Kimmel (225). "Fashionable, preoccupied with proper skin and hair care, he represented the return of a newly masculinized dandy or fop" (Kimmel 225). Urbane and stylish, the metrosexual first emerged in the cosmopolitan centers of Europe and America and "promised an alternative route to the achievement of masculinity through high-end consumerism" (Kimmel 225). To critics, however, the metrosexual did not represent a new masculinity, but a "narcissistic unapologetic consumer" (Kimmel 226).

As someone who has left city life in L.A. behind to get away from people whose main concern is appearance, fame and money, Cilla is suspicious of Ford, because his looks are seemingly too good to have just happened. When she assesses Ford's appearance and ask herself: "Hadn't she left this type out in L.A.?" (16), it is a rejection of the vanity and narcissistic consumerism of metrosexual masculinity. When it turns out that Ford is not vain, but relaxed about his appearance and maybe a little lazy, she is on board with his casually cool appearance. Establishing that Ford is not the kind of guy who spends time on skin and hair care signals Ford's adherence to the more traditional masculinity rather than metrosexuality. The fact that Ford, just like Cilla, has rejected an urbane lifestyle in New York in favor of rural Virginia also disproves him being metrosexual. The rejection of the urban, consumerist dandy does not hold a rejection of other qualities of the metrosexual, however. The metrosexual man is, according to Kimmel, "secure in his masculinity" and comfortable expressing emotions (Kimmel 225). These traits are not related to appearances, and thus not part of what is rejected when Ford's appearances are established as more traditionally masculine than metrosexual.

Described above as lanky and long-legged, Ford is not very muscular. At one point he tells Cilla that he has to work out five to six times a week, or else he starts to resemble Skeletor, the archenemy of He-Man from Masters of the Universe (76). He immediately corrects this statement, though, because despite the name, Skeletor is ripped (77). Ford's abs meet with Cilla's approval, and when she later considers his body it is in very positive terms:

He wasn't what she'd call buff or ripped, but reasonably toned over a build that leaned toward skinny. Just a touch of gawkiness, she mused. Add a few cute points for that. He had good arms. Strong, lean rather than bulky. Best, she thought, they knew how to hold on. Major points, she decided. He just kept racking them up. (157)

Although Ford's body does not reach the very muscular physical ideal that Kimmel has indicated, he is very fit and healthy, and still described as strong. He is also very tall, all of 6 feet and 4 inches, which gives him the same towering possibilities as Heath. This also means that while Cilla is tall for a woman, Ford is still much taller than her. Since it is customary for the man in a relationship to be taller than the woman, Ford's height signals that he is very much the man, and Cilla the woman. Ford's appearance may not be described in the same hyper-masculine terms as Heath, but he is still depicted as tall, fit, and good looking. Ford, too, is described as physically attractive, and although his looks deviate from the muscular masculine ideal he is still well within the limits of the current beauty standard. When it comes to bodily displays of masculinity Ford deviates slightly from what is considered masculine, but never enough to call his manliness into question.

### **2.1.2 Dominant Alphas and Sensitive Betas**

It should be clear by now that, although Heath and Ford both meet many of the standards of the ideal American manhood, they are also very different men, and they make for different types of romance heroes. The division of romance heroes into two types, two kinds of heroes, can be seen as something of a common theme among those discussing the romance genre. Modleski acknowledges a division of the men in romances into two groups, and goes as far as to claim that women in general tend to divide men into two categories: "the omnipotent, domineering, aloof male and the gentle, but passive and fairly ineffectual male" (71). In Modleski's analysis, heroes only come from the first category, though.

Kay Mussel has a different take on the categorization of the men in romances. Mussell's *Fantasy and Reconciliation: Contemporary Formulas of Women's Romance Fiction* is from 1984, and so her analysis of the romance genre is no longer contemporary, despite the title. In many instances Mussel's work is simply outdated, for example few today would claim that the romance genre is made up of only six types of formulas, distinguished by their differing "thematic concerns and structural imperatives" (29). The romance genre is now home to many more subgenres, or formulas, as previously mentioned. Still, her work is one of the most thorough examinations done of the genre, and her observations on the heroes in romances are worth mentioning, as they resonate with later categorizations.

Mussell states that there are two basic types of male characters in romances: the first being "the passionate, romantic figure with a past" and the second a "more conventional, sensitive, mature and competent husband-lover" (119). Both types can function as a hero, but

they can also both play non-heroic roles (119). The passionate, romantic male is, according to Mussell, “mysterious, experienced, strong, usually but not always dark, and described in implicitly sexual terms” (123). This type of hero is threatening and has to be domesticated to be a true hero, but fortunately his combination of “sexual potency and vulnerability” means he can be domesticated (123). The attraction of this passionate, romantic hero is his ability to provide sexual and romantic excitement, as well as his power to protect the heroine from “violation by the outside world – or by him when she submits, sexually or emotionally” (123).

The two classic examples of this kind of hero that Mussell offers are Rochester from *Jane Eyre* and Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights* (122). Exemplified by Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* and Knightley in *Emma*, heroes of the second type “frequently lack the mysterious energy of the passionate figure,” but are superior to all other male characters “in intelligence, sensitivity, manners, and wit” (123-4). This kind of hero does not need “the heroine’s softening influence” as much as the first kind, because he is already sensitive to the heroine’s needs (124). This does not imply that he is not strong, however. Just as authoritative as the passionate hero, he is a strong and powerful protector, but his sensitivity keeps his protectiveness from being overpowering (124). The second hero figure is attractive, because his combination of sensitivity and protectiveness means he is trustworthy and will make a good husband who fully appreciates the heroine (124-125).

Heath is closest to Mussel’s first hero figure. Krentz and Barlow have pointed out how the language and codes of romance novels includes figurative language, familiar plot elements and allusions to classics and myths that the readers will recognize (“Beneath the Surface” 16). Heath’s name is meant to be evocative of Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights*. Just like Heathcliff, Heath comes across as romantically passionate and he has a mysterious past. Heath comes off as well-mannered and high class, but only because he has worked very hard to educate himself and conceal the fact that he actually grew up in a trailer park, alone with an alcoholic and abusive father after his mother left them. He also has the threatening air of the first type of hero. When Heath and Annabelle first meet, it is because Annabelle has secured an appointment with him through her friend who is married to one of Heath’s top clients, and she is trying to land him as a client for her matchmaking business. She is clearly intimidated by him even before they meet, and refers to him as “the Python.” Annabelle’s initial fear of Heath does not dissipate during their first encounter, as his physical presence does nothing to make her less nervous. When she is face-to-face with him, she feels “as if she’d been punched in the stomach” (7). She remembers a junior high science lesson about

pythons and how “They swallow their prey whole. Head first” (8). Heath is in need of the softening influence of a woman, but not just any woman, it has to be the right one. At one point in the novel, Heath and Annabelle both help out with the organization of a “princess party” for a group of little girls. During this party, Annabelle dresses up in a shimmering fairytale gown and tiara, styling herself the fairy godmother of the little princesses in attendance. As this is a “princess party” Heath is referred to as “Prince Heath.” The significance of this event and the allusion to a well-known fairytale becomes even clearer in a later scene. Three year old Pippi, one of the little girls who was at the party and the daughter of Annabelle’s friend who connected her with Heath, keeps calling Heath “pwinz,” and when Annabelle shows up Pippi happily squeals “Belle!” The suggestion is clear: Heath is the Beast who can only be turned into a prince by the love of Beauty, Annabelle.

Ford comes closer to the second, competent hero. He is clearly intelligent, something Cilla’s father attests to. Early on in the novel, Cilla’s dad shares the opinion he formed of Ford back when he was his high school teacher: “Clever boy, always was. ... Tended to daydream, but if you engaged his mind, he’d use it” (25). Several times Ford demonstrates that he has wit and sensitivity. Using his skills as an illustrator, he is able to both comfort and persuade Cilla at times when she needs it. Knowing that Cilla is anxious about the exam she has to take to become a certified contractor, Ford has made a sketch captioned “The Amazing, the Incredible Contractor Girl,” which depicts Cilla in full contractor gear, determined and ready to do battle with anything that needs rehabbing or renovating (251). Finding this sketch in her car proves to be exactly the encouragement Cilla needs. The knots in her stomach unravel and she can drive “toward her future, singing” (252).

Ford’s strength is shown in his level of confidence; he is quite sure of himself and comfortable with who he is. He never hesitates to admit to being a nerd, and when it comes to Cilla he is from the beginning very frank about finding her attractive and wishing to spend time with her. He is, however, always sensitive to Cilla’s wishes and hesitation. When they first kiss, Cilla is afraid that getting involved with Ford would be a mistake and pulls away. Ford is not put off, though, and the way he responds shows both his sensitivity and his unwavering confidence:

At her light nudge, he pulled away. “Here’s what I need to know. There’s persistence, there’s pacing and there’s pains in the ass. I’m wondering which category you’d considered it if I wander over to your place now and again or invite you over here, with the full intention of getting you naked.” (63)

Ford also has a strong protective instinct when it comes to Cilla. Upon discovering that she is camping out in one of the bedrooms of the run-down farm house he tries to have her come stay in one his guest rooms. Because he is also sensitive to her needs, though, he relents when she protests and wishes to stay where she is. At another time, someone has broken in and vandalized Cilla's house and Ford rushes over when he sees the police outside. Obviously worried about her safety he asks "Are you hurt? Are you all right?"(215). Wishing to protect her, he offers to stay in the house while she goes over to his place to get some sleep. Cilla does not want to leave, however, because she does not think she will have the strength to come back again to the house if she were to go. In a display of both protectiveness and sensitivity to his heroine's needs, Ford then immediately says he will stay with her.

Regis, too, has divided romance heroes into two categories. The first kind of romance hero, according to her, is the alpha hero (113). Attributing the theory of this kind of hero to Krentz, Regis states that this kind of hero is a dangerous and powerful man who fills the parts of both hero and villain (113). "As the villain," Regis asserts, "the hero provides the heroine with the primary source of conflict" and the heroine has to tame him to complete the courtship (112-113). Interestingly, Regis casts both Darcy from *Pride and Prejudice* and Rochester from *Jane Eyre* as this kind of hero/villain, in addition to Mr. B from *Pamela* and Lufton from *Framley Parsonage* (113). The second kind of romance hero, according to Regis, is the sentimental hero, exemplified by George in *A Room with a View* (113). George does not require taming, he "poses no possible danger ... [but] knows from his first meeting with Lucy that she is the right woman for him, and he never wavers" (113). The sentimental hero, while "still strong, virile, manly," is "wounded physically, psychically, or emotionally" and thus requires the heroine's healing, rather than taming (113). A combination of the two types is also possible: a hero who needs both taming and healing (114). Recalling Regis's eight narrative events, the society that is corrupt and disordered at the beginning of the novel, and which is reformed and made orderly by the end, is in modern romance novels "largely within the heroine and hero themselves," with the hero making the largest contribution to the disorder (114). "Ordering society," according to Regis, "is now an issue of taming or healing the hero" (114). The consequences if the heroine fails to tame the alpha hero is that "he will regard courtship, wrongly, as merely the actions he needs to go through to get a woman into bed" (114). If a sentimental hero is not healed, "he will regard courtship, wrongly, as something he is exempt from: he is not good at it, is not ready for it, or it will merely hurt him" (114).

There are obvious similarities between the passionate, romantic hero described by Mussel and the alpha hero that Regis refers to, and it has already been established that Heath relates well to that type of hero. But while Heath is both dangerous and powerful and in need of taming, it is also true that deeply wounded by his past experiences with women. He seems to believe that he is incapable of trusting and loving a woman, and therefore goes about finding a wife with the same logic and determination that he would any of his business arrangements. The final match Annabelle makes for him, Delaney, answers to all of his requirements and he therefore decides that he will ask her to marry him. He is well aware that he does not love her, though, and plans to “dodge the whole ‘I love you’ thing” when proposing (301). During his childhood and youth, Heath would let himself fall for all of his father’s girlfriends, and then be heartbroken when they eventually and inevitably left. Therefore, Heath now believes he is incapable of trusting any woman to stick around and letting himself love her. When contemplating how to propose to Delaney, Heath thinks to himself: “If she pressed him on the love thing, he could always tell her he was fairly sure he *would* love her at some time in the future, after they’d been married for a while and he was certain she’d stick” (301). Through much of the novel, Heath views love and a relationship based on that love as something he is exempt from precisely because he is wounded by his past experiences with women. Using Regis’s categories of heroes, Heath is a combination of the alpha hero and the sentimental hero.

