

Hearts and Hashtags:
How BookTok is Reshaping Romance Literature

Sarah Rose Wiseman

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Guilford College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The Honors Program in English and Media Studies

April 18th, 2024

Committee:

Cynthia Nearman, Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing

George Thomas, Visiting Assistant Professor of English and Creative Writing

Tracie Fellers, Visiting Assistant Professor of English and Creative Writing

Abstract

Patriarchy has been around forever and born from patriarchy is this idea that women can't 'have it all.' The idea means different things for different women. For Helen Gurley Brown, who brought the conversation to light in 1982, 'having it all' meant a woman being successful in every aspect of her life. The idea has been debated over for four decades. Many critics, like Tina Rodia, say the idea is harmful to women. Calling 'having it all,' a "narrow idea for women: professional mothers." But one thing for sure is that 'having it all' has never been about challenging the patriarchy, but instead has been about women and their identities. Women finding solace in their identities and who they decide to be.

The ever changing idea of what it means for women to 'have it all' has always been present in Romance novels. In Romance novels of the past, the main character's happily ever after is tied to marriage with a wealthy man. Meaning the female characters in these novels have a patriarchal view of having it all, marriage, family, and wealth. However, Contemporary Romance of the 21st century portrays that 'having it all' to a female character is whatever they want it to be. Meaning they are not held back by gender roles and stereotypes of the real world. Female characters challenge roles and stereotypes of their gender through their activities, jobs, and characteristics in the novels they appear in. This challenge pushes the idea of what it means for a woman to 'have it all.'

Readers in online communities like #BookTok and Bookstagram, are taking notice of female characters in Contemporary Romance books 'having it all.' In these online communities readers have conversations, while growing the Contemporary Romance genre. These conversations allow users to find their love for reading and share their experience of 'having it

all' with each other online. In this thesis, I argue that while modern Romance novels still follow classic romance tropes like Grumpy/Sunshine, Opposites Attract, and Enemies to Lovers. Female characters in these novels show that women can be career driven and relationship driven. These novels do this by challenging gender roles and gender stereotypes. There are no sacrifices in a romance novel, the woman can have her dream career and a healthy relationship without real-life worry because of the promise of happily ever after.

Hearts and Hashtags: How BookTok is Reshaping Romance Literature

For decades the romance genre has been written for women and by women. The mere idea of a genre with such ties to women that caters to the feminine experience seemed wrong to critics, meaning the genre has been criticized for as long as it has been on shelves. Criticism has made the genre seem unserious. Contemporary Romance has also been faced with criticism for being a danger to society because of its content. As Dr. Elizabeth Reid Boyd states in her 2017 Guardian article, “it has been dismissed as sentimental, sappy and trashy, as well as mad, bad and dangerous to read” (Boyd [theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com)). Some common criticism of the Romance genre is that the novels aren’t well written, they are unrealistic, and they are predictable. These criticisms are opinions that can be found on the internet. The genre's predictability comes from their sense of happily ever after, which Romance Writers of America dictates is the only criteria for the genre ([rwa.com](https://www.rwa.com)). From 2020 to Now, the criticism has been focused on whether the genre is feminist or not, the sexual content, and how the ‘trashiness’ of the genre rot’s your brain. If we think about Contemporary Romance like these critics, the genre is ‘dangerous,’ read by women who don’t know the difference between reality and fiction and are enslaved by the patriarchy. Kelly Choyke touches on patriarchy and its place in the Romance genre in her dissertation titled, “The Power of Popular Romance Culture: Community, Fandom, and Sexual Politics.” She says “Romance novels are dangerous, but they are not dangerous to women; they are dangerous to the patriarchy because they show women they can be active participants in their emotional and sexual well-being,” (Choyke 121). Women being active participants in their own well-being is how Choyke would define Romance novels. But since these criticisms still exist we can connect them to the system of Patriarchy.