Ford, on the other hand, does not easily fit into either of these two categories. Ford has a confident, self-assured strength, yes, but he is not described as a powerful, dangerous alpha hero that has to be domesticated and tamed. There is a similarity between how George, the sentimental hero from *A Room With a View*, knows immediately that Lucy is the right woman for him and how Ford knows his own mind with regards to Cilla. Ford is interested in her in a romantic way and is both honest and straight forward about this with her. He does not doubt his ability to love Cilla and never tries to deny his feelings for her. He is not, however, in need of healing. Ford is not emotionally wounded: he does not need Cilla to show him how to trust or love again. He therefore does not fit the definition of the sentimental hero, either.

Ford never believes that love is something he is exempt from. Cilla is the one who believes she is no good at romantic relationships, that she is not ready for another one, and that it will merely hurt her if she attempts to enter into a serious romantic relationship with Ford. In *Tribute*, it is not the hero who is in need of healing, but the heroine. Putney has noted how a storyline with “the heroine saved by the love of good man,” although possible in a

romance, is much rarer to find than the one where a wounded hero is “saved by the love of a good woman” (101). In Putney’s opinion, this is because it is much more difficult to write as the story cannot rest on the theme of female triumph in taming and healing the “injured lion” and it requires better characterization of the hero who needs to be a “compelling figure in his own right” (101-102).

The term “alpha hero,” as used by Regis, has already been touched upon. However, there is more to be said about this subject, and there exists a second term that needs to be added to the discussion of Heath and Ford. Within the romance community, meaning the writers and readers of romance literature, the two terms “alpha hero” and “beta hero” are in frequent use.<sup>2</sup> As Ramsdell notes, the alpha hero is the classic hero in romances, and while the beta hero has been around for some time he is still not as popular or frequent as the alpha hero (50). Wendell and Tan confirm the popularity of these two categories, and while they stress that these categories are simplistic and that many heroes, especially those in recent romances, exhibit traits from both, the division into these categories can be a useful tool for analysis (76-77). Ramsdell, too, acknowledges that the current trend is blending the characteristics of each type of hero and observes that “the most successful heroes combine elements of both” (50).

Nevertheless, the alpha hero and beta hero remain prototypes of heroes in the genre, and these prototypes are interesting because they represent two very different types of men. These terms are connected to the more common concepts of alpha and beta males, although not necessarily exactly correspondent. An alpha male, according to the Cambridge dictionary, is “a strong and successful man who likes to be in charge of others.” Krentz was among the first in the romance community to use the term “alpha male” when describing the kind of hero that feminist critics despise: the tough, hard-edged, and dangerous male that has remained immensely popular with writers and readers of romance (“Trying to Tame” 107-108). Another romance author featured in *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*, Doreen Owens Malek, provides the following description of the alpha hero: “a strong, dominant, aggressive male brought to the point of surrender by a woman” (“Mad, Bad, and Dangerous to Know” 74). With this definition, she also touches on the reason why this type of hero is so attractive: he provides the best challenge for the heroine, and her victory in conquering him is all the sweeter because he is so strong, domineering, successful and aggressive (Krentz, “Trying to Tame” 107-108; Malek 74-75). More recently, Ramsdell has described the alpha

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<sup>2</sup> A quick search for “alpha hero” or “beta hero” will yield numerous lists of romance novels with a certain kind of hero, as well as blog posts and message boards discussing the definition of the terms.



heroes as “strong, take-charge men, handsome and possibly wealthy, who have already achieved success in their business or professional field” (50). Lauren Schmelz is one of the editors and founders of the blog *Write Divas*, and in her analysis the modern romance alpha hero is in accordance with Ramsdell’s definition. Schmelz cites domination as the “primary characteristic of an alpha male”: he “feels the need to control all situations.” The alpha hero also tends to believe he knows what is best for the heroine (Schmelz). Often, she says, the alpha hero has wealth and status to the point that he has “no spending limit, and no worry about limits in general” (Schmelz). Because he is a fantasy, the alpha hero is invariably good looking (Schmelz). “Can you name an alpha male you have read that didn’t have rippling muscles, was tall with broad shoulders, maybe tattoos, perfect hair, or an impeccable sense of style? Yeah, didn’t think so,” Schmelz affirms. The last point that Schmelz stresses is that the alpha hero cannot be “all testosterone,” he has to have a “crutch” or “vulnerability.” Alpha heroes, Schmelz says, “need to be emotionally scarred or hiding from their past; a past they’re either ashamed of or a past that deeply wounded them . . . in order to make them human, forgivable, loved, and redeemed.” This last point is especially important, because it implies that modern alpha heroes all have a combination of the traits of the alpha hero and the sentimental hero that Regis defined. This point is also raised by Wendell and Tan, who define alpha heroes as “strong, dominating, confident men, who hold a tortured, tender element within themselves that they rarely let anyone see” (77).

Heath definitively fits the description of the domineering alpha hero who needs to be in control of all situations. He also has the wealth and status typical of an alpha hero, and shows it off with his expensive and impeccable style. Several times Annabelle notes the way he is dressed. When they first meet, she takes in “a navy print necktie that probably cost more than her entire outfit and the perfect fit of his pale blue dress shirt” (8). His “pricey wardrobe” (52) includes accessories such as a TAG Heuer watch “similar to the one her brother Adam had bought for himself when he was named St. Louis’s top heart surgeon” (54). His wardrobe is, of course, only the icing on the cake that is his unbelievably handsome features and his toned and muscular body. Another point that can be crossed off on the list of alpha hero traits is Heath’s belief that he knows what is best for Annabelle, especially when it comes to running her matchmaking business, which he frequently offers his advice on how to do. Finally, Heath does also have a vulnerability: both his emotionally traumatic childhood and relationship with his fiancée during law school (whom he discovered was mainly interested in marrying him because the date for their wedding would line up with those of her parents and

grandparents) are experiences that have left him emotionally wounded. What this adds up to is a hero who will serve well in what Putney describes as “a fantasy of incredible potency”: the healing of a wounded hero through a woman’s love and compassion which makes that woman “a success in a very female way, for she has saved the Alpha male, the leader of the pack, and can now share in his strength” (101).

The Cambridge dictionary’s definition of the beta male, on the other hand, is “a man who is not as successful or powerful as other men.” This definition of the beta male seems to indicate that ‘betas’ are not the thing to be. To expand upon the idea of the beta male, it is necessary to turn to the humoristic, collaborative online dictionary of slang and trending, new vocabulary: the Urban Dictionary. The top definition of beta male there is in keeping with the one offered by the Cambridge dictionary: “An unremarkable, careful man who avoids risk and confrontation. Beta males lack the physical presence, charisma and confidence of the Alpha male.” The second most popular definition, however, offers a very different opinion of the beta:

“. . . The betas are wingmen, collaborative and conciliatory. In human terms, betas make the best mates. They do more in the house, and probably in the bedroom, because they know how to hasten the greater good. The beta has poetry in him, and a touch of youthful idealism. He’s sure of who he is, and not constantly trying to prove his value in materialistic terms. (Alpha: Your expensive car doesn’t make you interesting.) The beta can earn a lot of money, or a little, but the money’s not the thing; he profits because he works well with others. There’s something rebellious about the beta male; he challenges the social order rather than succumbing to it. The beta male doesn’t buy in to the basest stereotypes about male behavior, and that’s hugely sexy.” (Urban Dictionary)

According to this definition the beta male does not conform to standard masculinity, but is very attractive as a partner and “hugely sexy” because he does not feel the need to prove his masculinity. This understanding of the beta male seems to agree much better with the idea of the romance beta heroes. According to Ramsdell, the beta hero is gentler, softer and more sensitive than the alpha, in her view the beta hero’s “sympathetic nature and quiet strength has great appeal and is perfect for some situations” (50). Wendell also makes a comparison with the alpha hero when describing the beta hero on the *Smart Bitches, Trashy Books* romance blog:

A beta hero isn’t a weak hero—not at all. Unfortunately, it’s sometimes easier to define what a beta hero is by what he isn’t. He isn’t the alpha, he isn’t automatically dominant (hence the term “beta”) and he isn’t a badass (though he can be). A beta hero might be quieter, thoughtful, sometimes nerdy, and very often hiding a depth of character that could match the Grand Canyon. The

danger with a beta hero is that, sometimes, they're nice—and that can be deadly. If they're too nice, then they're just boring. (“The Sneaky Appeal”)

Krentz seems to believe that the alternative to the strong alpha hero is inevitably a man who is too nice and just boring. According to Krentz you cannot get the excitement and challenge needed in a good romance novel from “a sensitive, understanding, right-thinking ‘modern’ man who is part therapist, part best friend, and thoroughly tamed from the start ... a good-natured gentleman-saint who never reveals a core of steel” (109). While Wendell, too, stresses that the beta hero runs the risk of being boring if he is too nice, her definition presents the possibility of a hero who is a genuinely nice guy *with* a core of steel. This point is also addressed in *Beyond Heaving Bosoms*, where Wendell and Tan assert that among the pop-culture beta heroes are many superheroes with a “more alpha secret side,” for example Clark Kent/Superman or Peter Parker/Spider-Man (79). In Wendell and Tan’s estimation, the “alpha hidden within the beta isn’t so much a separate side of his personality as it is the physical manifestation of what makes the beta hero so great: an unshakeable core of pure and stalwart good, so constant and abiding it is damn near alpha in its strength” (79).

Ford is definitively the nice guy, he is nerdy and charming, would never boast about his accomplishments or try to show off, is always up for a good conversation and willing to listen when Cilla needs to talk about her issues. He does not feel the need to constantly prove his masculinity. Not even when faced with the contrast between Cilla’s masculine skills as a contractor and his own, more feminine talents as artist does he feel the need to demonstrate his manhood. Instead, his lack of skill with power tools and carpentry is something that both he and Cilla can joke about. Ford’s confidence and lack of doubt about his own value as a man is part of his inner strength. Ford never comes off as aggressive or domineering, but there is indeed something rebellious about and the way he challenges and defies many of the usual indicators of masculinity. While he may not be aggressive and dominant, Ford is not weak, either, and will not run from danger. When Cilla is threatened, Ford stays to face whatever danger he has to in order to protect the woman he loves. Ford is good example of the beta hero in romances, a genuinely nice guy with a core of steel.

## 2.2 Heroic Sexuality

Romance novels have a lay reputation of being pornography for women (Wendell and Tan 132-133). Wendell and Tan address the “chick porn” accusation by pointing out that a debate about whether or not romance novels are pornographic will always turn into a discussion about what does and does not constitute pornography. As they say, “[porn] lies in the eyes of the beholder” and for some people the presence of descriptions of sexual acts in a romance novel will inevitably qualify that novel as porn (133). The real problem with the “chick porn” accusation is that implies that “women ought to feel ashamed about sexual pleasure, especially self-pleasure. . . . Women’s sexual pleasure and the education of women on the means to that end are simply not accepted or even celebrated. Then here come romance novels, potentially including sex scenes of various levels of explicitness” (134).

Ramsdell also observes that the descriptions of sexual acts in contemporary romance novels range “from the innocent to the erotic, with the majority falling somewhere in between” (51). The level of sensuality and sexual explicitness vary greatly, but since romance novels are centered on the development of a romantic relationship between the hero and heroine, the protagonists’ attraction to and desire for each other form part of the narrative. Perhaps with the exception of the innocent subgenres, romances are sensual in nature and the sexuality of the protagonists is at the forefront in the story. Consequently, the sexuality of the hero and heroine is always in play in a romance novel.

*Tribute* and *Match Me If You Can* are typical examples of contemporary romance, as both novels fall in between innocent and erotic. While the depictions of sexual acts are not numerous or very explicit, it does provide material for analysis of the heroes’ sexuality. The following discussion will focus on the sexuality and sexual behavior of Heath and Ford. To do this it is first necessary to outline what is normative male sexuality in Western society, and what is the norm for depictions of sexual behavior in romance novels. How Heath and Ford relate to these norms, as well as how this can be related to the type of romance hero they represent, is then of crucial interest. Finally, the discussion will address directly the intertwined nature of sex and love in romance novels, taking into account the concept of “demisexuality” in romance novels and considering whether Heath and Ford can be said to be “demisexual.”

### 2.2.1 Sexuality and Sexual Scripts

Human sexuality is socially constructed: it is the result of a socialization process that is specific to any culture at any particular time (Fracher and Kimmel 457). Our sexuality consists of a set of behaviors and cognitive interpretations of those behaviors that are variable from culture to culture and can change over time (457). As Fracher and Kimmel emphasize: “[*t*]hat we are sexual is determined by a biological imperative toward reproduction, but *how* we are sexual – where, when, how often, with whom, and why – has to do with cultural learning, with meanings transmitted in a cultural setting” (457, italics in original).

The foundation on which we construct our sexuality is gender (457). This means that for men, “the notion of masculinity, the cultural definition of manhood, serves as the primary building block of sexuality” (457). Because sexuality is informed by gender, and gender in turn is confirmed by sexuality, the potential consequences for a man who faces a sexual problem is the loss of his self-image as a man (457). The contemporary male sexual script, the normative construction of sexuality, dictates a detachment from one’s self as an authentic actor and instead self-objectification as the performer of a sexual act (459-460). This is reflected in the work-metaphors such as “getting the job done,” “performing well,” and “achieving orgasm,” that men use to refer to sexual conduct; everything sexual becomes performances to be evaluated (459). According to Fracher and Kimmel, “the penis is transformed from an organ of sexual pleasure into a ‘tool,’ an instrument by which the performance is carried out” (459). The penis is placed in the center of the “sexual universe,” and great importance is placed on achieving and maintaining an erection, which includes strategies for delaying ejaculation in order to please a sexual partner: “[i]t’s as if sexual adequacy could be measured by time elapsed between penetration and orgasm, and the sexual experience itself is transformed into an endurance test in which pleasure, if present at all, is almost accidental” (459-460). “Performance anxiety,” the fear that the penis will not become or stay erect or that orgasm will occur too soon, is a normative experience for male sexual behavior (459). Men are also supposed to be aggressive, to have an “attitude of constantly ‘going for it’” (458), and being passive in sexual encounters thus risks exposing feminine behaviors and a loss of self-image as man (460). Normative heterosexuality assigns men the role of “doer” and there is pressure for men to escalate any sexual experience to “the end point of intercourse” (460). Women, on the other hand, are assigned the role of “gatekeeper,” with the task of determining the appropriate limits for a sexual encounter and the prevention of escalation if those limits are reached (460). In summary, the male sexual script “contains dicta for sexual distancing, objectification, phallocentrism, and a pressure to become and

remain erect for as long as possible, all of which serve as indicators of masculinity as well as sexual potency” (461).

### **2.2.2 Romance Novels and the Sexual Script**

Surprisingly little recent research exists concerning sexuality and depictions of sexual encounters in romance novels. There are, however, two recent studies conducted by Ménard and Cabrera. In “‘Whatever the Approach, Tab B Still Fits into Slot A’: Twenty Years of Sex Scripts in Romance Novels,” they examine the adherence to Western sexual scripts and some popular myths about sexuality in romance novels. The research that has been done on sexual content in other media, such as film, television, music videos and magazines, has shown that “male and female characters consistently behave in stereotypic ways that reinforce the sexual double standard and confirm other sexual myths” (241). The small amount of previous research on depictions of sexuality in romance novels, although not primarily concerned with sexual behavior, tends to confirm the findings from other media, and has shown that the male characters are often more sexually experienced than their female counterparts and are likely to “take the lead sexually” (242). Common for depictions of sexual behavior in television, movies, romance and other fiction is the absence of discussion and/or use of contraception (242). Other research has shown that consumer’s attitudes and behaviors are affected by exposure to sexual content in the media, and portrayals of sex and sexuality in romance novels is likely to influence readers’ attitudes and beliefs (241). Given the widespread readership of romance novels, the lack of research into what messages about sexuality and sexual behaviors that are promoted in romance novels is of great concern to Ménard and Cabrera (241). Their aim with this study is therefore to “gain an understanding of how sexual behaviours and sexuality are portrayed in contemporary romance novels and to determine whether these portrayals have changed over time” (241).

Given the findings from other media, Ménard and Cabrera hypothesized that the “depictions of sexual behaviours and sexuality in romance novels would conform to the expectations of Western sexual scripts ... with respect to the ‘who, what, when, where and how’ elements of the sexual script” and that “there would not be significant differences in depictions of sexual behaviours and sexuality in romance novels published between 1989 and 1999 compared to those that were published between 2000 and 2009” (243). What they expected to find was that sexual encounters would be between two “young, single, attractive, able-bodied, heterosexual individuals who do not differ significantly with respect to

descriptive characteristics” and that “[t]hese characters would engage in kissing, touching and penile–vaginal intercourse in a bedroom, at night” (243). In addition, they expected to find significant gender differences in agency and predicted that “male characters would be more likely to initiate the sexual encounter and more likely to initiate sexual behaviours within the encounter (e.g. initiating touching, oral stimulation or manual stimulation)” while the female characters would be recipients (243).

The material Ménard and Cabrera chose for analysis consisted of the 20 romance novels that had won the RITA award for best contemporary single-title romance from 1990 to 2009 (245). The purpose of the RITA award is to “promote excellence in the romance genre,” and consequently the winning novels were assumed to be “especially representative or prototypical examples of the genre” (245). It is noted that the relatively small sample limits the generalizability of their findings and that the appearances of multiple novels by the same authors, among them Nora Roberts and Susan Elizabeth Phillips, may have skewed the sample with regards those authors’ individual preferences in writing sex scenes (253). This is countered by the argument that since “these authors tend to produce best-sellers, their relatively greater influence in the study sample might represent an accurate reflection of their influence on readers” (253).

Their findings were largely in support of their hypotheses (251). Based on the sample they examined the findings were that “romance novel characters tend to be young, attractive, heterosexual, able-bodied and childless” and were engaged in scenes that depicted what has been characterized as “‘a one-way drive downfield to the end zone of intercourse,’ ... confirming narrow, heterosexist notions of what constitutes ‘sex’” (251-252). Less explicit sexual behavior, such as kissing and touching above the waist, would occur earlier in the books, while the more explicit sexual behavior such as manual sex, oral sex, and intercourse ensued later (248). “Deviant” sexual behaviors, such as use of lubrication, masturbation, anal stimulation and BDSM-inspired behaviors, were rare (252). The few instances encountered consisted of two depictions of solo masturbation, one instance of bondage and “[a] few other mildly titillating behaviours ... including use of food to enhance arousal, fantasy talk and a strip-tease” (248). According to Ménard and Cabrera, this indicates that while “minor deviations from the script are acceptable (and sometimes sexy), major deviations are not” (252). Regarding the time and location of sexual behavior, the findings were that most of the sexual encounters took place in the evening or late night, in the home of one of the protagonists (250). The bedroom was the most popular location within the home, followed by

the living room and the kitchen (250). There was an increase in use of contraception in the books published between 2000 and 2009, although many of those later books, too, made no mention of contraception (252). When contraception was used it was most often the male condom, and then usually provided by the male protagonist (249). On the subject of sexual agency, their findings were that the female protagonists were indeed more likely to be recipients of sexual behaviors such as touching, manual sex and oral sex, which Ménard and Cabrera claim “reinforce the idea that women should be sexually passive and do not get sexual enjoyment from performing sexual acts on their partners” and “supports the idea that men ... are perpetually aroused” (252). Although few of the differences between the first and second time block reached a statistical significance, the division showed an increase in scenes initiated by the heroine and scenes where both characters were initiators in the most recent novels (251). Ménard and Cabrera characterize this as “an increasing trend towards female initiation of sexual encounters,” but also note that the increase in encounters initiated by both partners was “relatively greater” (252). According to them, this “might indicate that while it is acceptable for women to initiate sex, it is still not preferable that women make the first move on their own” (252). One finding that was particularly surprising to Ménard and Cabrera was the fairly low total number of sex scenes, and the complete absence of sex scenes in some of the most recently published books (252). The low number of sex scenes in these award winning novels were contradictory of the reputation romance novels have of being “porn for women” (252).

In another article, this time as Cabrera and Ménard, the research conducted on sexual behavior in romance novels was followed up by an investigation of the depictions of orgasms in the same selection of RITA award winning romance novels. In the Western sexual script, orgasm is the sign of sexual fulfillment, and what is referred to as the “Orgasmic Imperative” idealizes simultaneous, mutual orgasms during intercourse (194). Because orgasm is so central to the Western sexual script, both women and men may feel a need to “fake it,” although this is more common for women (194). In a study conducted among university-age men and women, it was shown that the Western sexual script’s assignment of agency with the male partner and receptivity to the female had produced the belief that “[m]ale effort and technique is expected to result in the female orgasm; if there is no orgasm, then the inevitable conclusion is that the man’s technique was lacking and/ or that the woman’s body was faulty” (194).



Again, Cabrera and Ménard are concerned with the influence depictions of sex and sexuality in romance novels, now specifically orgasms, may have on its female readers expectations and beliefs about sexual responsibility (195). Assuming that “cultural beliefs concerning the orgasmic imperative and the belief that orgasm is necessary and sufficient for great sex” are reinforced in romance novels, as they are in other forms of media, they therefore wished to “examine the frequency and context in which orgasms occur and determine whether these characteristics have changed over time” and “identify the qualitative themes found within orgasm descriptions” in the sample of romance novels (196).

Their conclusion is that the orgasmic imperative is indeed reinforced in romance novels, orgasm was found to be an “essential component of a complete and fulfilling sexual encounter” in the novels they examined (206). In a pattern that was consistent through the twenty year time period, orgasms occurred as follows: “The female character orgasms first from manual stimulation by her male partner (30 % of orgasms). The couple then engages in penile-vaginal intercourse, which is likely to result in orgasms for both partners (94 % of male orgasms and 56 % of female orgasms), experienced simultaneously (45 % of all orgasms)” (206). Male characters were frequently described as being responsible for bringing about their partner’s orgasm (202). In contrast, the role of the female character was to be passively acted upon by her male partner (202). Female orgasm is prioritized in romance novels in contrast with real world findings indicating that men are more likely to orgasm during a sexual encounter than women (207). Cabrera and Ménard present two possible explanations for this: that authors of romance novels “might be creating an idealized, feminist re-imagining of the script to privilege women’s orgasms over men’s,” or writing about sexual encounters in a way that is “designed to give readers an enjoyable vicarious experience” (207). While rapid and frequent orgasms were the norm for female characters, the male characters would exhibit great control of their orgasm, including the ability to withhold orgasm until the female character had orgasmed several times (208). Both of these findings contrast with real life sexual experiences, where studies have shown that women frequently have difficulties with orgasm and that rapid ejaculation is a problem for some men (208).

Seeing that romance novels are mainly written by women and for women, it is not surprising that Cabrera and Ménard’s found female orgasm to be prioritized and far more likely to occur in romances than in real life. Romance novels are acknowledged as fantasies, and they are not claiming to be entirely realistic. The romance novel is used by many readers as a means of escape. It promises to be emotionally uplifting and provides the reader with the

safety of knowing that, no matter what happens on the way there, the hero and heroine will find love with each other and the ending will be happy. Within this fantasy, it seems unsurprising that sex is portrayed as greatly satisfactory to both partners. It would be far more surprising if the sexual behavior between the hero and heroine in a romantic fantasy was depicted as problematic. As Wendell and Tan remark, romance readers do not wish to have their fantasy spoiled: “we’re not necessarily interested in reading about lovers who come a little bit too fast and use a little bit too much tongue when kissing” (37). Too much reality would interfere with the escapist nature of romance reading.