The genre is dismissed completely in the social zeitgeist and has been for centuries, despite Romance being a bestselling genre. We can contribute the dismissal and some surface level criticism of the genre to the system of patriarchy. Patriarchy has been around for centuries and in short is “any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles,” a definition from Lois Tyson in *Critical Theory Today* (Tyson 98). Therefore we can agree that patriarchy, as a system, does not support the Romance genre, as a genre by women for women. Keep in mind that patriarchy only works by promoting gender roles. These gender roles portray men as the stronger gender compared to women. In the system of patriarchy, such a portrayal, privileges men above women. Traditional gender roles are present in the recent Contemporary Romance novels that I chose to analyze in this thesis. Moving out of the realm of Contemporary Romance and into society brings us to the idea of women ‘having it all.’ This idea which stems from patriarchy is a feminist idea that tells women they too can do what men do and seemingly ‘have it all.’

In the 1980’s an idea emerged that women could ‘have it all.’ Over time, this idea has meant different things for women. But the most popular meaning of ‘having it all’ is women being a successful career woman and a successful mother. As you will read from many women who write for popular magazines like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and who believe the idea itself is a myth, which has gone on for far too long. The idea of ‘having it all’ uses the system of patriarchy to turn women against each other. These journalists believe that the idea of ‘having it all’ may be feminist but only allows women to be two things: a career woman or a mother. Turning away from society and back to the Contemporary Romance genre the idea

of 'having it all' is also present in a Romance novel's 'predictable' ending with happily ever after.

Romance novels throughout history have tracked what 'having it all' means for women based on the happily ever after and the achievements of the main female character. Recently, Contemporary Romance has portrayed the idea of 'having it all' challenging gender roles and gender stereotypes. But the genre and authors writing for it are not advocating against the system of patriarchy. While the female characters may exude these challenges their characterizations are not completely against patriarchy. Readers online have begun to notice the portrayal of women in Contemporary Romance and these challenges of gender roles and gender stereotypes which continues to grow the genre. I argue that while modern Romance novels still follow classic romance tropes like Grumpy/Sunshine, Opposites Attract, and Enemies to Lovers, female characters in these novels show that women can be career driven and relationship driven. These novels do this by challenging gender roles and gender stereotypes. There are no lively sacrifices in a romance novel; the woman can have her dream career and a healthy relationship without real-life worry because of the promise of happily ever after.

Looking back on the idea of 'having it all,' in 1982 Helen Gurley Brown wrote an advice book titled *Having It All: Love, Success, Sex, Money...Even If You're Starting with Nothing*. She wrote the book for hopeful women who wanted more, "more love, more money, more stability and, inevitably, more sex" (Szalai nytimes.com). Brown's book is where many people believe the term 'having it all' came from, but instead it emerged two years earlier in 1980. In 2015, Jennifer Szalai wrote a *New York Times* article talking about 'having it all' and Brown's book, titled "The Complicated Origins of 'Having it All.'" Szalai finds that there is no trace of this idea before the

late 1970's. But it was first titled in Joyce Gabriel and Bettye Baldwin's *Having It All: A Practical Guide to Managing a Home and a Career*. Szalai condenses the book as, "offers straightforward tips on how a working mother might make the most of her scarce time," calling it "true to its word" (Szalai nytimes.com). Brown's advice book landed itself on the bestseller list, and by the end of 1982 the term 'having it all' became shorthand for children and a career, even though Brown barely mentions children in her advice book.

Mary Bourgoïn, the author of a *Washington Post* opinion article in 1983, runs with the same belief of 'having it all'. The opinion article's title was "You Can't Be a Mother and 'Have it All.'" Bourgoïn's idea of 'having it all' is the same as the public's belief at the time, women can't be both a successful businesswoman and a successful mother. Bourgoïn herself is a woman who conforms to traditional gender roles and inserts herself as what Tyson would call a "patriarchal woman" because Bourgoïn has internalized the values like men are strong, women are submissive, and other traditional gender roles, all of which align with patriarchy (Tyson 98). Her tagline for the article is, "with three daughters and a career something had to give, so I quit my job" (Bourgoïn washingtonpost.com). Throughout the article, Bourgoïn states how her reason for quitting her job was because she "lacked the stamina to do it all," and wanted to give more of her energy to her children (Bourgoïn washingtonpost.com). This reason on its own would be something Jennifer Szalai would agree is a problem of 'having it all.' Bourgoïn blames the women, and mothers in a Department of Education study, by writing, "women have to face the fact that they are partly responsible for academic slippage," (Bourgoïn washingtonpost.com). The blame blatantly tells women reading her article that they can't 'have it all,' unless they don't want the best for their children's academics. Bourgoïn blaming women using the idea of 'having

it all' is an example of how the idea works in favor of patriarchy. Bourgoin is saying that the feminist beginnings of 'having it all' is not helping out future generations, and going back to patriarchal beliefs and, as later Tyson defines, traditional gender roles is better. So, Bourgoin's take on not 'having it all' is tied to the success of the children versus the success of the mother. In the early 1980's, the belief that women can 'have it all' was born which brought controversy with certain women like Mary Bourgoin. But the term 'have it all' changed from being able to make time for things women enjoy to women being mothers and career women. But critics and journalists have wondered, for the past four decades, if a career and being a mother is all the idea can mean.