That being said, perhaps there should be more concessions to reality than what is currently found. This is certainly among the criticisms against the genre raised by Wendell and Tan in *Heaving Bosoms*. Too much reality may spoil the fantasy created in the romance, but so will too little. On their list of sexual behaviors depicted in romance novels that could use some reality adjustments are the frequently found simultaneous orgasms, the ability of heroes to bend their arms in impossible directions during intercourse in order to bestow upon the heroine “a shattering, mind-numbing moon-swallowing orgasm with one flick of his finger,” the idea that penetration would yield an instant orgasm for the heroine and that heroes never need time to recover from the first round of lovemaking before they are ready for the second round (164-167). However, there is also an indication that portrayals of sexuality in romance are continually adjusting. The prevalence of rape scenes and “rapist heroes” is one example of representations of sexual acts that used to be quite common in romance novels from the early ’70s to the mid-’80s, but have since disappeared (136-137). They also observe that erotic romance is pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable in the less sexually adventurous subgenres such as historicals and contemporaries (161). For example, anal sex, ménages à trois, and bondage are sexual behaviors that are now commonplace in erotic romance and making their way into other subgenres as well (161-162).

### **2.2.3 The Sexual Behavior of Heath and Ford**

In both *Tribute* and *Match Me If You Can* the depictions of sexuality stays close to the sexual script and there are few deviations from how sexual behavior is usually portrayed in romance novels. Neither Heath nor Ford have any problems “getting it up” or performing sexually in general, and the portrayal of their sexuality serves to affirm their masculinity. In both of these novels, there is the same pattern of escalation from less explicit to more explicit sexual behavior that Ménard and Cabrera observed in their sample. There is more than one sex scene

in both novels, and additional mentions of sexual intercourse taking place without being described in detail. Having said that there are not considerable deviations from the norm in either of these novels, a closer examination of the sexual behavior depicted in both books does, however, reveal some shades of grey.

The first time Heath and Annabelle engage in sexual behavior with each other it consists of kissing and touching each other above the waist. It takes place during a weekend getaway with the women in Annabelle's book club and their husbands. As a result of a tangle of miscalculations and motivations, Heath accompanies Annabelle on the trip and they are sharing a cottage. As Heath and Annabelle get back to the cottage the first night, they are both a little drunk and excited from dancing in front of a bonfire on the beach. Heath is the initiator, he is the one who closes the distance between them, and while she gazes up at him, he kisses her (189). Heath is the one with the agency and Annabelle is depicted as receptive, arching against him; "her body pliant" (189). There is some agency accorded Annabelle, as she is described as winding her arms around his neck and pressing her hips to him (189). The general development of the scene, however, does stay very close to the conventional sexual script: Heath is the doer and Annabelle is the gatekeeper, and it is she who ends the encounter by pulling away. The reasons why she pulls away are connected to the most prominent barrier in the book; it breaks with Annabelle's professional ethics as a matchmaker to become involved with her client. Another important barrier that is also in play during this encounter is Annabelle's sexual insecurity after the experience with her former fiancé who told her he was really a woman. Heath's behavior during this kiss is reassuring to her and she describes his qualities as a kisser in terms that are thoroughly alpha: "domineering in the best possible way, master and commander, lord of the realm, leader of the pack. No need to worry about this one slipping into high heels when she wasn't paying attention" (190). Annabelle is clearly in need of a man where there is no question of his being a man, and so Heath's adherence to the sexual script is especially important, because it affirms his conventional masculinity. Moreover, his manliness coupled with his desire for her assures her that she is the woman.

When the first sex scene in the book occurs, Annabelle comes back to their shared cabin after watching erotica for women with the other book club members. It is made a point of in the book, that men are the ones who usually watch porn and that porn is normally not to the taste of women. This erotic movie is different, because "[t]he men are all gorgeous, but the women are fairly ordinary. No silicone," and "[t]here's also a story, and real foreplay. ... Kissing, slow undressing, lots of caressing (210)." One character asserts that this "sets it apart

from porn for men, all right (210).” The notion being promoted here seems to be that erotica is more to the taste of women than conventional porn, because it incorporates romance as a significant component in the depiction of sexual behavior.

Watching the movie has turned Annabelle on and consequently weakened her resolve not to compromise her professional ethics. Heath notices that she is hot and bothered, he manages to wring out of her the reason why, which he finds both amusing and interesting, and their attraction to each other becomes too much to resist. As in the previous scene involving kissing, Heath is the initiator and is described invoking predator imagery: “His teeth glinted like a shark’s” (216). Again, once Heath has initiated, Annabelle exhibits a little agency, she presses her cheek to his chest and turn her lips against his skin, but for the most part agency lies with Heath, in keeping with both sexual script and the norm for romance novels (217). Annabelle is the recipient of manual stimulation and he is not, again in keeping with Ménard and Cabrera’s findings. There is mention of contraceptive use during this first encounter, and as per usual in romance novels it is the male condom. Also in keeping with the norm for romance novels, it is Heath who provides the condoms and there is no discussion about using them, just Heath telling Annabelle to “[c]onsider these a token of my affection,” and her replying “[n]oted and appreciated” (217). This can be seen as promoting the view that contraception is a male responsibility. It could also be seen as sending the message that it is not feminine to be prepared to have sex, while is natural for a man to be prepared. Men are, after all, commonly viewed as “perpetually aroused,” as Ménard and Cabrera phrase it, and always ready to jump at the chance of having sex.

The preoccupation with male sexual endurance typical of the Western sexual script is evident in Heath as he apologizes in advance for rushing Annabelle, telling her he is not likely to satisfy her the first time but promises to “do the job right” after he has released “that first burst of ... steam” (218). The words used by Heath here are also typical: the sexual act is a job to perform, and he promises to perform it well after some initial technical difficulties with too much “steam.” While Heath is not able to hold of his own orgasm very long the first time, this is not a problem because Annabelle orgasms too. In keeping with what was found to be a normal occurrence in romance novels, they experience a simultaneous orgasm while engaged in penile-vaginal intercourse. If taken as evidence of excessive sexual passion, it is also possible to see Heath’s less than perfect control over his first orgasm as a sign of his manliness. There is some concession to reality when Heath says he needs some time before being able to perform again, but he is a romance hero after all, and it does not take him “quite

as long to recover” as he thought (220). Although their interaction is not described this time, it presumably lasts longer since neither of them says anything “for a very long time” and he “finally” falls asleep (220).

The first time is before the declaration. At this point, Annabelle has realized her love for Heath, but as she does not believe he loves her she devises a plan to hide this fact from Heath and to try to move past her feelings. Heath does not at this point realize his feelings for Annabelle, but he still cannot shake the experience. The second scene is after the declaration, and this encounter as well adheres to the sexual script. This time both initiate, but the sexual behaviors are still adherent to the sexual script, with Heath as doer and Annabelle as receptive. The characterization of their “lovemaking” this time around is a curious mix of realism and romantic clichés: “they abandoned themselves, not in beautifully choreographed lovemaking, but in a messy mating of spunk and juice, of sweet filth, luscious obscenities, of deep and total trust, as pure and sacred as altar vows” (378). Next, their sexual behavior is referred to with combined agency: “*they* made love for the rest of the afternoon” (378, italics mine). A short time after, they are drawing up their “prenup” and one of Heath’s demands is that electronic sex toys “will not only be allowed in the bedroom, but encouraged” (380). That Heath is not threatened by, but in fact will encourage the use of “selected electronic devices” (380) shows his confidence in his own sexual competence. The drawing up of the prenup leads to the mention of sexual behavior that deviates from the script: “a lovely – and very successful – testing of her powers as a dominatrix” (382).

Overall, the sexual behavior that is portrayed in *Match Me If You Can* adheres to the sexual script, which is the norm for romance novels, and there are no detailed descriptions of deviant behavior. However, the fact that there is *mention* of deviant behavior, such as Annabelle acting as a dominatrix and the inference that the use of sex toys is part of their future sexual behavior together, means there are nuances other than the strictly black and white.

The typical pattern of escalation from less explicit to more explicit sexual behavior is present in *Tribute* as well. There are several instances where Ford and Cilla discuss or contemplate taking their physical relationship further than kissing and touching above the waist before the first sex scene. Wendell and Tan have noted that in novels where the protagonists come close several times before they “actually do the deed,” this sustains the sexual tension between them a little longer (151). Because Ford is not an alpha hero, the typical conflict between the hero who needs taming and the heroine who is just the woman for

the job is not present. Sustaining the sexual tension between Ford and Cilla by having them come close to getting together so many times is perhaps necessary, since there is little to no conflict between the two which would otherwise preserve the suspense of their growing relationship.

As mentioned, there is a pattern of escalation to Ford and Cilla's sexual behavior with each other. Ford is the one who initiates both the first and second time they engage in kissing. This should not be seen as evidence of Ford adhering to the male sexual script and "going for it," however, as he also backs off without protest when Cilla indicates that she is not ready for more. When their first kiss is broken off, Cilla tells Ford "I've already hit my quota of mistakes for this decade" and makes it clear that she needs time to think about it before she will let a romantic relationship develop between them (63). When Ford kisses Cilla the second time, the whole episode is a curious mix of sexual aggression and sensitivity. Ford is insulted when Cilla calls him fastidious for being troubled by her miserable living conditions, and disproves her by jerking her up to her toes, swooping in and plundering her mouth (69). The following description paints a picture of Ford that is completely in keeping with sexual script dictation of male sexual aggression: "The bolt of lust that slammed into him blasted away any thoughts of niceties. He wanted, he took. It was as elemental as that" (69). The next passages describe the kiss as potent, raw, and randy, and it leaves Cilla with "muscles quivering and nerve ends quaking" (70). This kiss seems to paint Ford as more of an alpha hero: dominant, aggressive, and dangerous. Cilla even says as much: "You're a dangerous man, Ford. ... I don't know how I missed that. I'm usually good at spotting dangerous men" (70). However, this claim is contradicted by Ford's immediate words and actions, and it seems it is not as elemental as that, after all. His response to her telling him he is dangerous is a casual dismissal of the idea: "I guess I wear it well, since I've missed that my entire life myself" (70). Despite calling Ford dangerous, there is no indication that Cilla feels threatened by him in any physical way. Ford tells her she should come stay in his spare bedroom, and emphasizes that Cilla can feel safe from any unwanted attention from him as she can lock the door and he promises not to kick the door down unless the house is on fire, and "Even then, since I've never kicked one down, you'd probably have plenty of warning" (70). Her response to this is to tell him that "If and when I sleep at your house, it won't be in the spare bedroom" (70). It seems highly unlikely that Cilla would contemplate sleeping with Ford, if she felt he was dangerous in the sense that he would do her physical harm. Rather, it's an acknowledgement that Ford threatens to upset her emotional equilibrium.

Met with resistance, Ford just shakes his head and lets the whole matter drop. Ford does not exhibit the alpha hero's typical need to control the situation, or the heroine. When Cilla tells him she wants to stay where she is, he simply accepts this and moves on. Again, he shows that he is sensitive to her needs and wishes, and he is not the kind of man who will steamroll over them. The fact that she is not yet ready for more does not deter Ford from pursuing her, however, and the scene ends with him telling her to come over to his place later and going home.

The next time they kiss, it is Cilla who is the initiator, but also the one who breaks it off. This time, she is the one who is described as forceful and aggressive: “[she] grabbed him by the hair, crushed her mouth greedily to his” (117). In the preceding exchange between the pair Ford shows some jealousy of Cilla sleeping with her ex-husband (this time in the sense of just sleeping). As Ford knows by now that Cilla will not accept his hospitality, he instead lends Cilla his old sleeping bag so they will have one each. Ford's affable self-confidence is again on display when he tells her she is not having sex with Steve, because the person she really wants to sleep with is himself. When she asks him why, if that is true, she has not slept with him yet, he tells her it is because she is not ready and that he can wait until she is. Evidently, Ford's beliefs are correct, as Cilla confirms her interest in him by kissing him in the manner mentioned above, breaks the kiss abruptly and leaves him to “think about that while you're waiting” (117).

A few pages later, Ford confuses both Cilla and himself by not taking the opportunity to escalate their physical relationship. They share a moment when Cilla shares her emotional vulnerability after being threatened earlier that day and Ford comforts her. The moment starts to get intimate, when Ford suddenly says they have to get out of the house. Ford's reason makes it clear that he wants this to be more than a casual hook-up: “Because I could talk you into bed right now, and I really want to. Then we'd both wonder if it was because you had a bad day and I was just here. Angst and awkwardness ensue. So... let's go get ice cream” (130-131). Cilla proceeds to tell him that she wants him to talk her into bed, but he is determined and drags her off for ice cream instead of taking the opportunity to have sex with her.

While Ford is open about his interest in having sex with Cilla, he is also concerned about the circumstances under which it should take place. This becomes very clear when Ford rejects Cilla's initiation of a sexual encounter. This is a feminine thing to do, and Ford knows it and says as much: “I can pretty much feel myself growing breasts as I say this” (169).

Knowing that he risks calling his manhood into question does not keep him from rejecting Cilla's advances, however:

“. . . I meant to say, even at the risk of sounding like a girl, this isn't right.”  
She slid her hand over his crotch. “Then what's this?”

“The penis has a mind of its own. And boy, oh boy,” he managed as he took her wandering hand and yanked it up. “I should get an award for this. A monument. Let's just step back.”

“Step *back*” Shock and insult leaped out with the words. “Why? What the hell is wrong with you?”

“The penis is asking those exact questions. But the thing is . . . wait,” he ordered, taking a firm hold of her arms when she started to jerk away. “The thing is, Cilla, you don't just toss stuff out when you're churned up. Just like when you're churned up you don't . . . lock the barn door.”

“It's just sex.”

“Maybe. Maybe. But when it happens? It's going to be just you and me. Just you. . . . Just me. No Steve or Steve's mom, no Janet Hardy, no letters. Just us, Cilla. I want lots of alone with you.” (170)

The way Ford refers to his penis having a mind of its own is in keeping with the male sexual script, which stages the penis as a tool to be used, distanced from the body and the self. However, Ford's behavior conflicts with the sexual script: he is the one acting as gatekeeper, he is deciding how far the sexual encounter should go and prevents its escalation. That they are both aware that this is in conflict with sexual script and atypical for a man is evident by Cilla's shock and Ford's own comments about how he risks sounding like a girl and should be awarded for showing such restraint in doing this. Ford's behavior during this encounter contradicts the idea that men will pursue any opportunity to arrive at the end point of sexual intercourse.

When they finally do get to the end zone of sexual intercourse, she is the one who initiates, contrary to sexual script and the norm in romance novels. The location for the scene is her bedroom, which is also common in romance novels, but it takes place in the morning, not at night. Also, there is no mention of or use of contraception, even though this was found to be common in romance novels published after the year 2000. The rest of the encounter is in accordance with the norm in romance. She orgasms twice: first as a result of Ford stimulating her manually and the second time in a simultaneous orgasm during penile-vaginal intercourse. Out of all the seven depictions of or references to sexual intercourse between Ford and Cilla, he is the initiator only once. She is definitively more in charge than the norm, but he is describes as “ravishing” her once. This scene takes place in the kitchen, and culminates with the typical simultaneous orgasm during penile-vaginal intercourse. During this scene, Ford is described as controlled by his lust and need for Cilla, “[a] new and rampant hunger surged



through him, a whip of need and now. ... Its dark excitement pushed him to take, to fill her with the same wild desperation that burned in him (236-237).” This encounter effectively shows that Ford *can* be the sexually aggressive party, he just does not want or need to every time. Once again, it seems that Ford does not feel the typically male need to constantly prove his masculinity, while at the same time this encounter is an instance where he does prove it. After “playing Viking and maiden” and proving that he is capable of ravishing a woman, however, Ford talks about doing the dishes. The decidedly masculine sexual performance is offset by this domestic, and traditionally feminine, task.

It is perhaps not surprising, given what has already been said about Heath and Ford, that it is Ford who diverts the most from the sexual script. Ford is a beta hero, and as a beta hero he does not conform to a lot of the usual signifiers of masculinity. Just as he contradicts other markers of masculinity, he does so sexually. However, he is also portrayed as able to take charge sexually. This proves that he is not *only* sensitive and considerate, as there is a side to him that is very much in keeping with traditional masculinity and the male sexual script. Ford’s sexual behavior is a continuous balancing act between traditional masculinity and emotional sensitivity and his unwavering confidence makes it seem effortless.

#### **2.2.4 Demisexuality and the Interwined Nature of Love and Sex in Romance**

An interesting perspective on the nature of sexuality in romance novels comes from Jodi McAlister. Her subject matter is category or series romance novels, i.e. romance novels published by Harlequin/Mills & Boon, but her argument is also generalized to include the wider genre of romance. Her claim is that what she has termed “‘compulsory demisexuality’”: the idea that sex and love are, and should be, tied together” is the governing paradigm of romance (300). According to McAlister, “[s]omeone who is demisexual can only experience sexual attraction to someone to whom they have an emotional connection,” and because demisexuality intersects with the idea of one true love in the romance genre this means that the protagonists can only experience true sexual pleasure with each other (300). This paradigm of compulsory demisexuality is gendered; while the heroines already are demisexual, the heroes become demisexual (300).

McAlister states that the demisexual paradigm has become more expressly gendered over time (308). This also changes the happy ending from a victory for demisexual relationships in general to a more specifically female victory (308). In modern category

romances, a frequent subject is that “once a hero has had sex with the heroine, it becomes extremely difficult for him to have pleasurable sex with someone else” (307). This is because the heroine has given him “love as a sexually transmitted disease” and he is now becoming demisexual (307). The heroines in these novels, on the other hand, believe themselves to be demisexual from the start (304). Therefore they are often horrified by the intense desire they feel for the hero, which often results in a sexual encounter and subsequent guilt, before the establishing of an emotional connection (304). While this would seem to disprove the heroine’s demisexuality, the intersection of one true love with demisexuality in romance novels works to have her desire prove it (307). As McAlister puts it: “[h]er desire becomes a sort of physical manifestation of a metaphysical bond, her body recognizing the man that will be her soul’s true partner, even if she does not yet know him” (307). Thus, when the hero admits that he has changed, that she has made him demisexual too, the happy ending takes place in “her sexual world, the world where love and sex are linked” (307).

A very similar idea is voiced by Wendell and Tan, though in slightly less scholarly terms. They confirm that the romance genre is obsessed with “the heroine (a) having excellent sex, and (b) not having sex at all unless it’s with the One True Love, who’s also usually the sole person who can make her come” (37). Through the workings of what is dubbed the heroine’s “Magic Hoo Hoo” and the hero’s “Mighty Wang,” the physical bonding between the heroine and hero always becomes part of their emotional bonding. Every romance heroine is in possession of a Magic Hoo Hoo that “creates an instant emotional bond” and one taste of it is all it takes, “the hero won’t be satisfied with anything else, physically or emotionally” (38), as “she of the Magic Hoo Hoo brings him to monogamous attachment” (87). For the hero’s part, his Mighty Wang not only has the power to bestow upon women “immense orgasm even if they’ve never located their own clitoris,” but it “reveals that the heroine is his One and Only” (86). What is highlighted by Wendell and Tan is that, in a romance, sex is always meaningful for both partners, as “romance capitalizes on the idea that both men *and* women need emotional connections to truly enjoy sex” (153-154). It seems to be an acknowledged element of the romance novel that depictions of sexual acts between the hero and heroine is usually an expression of love between them, even if one or both of them have yet to realize this. This was also evident in Cabrera and Ménard findings, where one of the qualitative themes of orgasm descriptions is termed “Orgasm as a Shared Love Experience (204).” Their analysis found that “[r]omance novel orgasms were often described as a form of merger or an expression of love and tenderness between characters” (204). Since orgasm is

seen as the true measure of sexual fulfillment, this finding could also be seen as being in support of the idea that, in romance novels, great sex – true sexual pleasure, is only possible with the one person that is perfect for you.

In *Match Me If You Can*, it does appear as if Heath is affected in the usual way by the heroine's Magic Hoo Hoo. Heath is unable to shake the experience of having sex with Annabelle. When planning out his proposal to another woman, a woman who has all the qualities he looks for in a wife and is, on paper, his perfect match, his line of thinking inevitably strays to thoughts of Annabelle and their night together. He tries to convince himself that "making love with Annabelle ... hadn't been important" and that the "only reason he thought about so often was because he couldn't repeat the experience, so it had taken on the lure of the forbidden" (301). He is, of course, mistaken, making love with Annabelle was important, and now nothing else will provide the same physical or emotional satisfaction. While this could be seen as evidence of Heath becoming demisexual, the case for compulsory demisexuality is still weak, as Annabelle does not seem to believe she is demisexual or exhibit any surprise about her own desire for Heath, nor is she ashamed about her desire. She feels guilty for compromising her professional ethics, but not for having sex with Heath. Admittedly, Annabelle has already realized she has fallen in love with Heath, and so at least on her part, there was an acknowledged emotional connection in place when they first have sex. However, the following morning, as she believes he does not and cannot love her back, she puts on a performance of nonchalance in order to continue their professional relationship and move on herself. She tells him she used him to get over her issues, that she "needed someone safe who could help me reconnect with my body, someone I wasn't emotionally involved with" (223). That she would use this lie is telling of her attitude towards her own sexuality: there is no hint at shame in having sex without emotional involvement.

In *Tribute*, the depiction of orgasm during the first occurrence of sexual intercourse could definitively be described a merger or expression of love and tenderness between Cilla and Ford. Given what has been said about the intertwined nature of love and sex in romance novels, this is not surprising. The act of sexual intercourse is also described as a new experience for both of them: "He touched her with a care, a curiosity, as if she were the first woman he'd touched. And made her feel as if she'd never been touched before" (224). This description presents the experience as equally new for both of them: there is no difference in the newness. There is also no difference in the effect the sex has on them afterwards. That is to say, there is no indication that Ford suddenly becomes obsessed with Cilla as a result of

having had sex with her, or vice versa, for that matter. Just as Annabelle does not exhibit any signs of being demisexual before meeting Heath, there is no indication that this is the case for Cilla either. There is no hint of shame at her desire, and no mention of sex never having been good before. The same is true for Ford, there is no indication that either of these protagonists are initially demisexual. However, Cilla does describe their first time together as “the best sex of her life” and wonders if that means “it was all downhill from here” (224). There is a clear indication that, even though they have yet to fully acknowledge it, the sex is great because they love each other, as their feelings for each other and mutual trust lead to passionate and mutual pleasure. This does not necessarily amount to compulsory demisexuality, as there is no mention or direct indication that either Ford or Cilla believes it would be impossible to experience the same level of sexual pleasure with someone else. That this sex is meaningful is nonetheless made clear, both by the long build-up, and the established fact that there are emotions involved for both of them. Given these circumstances, what is shown is the usual presentation in romance novels: that an emotional involvement always makes the sex that much better.

While the case for compulsory demisexuality, as McAlister has defined it, is not entirely convincing in either *Tribute* and *Match Me If You Can*, there are undeniably emotions involved in the hero and heroine’s sexual behavior with each other. The notion promoted in romance seems to be that sex is better with emotions involved, because that means both partners care about each other’s pleasure. Part of the hero’s appeal is the way he cares about the heroine and is attentive to her as a sexual partner, which may often be represented as a practically magical ability to please her sexually. Romance novels are, after all, all about emotions and emotional connections, and this is the next theme of this thesis.