It would be wrong to say that the meaning of 'having it all' has changed from the 1980's to 2024. In 2015, Tina Rodia wrote "How the Idea of 'Having It All' Makes Women Feel Terrible About Themselves." Rodia is, as you will soon read, a victim of the traditional 1980's idea of 'having it all.' Rodia in her article brings feminist authors to the stand asking why they define womanhood with narrow terms. Rodia writes, "feminist setbacks and victories have revived the phrase "having it all" for a very narrow definition of women: professional mothers." Rodia looking back on the idea of 'having it all' in 2015 is appalled by this narrow feminist belief of womanhood which makes it a failed feminist idea under patriarchy. She says the definition is false because "many women do not have careers or children" (Rodia washingtonpost.com). She gives her own experience of not going to graduate school and staying in her retail job because she didn't want to have a huge amount of debt. Her retail job had benefits and flexibility, which a future career would not (Rodia washingtonpost.com). Then she says that she may be too old and too economically disadvantaged to have children. Rodia boils it

all down to classism, saying that many feminist discourses discuss only a professional career. She also writes that ‘having it all’ is a “marketing gimmick for women” (Rodia [washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com)). A marketing gimmick for women to buy advice books like Brown’s and push themselves to exhaustion like Mary Bourgoïn did before she inevitably quit her job.

Rodia also writes, “there are plenty of women who want it all, but that may not mean a professional career and children” (Rodia [washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com)). So, what does ‘having it all’ mean in 2024? For so long now, it has meant women can be both successful mothers and successful career women. Asking this question expands the idea of ‘all.’ Amy Wilkinson also asks this question in her 2023 LinkedIn article, “Can Women ‘Have it All’ and What’s Your ‘All’ Anyway?” Wilkinson is a mother and food coach, who calls the idea of ‘having it all’ a lie. She is also another ‘everyday woman’ who has felt the pressure of ‘having it all.’ She says that women who she works with all think they should ‘have it all.’ But she writes that these women have “completely lost who they are and why they’ve been chasing after it. And frankly they’re exhausted” (Wilkinson [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com)). It seems that these women are suffering from some kind of mental burn out from years of trying to uphold this belief they have been told all their lives. Ultimately, burning out and being forced to conform to being a “patriarchal woman.” Wilkinson writes that ‘having it all’ has been something said to little girls for years from teachers, parents, and caregivers associating the idea with being “strong, independent women” (Wilkinson [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com)). Little girls and young women being told that this is the only way to be seen as ‘having it all.’

Though Wilkinson is only writing about women in the food industry, I can imagine it’s similar with all careers. She writes that many women have to choose between family and career

but says that it has nothing to do with ‘having it all.’ The choice has everything to do with, “infrastructure and flexibility just isn’t there in the food industry to support those women who want both” (Wilkinson LinkedIn). Again, Wilkinson only writes about the food industry because that’s the industry in which she works in, but the same goes for all women. Rodia explains the same thing in her *Washington Post* article. Rodia didn’t want to pursue a career because of lack of flexibility. Wilkinson then gives some advice for women at the end of her article. Her number one rule of advice is asking women to “Define Your ‘All’” (Wilkinson LinkedIn.com). Her main advice in this section is asking women what their ‘all’ is and what their ideal day looks like. She mentions how everyone can get caught up in what everyone else is doing, and women need to focus on their goals and priorities.