## 2.3 Emotional Heroes

Emotion is an essential part of the romance genre. The narrative is centered on the protagonists' emotional responses to each other. That a romance novel is "emotionally satisfying" is even part of the RWA's definition of the genre. That definition highlights how the reader's own emotional response when reading a romance is key to the genre's appeal. Seeing as the protagonists' emotion is such an essential part of the story, it seems logical that part of what makes a hero attractive is the way his emotions are portrayed. It follows that the portrayal of how the hero feels, and how this manifests itself, is a large part of why readers engage in romance reading. In effect, the way the hero's emotions and emotional behavior are depicted is crucial for the success of the entire novel, and has much to do with how attractive the hero will be to the reader. The following discussion presents an outline of the gendered nature of emotional expression as described by Shields and how Heath and Ford relate to these standards of emotional behavior.

### 2.3.1 Emotion is Gendered

One of Shields' primary concerns in her book is the need to appreciate that our beliefs about emotion both influence and are influenced by our beliefs about gender differences. As mentioned above, Shields states that there exist emotional stereotypes concerning each gender, and that these boil down to the view that a man *has* emotions, while a woman *is* emotional. In her estimation, the "distinctive differentiation made by emotion stereotypes between emotional female/unemotional male is ... a prominent theme in Western culture, I believe especially in the US (14)." As Shields explains, many of these stereotypes come down to ideas about men and women's differing capacities for management of their emotion (53-54). The underlying notion of the emotion stereotype is that men control their emotion, while women are likely to be controlled by their emotion (53). When it comes to the ideal display of emotion, Shields observes that "[w]hile much is made of getting in touch in with one's true feelings, the aim of getting in touch is to get in control" (85). The prevailing emotional ideal in contemporary hegemonic culture is "expression of deeply felt emotion under such control that it can be telegraphed by minimal gesture, tone of voice, language, or facial movement" (85). While this ideal is labelled "manly emotion," it is an important distinction that manly emotion is not male emotion (85). Manly emotion is a sign of manhood to be achieved, and is the "standard for 'appropriate emotion' for both sexes" (85).

When it comes to display of emotion there are social pressures to show the appropriate emotion in any given situation (112). However, there is also internal pressure to feel the right emotion and “we deliberately shape our felt emotion ... [t]he wrong emotion, or too much or too little, makes us ‘out of sync’ with ourselves” (113). The gendered styles of emotion, female extravagant expressiveness and the telegraphed style of intensely felt, but controlled, emotion that is “manly emotion,” are both considered appropriate emotional behavior in certain contexts (113). While “[e]xtravagant emotion is a legitimate way to ‘do’ nurturance; ‘manly emotion’ is called for in just about every other situation” (113-114). For men, it becomes a challenge to reach the emotional ideal while meeting the society’s other requirements for manhood:

Contemporary dominant culture in the US encourages men to be good friends, good lovers, good fathers, which means “be sensitive” and risk being feminine. Contemporary dominant culture also requires manly emotional self-control, which is often understood as “be inexpressive” which is not only incompatible with the emotional extravagance standard, but more threateningly, also incompatible with being a genuine person. (114)

Thus, it becomes a challenge to reconcile “competing emotional standards in a way that can be experienced as consistent with ... a coherent sense of authentic identity” (114).

That men are emotionally inexpressive is part of the gender stereotype, and the belief in men’s “constricted emotional range, suppression of felt emotion and diminished intensity of emotion” has been widely problematized since the 1970s (119). Shields, on the other hand, problematizes the view that emotional inexpressivity, whether innate or learned, is a trait at all (121). Her analysis of the notion of masculine inexpressivity reveals these three themes:

(1) In accounts of masculine inexpressivity historical time and culture is compressed, such that a stereotype of a certain subset of white males in the 1960s has come to be treated as a universal and enduring marker of masculinity. ... (2) Emotional inexpressivity seems to have more to do with talking about emotion than showing it. In other words, inexpressivity does not generally appear to encompass the absence of feeling or showing emotion, but more accurately, reluctance or disinterest in emotion as a matter to be discussed. And, perhaps most surprising, (3) emotion is often not counted as emotion. (124)

That emotion is often not counted as emotion is central to what Shields labels “*the fundamental paradox in the emotional female/unemotional male stereotype*”: that the stereotype of anger is male (140). Shields asks: “is anger, in fact, viewed as emotionality when displayed or experienced by adult men?” (140). The answer has a lot to do with entitlement, and the way status and privilege is maintained by maintaining gendered social

arrangements. When the right person, meaning a white, adult man, displays anger, it is more often considered an appropriate response to the given circumstances, it is considered effective emotion (165). Anger from a child, a person of another race or a woman is judged differently (165). Women's anger, in particular, is often "represented in terms that emphasize anger's ineffectual form: petulant, bitchy ... or diffusely out of control ('hysterical,' ergo impossible to harness in the service of reason)" (165).

Shields asserts that "[b]eliefs about emotion as correct or incorrect, socially appropriate or inappropriate, and healthy or unhealthy are themselves deeply implicated in creating and sustaining gender boundaries" (165-166). Throughout the book, Shields demonstrates how women's display of emotion is more likely to be interpreted as ineffectual, out of control and the woman herself as "merely emotional." That female emotion is viewed in this way has indications for men if they attempt to display emotion in a similar style. This is very evident in the how the "quiche-eating Mr. Sensitive" failed to be accepted as an ideal of the feeling male, and has instead been the source of much ridicule since the 1970s (125). The Mr. Sensitive version of the feeling male "achieves emotional capacity by adding feminine emotional style to the masculine repertoire" with the objective of being "androgynous *and* manly" (125, italics in original). However, as Shields observes, "the man who adopts a feminine emotionality is not . . . congratulated for triumphing over constricted gender roles. He is viewed as weak or disingenuous" (125-126). Because a man's masculinity is never taken for granted, but has to be constantly performed and asserted, it is impossible for a man to do emotion the in feminine way and retain his masculinity (126).

The gendered beliefs about emotion have everything to do with gender inequality, and Shields points out that "[i]n order to assert emotional superiority without relinquishing masculine privilege it is essential that the desirable or ideal form of emotion be distinguished from it weaker, ineffectual, or 'merely emotional' version" (126). While the stereotype of the unemotional male suggests that appropriate emotional display for men is to display little emotion, this is in fact not so, and media images suggest that the ideal of manly emotion actually consists of expressions of strongly felt emotion (126). The movie *Jerry Maguire* is used as an example of a media image of ideal manly emotion. In this movie, Jerry's manly and authentic display of emotion is contrasted with the way the women in a support group talk about their emotions in a cliché-filled conversation (129). The emerging image of ideal emotional display for a man is that "a *real* man doesn't have to talk about his genuine emotions, he just has to show that he has them" (129).

Rotundo has observed that modern masculine ideals all have that in common that they represent a turning away from women, both in interpersonal relationships, and traits associated with femininity (289). Kimmel, too, emphasizes that proving one's masculinity means distancing oneself from signs of femininity (5). What Shields shows, is that the "appropriate" display of manly emotion is part of how masculinity is proved and asserted, and part of how gender boundaries are upheld. That there has, so far, been little overlap between the academic fields of gender studies and the psychology of emotion is not to the benefit of either field, as this prevents expression of emotion and its interpretation from being identified as relevant to and part of the gender discourse (12-13). When emotion has been part of feminist theory, it has either been as an assertion that "Female emotionality is healthy," or as revisionist claim that "It's really men who are hobbled by emotion because they don't know how to do it right" (14). Both of these options presuppose gender differences in emotion, which is what Shields shows is a misconception.

Expression of emotion is loaded with social meaning. As Shields states, "[a] huge proportion of interpersonal interaction is taken up with the comprehending and responding to emotion, or discussing emotion-laden situations and issues" (176). However, discussion of emotion in everyday conversation rarely entails using "emotion labels," and naming an emotion directly (176). Naming emotion carries a statement of value of the emotion, "its authenticity, rationality, legitimacy, and hedonic tone" (177). That naming emotion occurs infrequently, despite the importance of emotion in human interaction and existence, says a lot about how visible (or invisible, as the case may be) evaluations of emotion are in our daily life. When it comes to romance novels, then, it seems reasonable that the frequent devaluation of female emotions has had strong implications for the devaluation of a genre that is both highly emotional and closely associated with women. What's more, it seems to be of considerable interest to examine how romance heroes conform to or differ from the standards of "correct" emotional behavior.

### **2.3.2 Romance Heroes and Emotion**

The invisibility of emotion labels in conversation seems to extend to the direct identification of the emotional behavior of romance characters, as very few critics have anything to say on the subject. What has been said seems to indicate that romance heroes usually resemble the stereotype of the unemotional or inexpressive male, at least initially in the narrative.



Radway is a notable exception, as she found that the tender and nurturing qualities of the hero was central to a romance novel's appeal to the readers she interviewed (145-151). According to Radway, at a certain point in the romance, the hero suddenly treats the heroine tenderly, even though he has previously only treated her with cruelty or indifference (147). This was crucial to her psychoanalytical idea that the hero provides the heroine with a mother figure and allows the heroine to "return to the passive state of infancy where all of her needs were satisfied and all her fears were erased at her mother's breast" (147). The reader, in turn, will vicariously experience the nurturing of the hero and find contentment and happiness in this (151). The hero's sudden capacity for tenderness and kindness is never explained, and in Radway's estimation this indicates that "[t]he hero is permitted to simply graft tenderness onto his unaltered male character" (148). Radway's evaluation of this is telling, not only of her view of the genre and its impact, but also of her beliefs about emotion: "the genre fails to show that if the emotional repression and independence that characterize men are actually to be reversed, the entire notion of what it means to be male will have to be changed" (148). According to Radway, this miraculous transformation in the hero indicates that:

The romance inadvertently tells the reader, then, that she will receive the kind of care she desires only if she can find a man who is *already* tender and nurturant. ... The reader is not shown how to find a nurturant man nor how to hold a distant one responsible for altering his lack of emotional availability. (148, italics in original)

While Radway's opinions about the romance genre seems to demand a lot from a literary genre, they also belittle the readers' abilities to separate fantasy from reality, and completely ignores the possibility that entertaining a fantasy might not necessarily represent what someone wants in real life.

Also back in the 1980s, Mussell observed that all male characters in romance novels, excepting a few recent heroes, are "emotionally remote from the heroines" and "especially circumspect about emotional matters" (125). This, too, seems to echo the stereotype of the unemotional male. Both Radway and Mussel are commenting on what Wendell and Tan have labelled "Old Skool Romance," and their observations are not necessarily relevant to the more recently published "New Skool Romance." However, much the same idea as Mussel observed about romance heroes is voiced by Ramsdell in a general characterization of the contemporary romance. She says that "heroes at first often appear reserved, even aloof, and somewhat mysterious, and are typically unwilling to become emotionally involved with anyone (50)." Usually, the hero is wary of emotional involvement, because another woman has hurt him

badly in the past or because of some other issues that have left him believing himself unworthy of love (50). Ramsdell also notes that the reverse situation, “with the heroine being wary party and the hero knowing exactly how he feels,” is also possible (50). This echoes what Putney has said about stories about a woman being saved by the love of a good man being rarer than the opposite, because the opposite scenario can rest on the female triumph of taming and healing the injured lion. With regard to the theme of female triumph in taming and civilizing the dangerous hero that is central to many of the essays in *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*, there is one aspect of the claim made with that theory that is particularly interesting. This is the idea that the civilization of the hero consists of “teaching him to combine his warrior qualities with the protective, nurturing aspects of *his nature*” (Krentz 6, italics mine). This theory, as presented by romance writers, is based on an understanding of nurturing emotions already being part of the hero’s, the man’s, nature. He just has to accept it as part of himself.

That men, in real life, do not usually express their emotions in the same way as women is a subject that Owen has touched upon. She asserts that women have a greater interest in talking about emotions and do more talking about emotions than men, and points to one likely appeal of romance heroes for readers (542-543). This “resolving dialogue,” as Owen calls it, is “often the real climax” of the book (542). According to Owen, many of the romance readers she interviewed “commented with regret on how uncommunicative men could be” (543). The resolving dialogue of the romance novel “posits an emotional situation that is unusually attractive to women, where the action of the plot resides in the dialogue and the hero, unlike perhaps the men they meet in real life, eventually does explore his feelings in a real dialogue” (543).