Wilkinson wants to remind the women reading this article of a Michelle Pfeiffer quote, “You can ‘have it all,’ but you can’t do it all” (Wilkinson LinkedIn.com). Her reminder shatters the patriarchal view of ‘having it all’ by asking women to define their own goals and therefore their ‘all’s,’ which may not rely only on a career and being a mother. Wilkinson’s main mission in her article is to get this reminder to women who only believe the lie of ‘having it all.’ It is a myth that all these authors, except Helen Gurley Brown, believe is impossible to achieve. In contrast to works of fiction, currently in 2024, there are too many complications with ‘having it all,’ including child-care and work flexibility or simply having the time in the day to ‘have it all.’ Many women tie their happily ever after to their success of fulfilling this idea that’s been around for generations. In the past, a woman’s happily ever after depended on marrying a wealthy man for health and security for their family. Now, women marry for tons of reasons and their happily

ever after depends on themselves, and their pursuit to 'have it all,' more than their partner. This change is also reflected in Contemporary Romance novels.

The idea of "having it all" connects to my argument because many women have been told this idea is the only way to succeed. 'Having it all' is assumed to be the only way to be successful as a woman, which like Szalai said is a myth. It is a failed feminist idea because it has done the opposite of what women like Gurley Brown set out to achieve. The idea relies on patriarchy and allows women to blame each other for 'having it all' or not. Rodia calls out feminists who still believe in the traditional idea of 'having it all.' There are many different ways a woman can be successful and 'have it all' that doesn't connect to only being a career woman and a mother. There are broader terms for womanhood than this idea, which can be read in Contemporary Romance novels. I argue that Romance novels, especially recent Contemporary Romance novels, show those many different ways women can be successful. Contemporary Romance doesn't use the term 'have it all' in every novel, but every Contemporary Romance novel does have a happily ever after. According to the Romance Writers of America, the only criteria for a Romance novel is to have a happily ever after (rwa.com). It's useful to keep in mind the idea of 'having it all' while reading Contemporary Romance is to see more than the relationship in the novel. Yes, a Contemporary Romance novel is about love and the journey to getting to happily ever after, but it is also about the lead female character. I believe this since most Contemporary Romance readers are female and most lead protagonists in Contemporary Romance are women.

Keeping in mind the idea of women 'having it all' in the real world connecting to Contemporary Romance novels helps readers think about themselves as well as the fictional

women they are reading about as well as themselves. Ria Cheyne talks about futures in Romance novels in her chapter “Desirable Futures: Romance” in her book titled, *Disability, Literature, Genre: Representation and Affect in Contemporary Fiction*. She says, “In a romance novel, the protagonist triumphs over their obstacles to their relationship, eventually securing a happily-ever-after ending...” (Cheyne 135-136). In a Contemporary Romance novel these obstacles could be anything from completely fiction to relating to real-life. As I said before, there are complications to ‘having it all’ in real-life; child-care and work flexibility are just some examples of issues that make it difficult for women to ‘have it all.’ In real-life, there is no prince charming and very seldom does everyone get happily ever after. Patriarchy is still a system present in Contemporary Romance novels, which makes Contemporary Romance enticing to many women. This is because patriarchy is a system that is familiar, but in these novels patriarchy is easier to overcome through happily ever after and female characters having it all. But overcoming patriarchy is nothing but a fantasy in these novels. Cheyne says “Romance is also similar to fantasy in that it presents affirmative narratives of achievement in which the obstacles to a desired goal are overcome” (Cheyne 136). In this thesis, I am saying that the achievement by the protagonists in these novels is ‘having it all.’ The obstacle is patriarchy, which includes traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes. I am also saying that the desired goal is happily ever after. So, Contemporary Romance readers can see the many different ways these fictional women are ‘having it all’ that doesn’t always involve being a career woman and a mother which allows readers to reflect on their own ideas and achievement of ‘having it all.’ Moving forward here are some Romance novels overtime and how the lead women in these novels ‘have it all’ by connecting that idea to their happily ever after.

The first Romance novel was published in 1740 titled *Pamela; Or, Virtue Rewarded* by Samuel Richardson. Author of *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, Pamela Regis, summarizes *Pamela* as “the story of the courtship, betrothal, wedding, and triumph of lady’s maid Pamela Andrews to Mr. B, the master for whom she works” (Regis 69). Richardson creates a rags-to-riches story for his character Pamela. Following this idea of rags-to-riches, *Pamela* would fit into the traditional romance trope of Opposites Attract. As Regis summarizes the character, Pamela, is courted and married to the man who she works for, Mr. B. Since *Pamela; Or, Virtue Renewed* is a romance novel, we can conclude by Romance Writers of America standards that it has a happily ever after, Pamela and Mr. B end the novel married. Pamela goes from being a lady’s maid and employee of Mr. B to being his wife, so did Pamela ‘have it all’ as a female character? We know that during this time period women did not have the rights they have now. We also know that marriage at this time was the only way for a woman to bring any type of success and wealth to her family. This novel is rooted in patriarchy and Pamela is no exception, even though she is a fictional character.

To understand how Pamela ‘has it all’ by the end of the novel, here is some summary of *Pamela*. At this time, a bride’s family would pay a dowry to the groom or his family, a dowry that Pamela’s parents in the novel cannot afford, therefore she has no chance of marriage (Regis 74). Pamela is penniless with or without her parents. This is when Mr. B, her employer and love interest makes her an offer, with marriage he can contribute, “financial security, protection from some of the perils of pregnancy, legitimacy, and a large step up in status” (Regis 78). Pamela would go from a penniless lady’s maid to a high-status woman through only marriage. Since *Pamela; Or, Virtue Renewed* was and is still considered a Romance novel, based on my

argument, we can conclude that Pamela had the opportunity to ‘have it all’ through this choice. Though the idea of ‘having it all’ wasn’t around when *Pamela* was published, we can apply the idea to the novel. Pamela would quite literally go from nothing to ‘having it all.’ Therefore, Pamela gets everything she wants, protection and financial stability for not only herself, but her parents as well. She gets a bump up in status and marries a wealthy and well-known man. In all of this, Pamela achieves the idea of ‘having it all.’ Though the novel is still rooted in patriarchy because marriage is the only way Pamela as a character can achieve ‘having it all.’ The character gets what she has been longing for the entire novel. Pamela doesn’t fit into the narrative of ‘having it all’ that many people know of today, but she has what she wants, which is what Amy Wilkinson wants women to ask themselves in her article. We can see that even though the idea was not around when *Pamela* was published, the novel still shows how a woman could ‘have it all’ in 1740. Pamela isn’t the only female character in Romance novels to achieve their goals of ‘having it all,’ Elizabeth Bennett in the ever so popular *Pride and Prejudice* does as well.

Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* was first published in 1813, and originally in three volumes. The novel is considered a classic and sometimes the greatest romance novel of all time (Regis 81). *Pride and Prejudice* centers around Elizabeth Bennet, the daughter of a country gentleman, and Fitzwilliam Darcy, a rich aristocratic landowner (Austen *Pride and Prejudice*). Another rags-to-riches story though different from *Pamela* because both characters, Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet must get over their differences in order to marry and fall in love. Because of the relationship between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, many readers categorize *Pride and Prejudice* into the traditional Romance trope of Enemies to Lovers. The characters’ differences, as author Pamela Regis writes, allows Austen to focus on the human experience of genuine

growth (Regis 84). This growth is seen throughout the novel as both characters struggle with literally their own pride and prejudices of the other person. But by the end, Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth are together. Inevitably, Elizabeth Bennet ends the novel with ‘having it all,’ which is Austen’s growth in her characters throughout the novel. Austen depicts four different versions of marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* (Regis 84). Elizabeth is sectioned into a household where her sisters do not mind or want to be married. This goal of her sister’s sets her apart, Elizabeth has reasons she does not want to be married. She wants freedom and she refuses to marry for anything but love. Regis writes, “Elizabeth’s freedom is basically the freedom to think for herself,” (Regis 88). In marrying Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth achieves a few things. She exercises her freedom by choosing Mr. Darcy, her social life and freedom are secured through this marriage (Regis 90). She also ends the novel, ‘having it all.’ Though similar to *Pamela*, the only way for the character of Elizabeth to ‘have it all’ she must submit to patriarchy and traditional gender roles of becoming a wife. Through marriage Elizabeth gets to keep her freedoms, her life is secured, and she gets to marry for love, which is something she has pushed for the entire novel and allows her to be a character that ‘has it all’ through her happily ever after.