### **2.3.3 Men Who Love Openly and Joyously**

From what has already been said about Heath and Ford, it should be clear already that Heath and Annabelle’s relationship follows what Ramsdell describes as the usual way in romance novels, with Heath being the one who is at first reserved and unwilling to become emotionally involved with anyone. This also fits with Heath being an alpha hero: he is dominant and hyper-masculine, and a feminine style of emotional expression would be at odds with this. Heath is initially very masculine in display of emotion, and he seems to have mastered the manly emotion ideal of being in complete control of his emotions. However, during the course of the narrative, this is seen to change dramatically.

There is a big difference in what Heath expresses and what he feels. Because this novel is a “New Skool” romance, there are many scenes from the hero’s point of view. This means that the reader is given insight to Heath’s emotional struggles and insecurities early on. While alone in his house, Heath recalls a previous relationship by looking at an invitation to his own wedding which he has kept “as a reminder of the gut-wrenching pain he’d felt when he’d first opened it” (31). The wedding invitation had been sent to him by mistake, which alerted him that he was a “cog in a well-oiled family production” of a three-generational wedding date (32). Being used in such a way by a woman he trusted and loved hurt Heath so much that he now believes that “[h]is emotional survival depended on not falling in love” (33). Heath seems thoroughly convinced that he has mastered his emotion to such a degree that he has full control over falling, or rather, not falling, in love again. He does still harbor some hope, though, and is certain that “he’d love his kids, that was for damn sure. He’d never let them grow up as he had. As for his wife... That would take a while. But once he was sure she’d stick, he’d give it a try” (33). Heath’s pain and insecurities is shown to the reader when he is alone. This allows Heath to still be seen as conforming to the standard of manly emotion, since the world he inhabits still has not seen him as anything but in total control of his emotions, while also presenting him as someone to sympathize with.

As mentioned, Heath shows the world very little of what he feels. He also does not talk about matters of emotion, not even with his trusted employee and good friend, Bodie. Despite having a close friendship, Bodie and Heath do not talk about emotional matters: there is no mention of them ever having that kind of conversation and there is never a scene showing them talking about emotional matters, even though there are many scenes from Heath’s point of view. The first time Heath is shown to open up about his pain and insecurity, it is to Annabelle. When she presses him on his real name, Heath tells her:

“Look, Annabelle, I grew up in a trailer park. Not a nice mobile home park – that would have been paradise. These heaps weren’t good enough for scrap. The neighbors were addicts, thieves, people who’d gotten lost in the system. My bedroom looked out over a junkyard. I lost my mother in a car accident when I was four. My old man was decent guy when he wasn’t drunk, but that wasn’t very often. I earned everything I have, and I’m proud of that. I don’t hide where I came from.” (88)

As much as Heath insists he is not hiding where he came from, that is exactly what he is doing. While being open about the physical circumstances, he is hiding the emotional ramifications of his upbringing, which anyone will realize are significant after such a traumatic childhood. From Heath’s description, it is clear that it was traumatic, and that it still

troubles him. However, his masculinity resides on presenting a tough, macho exterior, which does not allow for the display of vulnerability or sensitivity. The expression of manly emotion means there are no big, open expressions of emotion, and hinting at a deep vulnerability by describing his childhood is as far as Heath's emotional expression extends at this point, and he quickly shuts the conversation down.

When Heath's expression of manly emotion starts to fall apart for real is after having had sex with Annabelle. As already discussed, feelings are always involved when the protagonists in a romance novel have sex, even if they have yet to realize those feelings or the extent of those feelings themselves. Sex in romance novels is an emotional experience. When Annabelle lies to him the next morning, telling him she used him to get over her own issues with having sex with a man in order to pursue a romantic relationship with Dean, the quarterback Heath has been trying to land as a client, Heath has an emotional reaction that disturbs him. His reaction makes it clear that he has feelings for Annabelle, although he has yet to realize this himself: "He didn't understand the smoldering mass of resentment growing in his chest, especially since she had just handed him a free pass" (225).

From this point onwards, Heath's emotional control is coming undone. After a business trip he cannot take going home to his own, empty house and "he'd heard himself giving the driver Annabelle's address. This sense that he was thrashing around threatened his mental toughness" (266). Clearly, mental toughness is really emotional control, and his is breaking down. Still, when Heath comes to the realization that Annabelle would be perfect as his wife, the emotional walls he has put up to protect himself from heartache have not fully come down. Even when he proposes to Annabelle, he has not acknowledged that his own feelings are actually those of love for her. Proposing without being able to tell Annabelle he loves her proves to be a major miscalculation, however, as Annabelle does not overlook the missing words: "Did anybody hear him mention the L-word? Because I sure didn't" (337). Unwilling to marry a man, even a man she admits to being in love with, without having him return those feelings in full, she refuses his proposal.

Her refusal leaves Heath reeling and he gets drunk "just like his old man used to" (343). In his drunken stupor Heath's thoughts revolve around how he now resembles his father, as he too has now smacked around a woman, "not physically, maybe, but he'd beat the hell out of her emotionally. And she'd smacked him right back. Got him right where it hurt" (343). While Heath is comparing himself to his abusive father, the insight to his thoughts reveals that he is nothing like his father. Heath clearly cares about the pain he has caused

Annabelle, at the same time as his thoughts reveal his own emotional vulnerability. While Heath wishes he could have told her what she needed to hear, “he couldn’t give Annabelle anything but the truth. She meant too much to him” (343). At this moment, the insight the reader has into Heath’s mind is crucial to his likability and continued attractiveness. It shows that Heath, despite just having proposed to a woman he knows loves him and consequently thought would accept his proposal without any declaration of love from himself, which is a pretty calculating and arrogant move, is really an honorable guy who could not bring himself to lie. That he is so hurt is of course no surprise to the reader, who knows what Heath’s true feelings for Annabelle are even though he has yet to realize and accept this himself.

When realization finally dawns on Heath it comes with the prompting of his other matchmaker, Portia. Having heard of his disastrous proposal, she comes to see him the next day and set him straight about his emotions.

“... You do have all the classic symptoms.”

“Of what?”

“Of a man in love, of course.”

He flinched.

“Look at yourself.” Her voice softened, and he thought he heard a note of genuine sympathy. “This isn’t about a deal gone bad. This is about your heart breaking.”

He heard a roaring inside his head.

She walked to the window. Her words drifted back to him muffled, as if she were having a hard time getting them out. “I think... I think this is the way love feels to people like you and me. Threatening and dangerous. We have to be in control, and love takes that away. People like us ... We can’t tolerate vulnerability. But despite our best efforts, sooner or later love seems to catch up with us. And then...” She drew a jagged breath. “And then we fall apart.”

He felt like he had been sucker punched. (350)

Losing control is at odds with manly emotion: intensely felt and equally intensely controlled emotion. To Heath, the dangerous alpha hero, this is what feels threatening and dangerous: losing control of his emotions. Heath’s emotional reserve and tight control is breaking down because he has fallen in love. This is evident by his state of dress and general appearance when he meets Annabelle again to declare his love for her, which is “mismatched, unkempt and unshaven” (369). The “polished veneer” Heath has placed such importance on is now “stripped away” (369). The image of Heath is no longer the image of a person in total control of himself and his surroundings. This image is of a person who has lost control of their emotion, someone who is in fact being controlled by strong emotion. That is a highly feminine emotional state, and it is therefore all the more interesting that the masculine, alpha male Heath is not punished for exhibiting feminine emotion.

This is also the scene where Heath finally reveals his real name. The declaration of love does not go as smooth as Heath expects, as Annabelle's reaction to seeing him is to tell him he should not have come, it's "a waste of time" (369). When Heath responds by telling her: "Hey, this is supposed to be like in *Jerry Maguire*. Remember? 'You had me at hello,'" Annabelle answers him with "Skinny women are pushovers" (369). In an effort to prove his sincerity, Heath lets Annabelle in on the secret of his name. Earlier in the novel, his last name, Champion, while suspiciously fitting for a sports manager, is actually just the English spelling of the original Italian, Campione. Now, he tells her his full, real name is "Harley Davidson Campione," and the comment of "[m]y old man loved a good joke, as long as it wasn't on him," again highlights the emotional pain his father inflicted (370). This revelation serves two purposes: proving Heath's sincerity and disproving his connotation with his classic namesake, the beastly Heathcliff. Heath is not the Beast after all. Annabelle, however, is still reluctant to let him "play on her sympathies," and takes his declaration of love to be "carefully calculated, chosen for the sole purpose of closing a deal" (370-371). In the scene with Portia, Heath expressed his belief that saying the L-word was unnecessary, exclaiming: "It's a word! Action is what counts" (349). Annabelle's refusal proved him wrong, however, and it seems that the message conveyed here is that *both* action and words is necessary. When Annabelle finally does believe Heath when he tells her he loves her, it is after he has both said the words *and* proved it through the action of ignoring important business calls, effectively showing her that he cares more about her and winning her love than his previously all-consuming career.

Early in the novel, the impression given of Heath is that that he does not talk about his feelings with anyone, not even Bodie, and he does not show anyone his pain and insecurities. In all respects, he is the very image of ideal, manly emotion. Yet, he starts to open up with Annabelle about his troubled childhood and difficult past. In the romance narrative, this is not surprising because the reader is meant to recognize that Annabelle is the woman who can both tame and heal the beast, and meeting her is supposed to bring about a change in his behavior. The story told here is the one of the alpha hero's transformation that comes when he learns to combine his aggressive and tough side with his sensitive, nurturing side. This transformation has everything to do with Heath talking about his emotions. Heath is unable to tell Annabelle that he loves her when proposing, and so she refuses. Annabelle only accepts Heath's proposal when he is able to both show her and tell that he loves her. Importantly, this only happens after he loses control of his emotions, and after he learns to express his emotions verbally. These are both emotional behaviors closely associated with women, and

consequently often devaluated. In this novel, however, a feminine display of emotion is the key to winning the woman's heart.

Ford, on the other hand, is a beta hero, he is the nice, sensitive guy who is not bound by the same constraints of constantly proving his masculinity. As already discussed, in Cilla and Ford's relationship it is she who is the wary one and he who knows exactly how he feels. Or, to use other terms, Cilla is the one who is hurt and Ford is the good man who saves her with his love.

Owen has commented on regarding romance heroes who eventually explore their emotions in a real dialogue, and how this is an attractive feature of the hero to romance readers. This idea is interesting in connection with Ford's behavior because there is no "eventually" with Ford: he is open about his feelings throughout the book. In many respects, Ford and Cilla bend the gender expectations: his profession could be considered feminine, hers is decidedly masculine; she is more sexually aggressive, he is considerate and sensitive during sexual encounters. This defiance of gender expectations extends to emotional behavior as well. Ford's ever-present sensitivity and consideration of Cilla's emotional state has already been discussed in relation to his sexual behavior. With Ford, consideration of his partner's emotions takes precedence over his admitted desire to have sex with her. When it comes to talking about emotional matters, too, Ford defies gender expectations. While Cilla is the initiator of most of their sexual encounters, Ford is the one who initiates every conversation about their feelings for each other and the nature of their relationship. Notably, it is also Ford who first realizes that his feelings for Cilla amounts to love. Following a dramatic scene where Cilla was violently attacked, Ford takes her home and tends to her bruises and cuts and the realization is described as equally powerful and violent: "he'd had it slammed into him, clutched in the meaty fist of fear and rage, in one hard and painful punch when he'd seen her sitting on the side of the road" (280). He does not, however, immediately tell her. Not because he does not want to or dare to, but because he knows this is not what Cilla needs at this time, which is "a shoulder to lean on, somebody to get her a bag of frozen peas and offer a quiet place to ... collect herself" (280). Again, Ford shows that he is sensitive and aware of Cilla's needs, and willing to wait for her to be in a better frame of mind before bringing about an escalation in their relationship.