Both novels were written before the idea of ‘having it all’ became a contested feminist idea in the 1980’s. But we can apply what each female character would believe is ‘having it all’ by their journey throughout the novels. Somewhat for both of these characters, their idea of ‘having it all’ was security and therefore marriage of some form. In *Pride and Prejudice*, through Austen’s characteristics of Elizabeth, she wanted marriage through love. In *Pamela*, through Richardson’s characterization of Pamela, she wanted social security and money through marriage. But after this idea became a forefront in the early 1980’s society had a different

approach for what having it all meant. This can be expressed by the long change to 2016's *It Ends with Us* by Colleen Hoover, a novel that is published in a world where a woman can be more than a successful businesswoman and a successful mother. It is also published in a world where patriarchy is still rampant and is reflected in Contemporary Romance novels.

Hoover's *It Ends with Us* wasn't an overnight success and didn't have the popularity it has currently until the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021 *It Ends with Us* became a viral hit in online bookish communities like #BookTok and Bookstagram. The story follows Lily Bloom, a florist, who struggles to find her way out of the abusive pattern from her youth according to Hoover's website (colleenhoover.com). Lily spends the rest of the novel trying to come to terms with her relationship with her husband, Ryle and his abusive nature, while falling in love again with her high school sweetheart, Atlas. *It Ends with Us* does a terrible job at fitting into the Grumpy/Sunshine trope because Hoover focuses on Ryle instead of Atlas. Lily throughout the novel doesn't know what she wants. She relies on Atlas to give her insight into her relationship with Ryle. Lily's trajectory as a character and Hoover's storytelling has become controversial among readers. Chloe Foster talks about some of these controversies in "The Impact of Social Media on the Publishing Industry: A Case Study of Author Colleen Hoover." Foster says, "Hoover takes abuse to the extent of heavy details of each abuse circumstance..." (Foster 8). Hoover does write the novel with Lily still in a relationship with her abuser. The only glimpses of romance readers get is with Atlas. So does Lily as a female character 'have it all?' Throughout the novel no, she doesn't know where she stands. She has her flower shop and does by the end of the novel become a mother. But Lily Bloom does get her happily ever after by the end of the novel. Hoover drowns her main character in the system of patriarchy. Lily is in an abusive

relationship with a man and can't leave. The happily ever after Hoover gives Lily one where she is divorced from Ryle, breaking the cycle of violence from her childhood, and can pursue a happier and healthier relationship with Atlas (Hoover *It Ends with Us*). By the end, this change in Lily's life allows her to 'have it all' and break free from being a "patriarchal woman." She's free from her abusive ex-husband and free from the cycle of violence from her childhood. She figured out, with Atlas's help, what she wanted throughout the novel. Hoover has Lily's character grow and 'have it all' at the end of the novel.

I have been discussing past popular Romance novels because they all connect to my argument of female characters 'having it all' based on their happily ever after. Each of these novels had a happily ever after where the protagonist ended the novel with character development involving them 'having it all' and in love because they are Romance novels. I used three different novels from multiple years (1740, 1813, and 2016) to show that even though the idea of 'having it all' is not explicitly mentioned in the novels it is still present. Pamela, Elizabeth, and Lily are all characters whose stories end with a happily ever after and therefore they 'have it all.' For the rest of the thesis, I will argue that while modern Romance novels still follow classic romance tropes like, Grumpy/Sunshine, Opposites Attract, and Enemies to Lovers, female characters in these novels show that women can be career driven and relationship driven. These novels do this by challenging gender roles and gender stereotypes. There are no sacrifices in a romance novel, meaning the woman can have her dream career and a healthy relationship without real-life worry because of the promise of happily ever after. Readers online are also taking notice of Contemporary Romance novels challenging gender roles and posting about it in online communities like #BookTok and Bookstagram.

The classic romance tropes I mention are ways the author of a Romance novel characterizes characters or main love interests of a Romance novel. The most famous romance tropes are the Grumpy/Sunshine trope. In which someone in the main relationship of the novel is grumpy (not sociable or surly), and the other person is sunshine (bubbly/ a people pleaser). Then there is the Enemies to Lovers trope. In this trope, the main characters in a romance novel start off hating each other and ultimately end the novel in a relationship. Finally, another classic trope is Opposites Attract, in which the main characters are completely opposite to each other (looks, personality, hobbies, etc.). The romance novels I have mentioned so far, *Pamela; Or Virtue Renewed*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *It Ends with Us*, use either one or more of these tropes to characterize the love interest's relationship with each other throughout the novel. These tropes also challenge gender roles and stereotypes pushing for more diverse characteristics in female characters. The roles can be reversed in each trope depending on the novel.

Lois Tyson defines these gender roles in literary works in the feminist criticism section of *Critical Theory Today*. Tyson writes, “Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive” (Tyson 81). Tyson then explains that these gender roles are possibly only through the system of patriarchy. These gender roles sound typical to Contemporary Romance novels, where the men are protective, and the women are submissive. Tyson goes on to explain that these gender roles convince women in the real world that they, for example, are not good at mathematics or engineering (Tyson 81). Many of these gender roles are unknowingly taught through popular media like films, television, and novels, which means they are widely known and understood by people. They also present themselves in Contemporary Romance tropes like

Grumpy/Sunshine, Enemies to Lovers, Opposites Attract. In these tropes it's an easy guess who will fulfill each role. In a stereotypical sense, the 'grumpy' character is male and the 'sunshine' character is female. Similar to the Opposite Attract trope where, for example, the character who would like pink is female, but the character who likes blue is male. In Contemporary Romance the guess to who is who in these tropes is actually quite difficult. There are some novels that change the stereotype behind these tropes, *The Risk* by Elle Kennedy (Enemies to Lovers), *Promise Me* by Carlie Jean (Opposites Attract), and *Reckless* by Elise Silver (Grumpy/Sunshine). In these novels, the female character performs the more idealized male gender role for these romance tropes. In other words, female characters also don't conform to gender stereotypes in that they can reflect both gender roles.

In the real world, there are gender stereotypes that only force men and women to conform to one thing and that is what is stereotypical of their gender. These stereotypes transfer to Contemporary Romance novel characters. Alexandra Hazel Mulvey writes about some stereotypes of female athletes in her master's thesis, "Gender and Sex Stereotypes in Sports Romance Fiction." The stereotypes Mulvey analyzes are present in my choice of recent Contemporary Romance novels to analyze below, *Fair Catch* by Kandi Steiner and *The Brightest Light of Sunshine* by Lisina Coney. Both female characters in these novels are athletes, which makes Mulvey's analysis of female athletes relevant to my choice in novels. Mulvey writes that sports and athletics are gendered. Stereotypically there are masculine sports and feminine sports (Mulvey 11). Masculine sports consist of contact sports like American football, ice hockey, and boxing. Feminine sports are activities that favor grace, flexibility, and artistry like ballet, cheerleading, ice skating, and gymnastics. Mulvey also writes the most damaging stereotype of

female athletes is one about their sexuality. “Successful female athletes must be masculine presenting lesbians, which is damaging to both lesbian and straight athletes because it associates their athleticism with masculinity” (Mulvey 11). The damage to female characters in this case is reader perception of them. Readers are already beginning the novel with these stereotypes in mind and therefore the author is as well and chooses to go against it.

Readers and authors seeing these novels with stereotypes in mind is because of patriarchy. Readers and authors are actively living in a system of patriarchy. A system that when it wants to undermine a behavior portrays that behavior as feminine (Tyson 101). Authors choosing to go against gender stereotypes are therefore challenging patriarchy, but not to the point of radical change. The female characters in my choice of novels are also college students, which is drastically different from my example novels above. This is because college romance is a popular sub genre in online bookish communities, which connects to the other part of my argument. They are also novels that feature young women who are about to enter adulthood, and who are confused and frustrated about their futures. Female characters in Contemporary Romance novels ‘have it all,’ through their portrayal challenges gender roles and stereotypes. Continue to remember gender roles are only possible through the system of patriarchy. The authors and creators of these female characters allow them to ‘have it all,’ because even though they challenge these ideas of gender they also affirm them. This matters because we can conclude that Contemporary Romance authors are connecting their characters to their female audience which lets their audience seem themselves reflected on the page.