A little later, when she has had a little time to "collect herself," he does tell her. The way he tells her and his description of his own realization can only be characterized as an open expression of emotion: "When I got there, and I saw you sitting on the side of the road.

So pale. The relief came first, waves of it. Waves. There she is. I didn't lose her. Waves of relief, Cilla, and this lightning strike at the same time. There she is. And I knew. I'm in love with you" (283). In addition to escalating the emotional side of their relationship by being the first person to realize that he is in love and telling the other person so, Ford is also the one who first proposes a permanent commitment to each other in marriage. While the proposal takes place after both have declared their love for each other, Cilla does not immediately accept. When she does accept, it is in a speech that makes highlights love as such a powerful emotion that it inevitably makes one vulnerable to being hurt, which makes being in love incredibly scary. When Cilla asks Ford if she could hurt him, he replies: "Cilla, you could rip my heart out in bloody pieces" (399). Taking this in and realizing that he can do the same to her is the turning point for Cilla as she asks herself "Wasn't that a hell of a thing? Wasn't that a miracle?" (399). The success of Ford and Cilla's love story resides in no small part on Ford's ability to express how he feels about Cilla so openly, this is what facilitates Cilla's ability to return his feelings in full.

Ford's emotion is emotion that is well managed. However, it is managed in a distinctly feminine way, a way that is considerate, nurturing, open, and sensitive. Long before either of them have come to realize that they love one another Ford is shown to be caring and nurturing, and Cilla recognizes this: "[a] hot meal, companionship. Help. All offered, she thought, without a need for asking" (153). Ford seems to be very much in touch with his caregiving and nurturing qualities from the start, unlike what is usually seen in the alpha heroes most commonly found in the genre, there is no considerable change wrought in him by falling in love with Cilla. During one conversation Cilla remarks to Ford that he is "frighteningly well adjusted. Or maybe just compared to me" (226). She tells Ford that she has "abandonment issues," and gives him "fair warning" that she expects "to be exploited and used, or I expect the attempt, and as a result, have successfully sabotaged any potentially long-term, healthy relationship I might have had" (226). Interestingly, and perhaps precisely because Ford is emotionally well adjusted himself, this information does not scare him or deter him from pursuing a relationship with her.

Both Kimmel and Fields have discussed anger as a particularly male emotion. Kimmel has stated that "[t]he turn of the twenty-first century also finds American men increasingly angry" (217). Shields has pointed out that anger is not only stereotypically male, but also frequently evaluated as illegitimate when displayed by women. In light of this, it is interesting to note that in *Tribute*, it is Cilla who is most often portrayed as angry or mad, and while Ford



also has some moments of righteous anger, he is portrayed as calm and collected most of the time. One instance is when the tabloid press is publishing stories about them and swarming Cilla's house. Cilla is the one exhibiting anger at the situation, while Ford is calm and takes the whole affair in stride. The way Cilla describes him is telling: "Not angry, she realized. Not upset. Not even especially irked. How had she managed to connect with someone so blessedly stable? (309)." This could be interpreted as Ford exhibiting a manly in control of his emotions, while Cilla can be viewed as displaying a typically female, over-emotional response. However, her anger is not portrayed as irrational or excessive.

Unlike Heath, Ford does not lose control of his emotions, and become *emotional* in that way. Nonetheless, he does exhibit a typically feminine style of dealing with emotional matters in being so willing to acknowledge feelings and talk about emotional matters. The emotional behavior of the protagonists in *Tribute*, that Ford is portrayed as more openly expressive of his emotions and less angry than Cilla, is another reversal of the gender stereotypes. Still, it is never suggested that Ford is unmanly and unattractive because of this. At the end of the day, Ford is not punished for his femininity or alternative masculinity, he is rewarded by getting the girl.

It is possible that romance heroes' emotions are inevitably coded as manly by readers because their masculinity is already established in other ways. It is impossible to confirm or deny whether or not this might be the case in this thesis as there is no way to know this without extensive study of readers' response to the portrayal of heroes' emotional expressions. However, I suggest that romance heroes can do emotion in a feminine way and still be considered attractive by heroine and readers because women generally find men who display emotions in a feminine way attractive. That this is likely is supported by what is found here: that these examples of the two major archetypes of romance heroes can both be said to exhibit a feminine emotional style. Romance novels are depictions of interpersonal, highly emotional, relationships between men and women and in romances, and the obligatory happy ending dictates that the man and woman always end up turning towards each other in a display of deeply felt emotion. How the hero displays emotion is thus crucial to both the success of the novel as "emotionally satisfying" and to the success of the relationship. It is an important factor to his attractiveness and appeal to both the heroine and the reader. This makes it highly interesting that it appears as if the men in romance novels can, in fact, do emotion the feminine way and be found attractive as a romantic partner, not despite, but because of it.



### 3 Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis I noted how the romance genre and the readers of the genre have frequently been the subject of critical and popular scorn, quite possibly resulting from a lack of understanding of the genre. That the romance genre is gendered in several different ways was also something I noted, and this steered me to the subject of gender as a focus for study of the genre. The research that has been done previously has tended to focus on the portrayals of women and the ideas about femininity that are promoted in romance novels. I therefore felt it would be most interesting to take a closer look at the other central character, the hero, and explore the ways these men and masculinity is represented in these types of books. Despite frequent denigration, romance novels are appealing to many women (and some men), and I believe the appeal is closely linked to the portrayal of the hero.

Historically, white, heterosexual men have been the standard against which others are measured, rendering their own gender largely invisible. Literary masculinity studies are about bringing historical and cultural perspectives on manhood into analysis of the representations of men in literature. What I set out to do was study the men in romance novels *as men*, examining their masculinity and how it corresponds to the hegemonic masculine ideal. My specific interest resides in what makes the romance heroes attractive. I posited that romance heroes conform to many aspects of hegemonic masculinity, but that they defy gender expectations when it comes to emotionality and that this is vital to their attractiveness.

What was found was that in one important aspect these two characters, Heath and Ford, are similar: they are both professionally successful and wealthy. As both Kimmel and Rotundo have pointed out, success in the traditionally all-male sphere of the workplace has been a cornerstone of the ideal American manhood. Both Kimmel and Rotundo identify the self-made man as masculine ideal, and although self-made successes have become few and far between in contemporary America, the heroes I have examined are indeed what one would call self-made men. However, the differences in Heath and Ford are reflected in the difference between their professions: where Heath has made his fortune from the predominantly male interest in professional sports, Ford is more moderately successful as a graphic novelist, which could be considered feminine for its association with the liberal arts.

The second indication of the difference between these two heroes is their physical appearance. Heath is described as incredibly good looking and sexy with words that emphasize his masculinity. While Ford is also described as good looking, he is described as

lean rather than muscular, and his appearance is not as overtly masculine. Both are, however, very tall men, and their height marks them as the man in relation to the heroines.

The differences between Heath and Ford also become evident when they are compared to the different types of romance heroes that critics of the romance genre have defined. Among these different types, it is the alpha hero and the beta hero that are the two most widely recognized prototypes of romance heroes. Each of the heroes I have examined fit one of these prototypes well. Heath is the alpha hero: hyper-masculine, strong, dominant, rich, in control, and confident, but also harboring emotional wounds from a traumatic childhood and previous relationships. Ford, on the other hand, fits the descriptions of the beta hero: a sensitive, self-confident, nice guy who does not feel the need to prove his manliness through traditional demonstrations of masculinity. It is my argument that, because Heath and Ford fit each of these prototypes so well, what is true for each of them could be true for alpha and beta heroes in general as well.

The sexual script assigns different roles for each gender, where the male is the doer and the female is the gatekeeper. The male sexual script dictates that a man should be sexually aggressive, dominant, and constantly “going for it.” Within the male sexual script, the penis is seen as a tool and sexual acts as a job or performance to be evaluated. When it comes to the sexual behavior of romance protagonists, Ménard and Cabrera have found that this usually adheres closely to the sexual script. However, female orgasm is prioritized in romance novels, in contrast with real world findings. I have stated that this is not surprising, given that romances are acknowledged as fantasies and primarily written by women and for women. That sex is not portrayed as entirely realistic, but always as greatly satisfactory to both partners is to be expected.

The sexual behavior of Heath and Ford can be said to reflect their categorization as alpha and beta hero. Heath is overall portrayed as very masculine and his sexual behavior also stays close to the sexual script. Ford is not as conventionally masculine, and he deviates more from both the sexual script and the norm in romance novels. In most instances, Ford is not the initiator of a sexual act and he is frequently concerned with the emotional effects of sexual acts. However, Ford is also shown to be capable of aggressive sexual behavior, which confirms his masculinity. With Heath, on the other hand, the fact that he is generally depicted as hyper-masculine and true to the conventional male sexual script makes the few indications of deviant sexual behavior, such as being dominated by female partner and use of sex toys, all the more notable. This seems to indicate that the masculine alpha hero can also defy gender

expectations when it comes to sexuality and still be attractive. That romance heroes are often almost magically talented at satisfying their partners sexually comes with the function of romance novels as escapist fantasies written primarily for women, but it should not be ignored that whenever these two couples engage in sexual intercourse, Heath and Ford are equally satisfied by the encounter. The message promoted seems to be that when the two partners are emotionally involved, when they care about each other, the sex is invariably great for both parties. That it is emotionally significant for both partners is an unescapable element of sex in romance novels, as sex in romance novels is always linked to love. This is evident in *Tribute* and *Match Me if You Can* as well; the act of sexual intercourse is emotionally significant and has repercussions for both hero and heroine.

It is hardly surprising that sex and love are tied together in romance, as romantic love is the central theme in romance and emotionality has been said to be foregrounded as subject matter in this genre. The main focus of any romance novel is the relationship between a man and a woman; that emotions and feelings are important to the protagonists is openly acknowledged. Thus, the relation that Shields has observed between our beliefs about emotion and our beliefs about gender is especially enlightening when examining romance heroes. As Shields has pointed to, the manly emotion ideal is considered to be the correct emotional behavior for both men and women in contemporary American society. It is then very notable that both of the romance heroes I have considered do not conform to the manly emotion ideal. In fact, both Heath and Ford, who are representations of the two main prototypes of romance heroes, display distinctly feminine emotionality.

What has been described as a female triumph when the heroine is able to tame or heal the dominant and powerful alpha hero rests on the alpha man learning to express his emotion in a more feminine manner. For the alpha hero Heath, the final victory that is the betrothal is only possible after he has been overcome by the powerful emotion of love, losing control, and has expressed his feelings to the heroine both in action and in words. Ford, who is a beta hero, has a style of emotional expression that is feminine from the start: he talks about emotion, openly acknowledges the emotional significance of sexual acts, and when he realizes he is in love he is open about that realization as well. That he is emotional in this way is crucial for the romance to work, because that emotional style is what is needed for the relationship with his heroine to even become a relationship. In fact, Ford's feminine emotional style is one of his main attractive qualities.

It would, of course, be interesting to study larger selection of books and more heroes, to see if what I indicate is equally applicable to the genre as a whole. One aspect of my analysis that I wish to emphasize is the presence of the beta hero as a prototypical romance hero, as this is an element of the genre I believe many critics of it are unaware of. While the predominance of the alpha hero means that most romance heroes are exceedingly masculine, the presence of the beta hero indicates that men who do not conform to conventional masculinity in that way are also found to be highly attractive by many female readers. It would be very interesting to see more research into reader response when it comes to the content and messages of contemporary romance.

Through the work I have conducted with this thesis, I have come to believe that what Shields claims about female emotion and emotionality being devalued by society is a large contributor to why romance genre is so frequently scorned. What Shields says about the devaluation of female emotionality can be connected to and something Barlow and Krentz touched upon: that the conventional diction of romance novels is too effusive, descriptive, and makes too much use of stock phrases and literary figures that evoke a keyed-in emotional response in the reader to meet the standards of “good” literature (20-21). Studying the language employed in romance novels in order to evoke emotional responses could be an interesting endeavor, especially if connected with the perspective on the connection between gender and “correct” emotional expression that Shields has shown.

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