In *Fair Catch*, Riley Novo could be described as a girly football kicker. *Fair Catch* is an Enemies to Lovers contemporary college romance novel, published in 2022 by self-published

author Kandi Steiner. Riley upholds certain gender roles; she also challenges them by being characterized as aggressive. In terms of gender stereotypes, Riley plays the aggressive sport of American football. Riley's gender role as a character is the opposite of what Tyson describes for a female character. Riley is also an unemotional person, which goes against a gender role Tyson states in *Critical Theory Today*, "...women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive" (Tyson 81). Riley is not emotional, weak, or submissive. Zeke describes her behavior at times as hostile (Steiner 36). But it's Riley who calls attention to the gendered qualities of her own behavior. Zeke says, "And you pop off at anyone who so much as looks at you wrong," Riley responds with, "If I were a guy, you'd admire me for that" (Steiner 112). With that remark, Steiner seems to be aware of what Riley's role should be and how she should act, but she rejects it. I believe what these two characters are talking about are their respective gender roles in the context of the novel. Riley is hostile and aggressive at times, which is not typical for a female character, but is typical for a male character. Steiner's characterization of Riley points to her not fitting into gender roles. However, the character of Riley Novo 'has it all' when it comes to gender roles throughout the novel because Steiner shows Riley being a caring sister to her disabled twin brother which shows her sensitive side (Steiner 262). She also shows Riley being an aggressive and unemotional character all around. Riley can 'have it all' by taking on both of these gender roles.

Riley also challenges gender stereotypes in other ways. Steiner writes that Riley has "... long, thick, chestnut hair" (Steiner 20), meaning that Riley has the societal ideal hairstyle for women, which is long. Usually, short hair is curated towards a more masculine appearance. Riley is also relatively good at school and has a passion for art. These are stereotypes that point to

Riley being a stereotypical female Contemporary Romance love interest. But her activity of choice puts her out of the stereotypical box of an athletic female character. She plays a contact sport, which according to Mulvey is characterized as a masculine sport (Mulvey 11). Steiner reveals that Riley was good enough to get a D1 football scholarship, which in real-life is a major achievement for collegiate athletes (Steiner 65). She plays the position of kicker. Someone could say that this position is the safest a woman could play on a football team, but it's actually the most stressful. A winning game can be determined by the kicker's field goal. Steiner breaks gender stereotypes for Riley through her characteristics of being a 'girly-girl' and football player, which means she 'has it all.' Riley can be categorized as a feminine character as well as a football player. Her passion for the sport of football, while going against the stereotype of female athletes allows her to 'have it all.' Not to mention, Steiner ends the novel with Riley continuing to play her sport of football at the collegiate level while pursuing her passion for art, and ending the novel with her love interest and fellow football player Zeke Collins. Riley literally 'has it all' at the ending of *Fair Catch*.

Something similar happens with *The Brightest Light of Sunshine* by Lisina Coney and female main character, Grace. *The Brightest Light of Sunshine* is an Opposites Attract and Grumpy/Sunshine troped contemporary romance by self-published turn traditionally published, Lisina Coney. The story is centered around ballerina Grace Allen. While Grace is participating in a "feminine" sport like ballet, she's showing emotional strength as she heals from a sexual assault. She's also starting to pursue her passion for writing throughout the novel. Coney's characterization of Grace challenges the same gender role as Steiner's characterization of Riley in *Fair Catch*. Tyson's mention of feminine gender roles including "emotional" or as Tyson

explains further is “irrational” (Tyson 81). Yes, Grace is emotional. She is vulnerable when she needs to be, but she is not irrational. When her love interest Cal breaks up with her, she understands (Coney 406). She knows that Maddie, Cal’s little sister, is his first priority. But she still wants to be there for both Cal and Maddie because, since this is a Romance novel, Cal is Grace’s future. Grace tells Cal, “I understand. But I’m not going to let you push me away, Cal. Not when there’s a possibility we might never break up. Because I don’t think we ever will. You’re it for me,” (Coney 410). She’s patient with Cal as he settles into his new role as Maddie’s guardian. It’s actually Cal that’s acting outside of masculine gender roles. By acting irrational and not thinking before he acts. Grace renounces the feminine gender role of being emotional or irrational by being patient with Cal and his decision. Coney has her characters switch gender roles in this part of the novel. Through this decision, Grace ‘has it all.’ She can continue to be the vulnerable, but emotionally strong character she has been the entire novel. But she can now take on the rational characteristic and both of these roles give her the opportunity to ‘have it all,’ when it comes to challenging gender roles.

Coney’s relationship with challenging gender stereotypes is different in her characterization of Grace. The character of Grace Allen fits completely into the gender stereotype of female athletes in the real world. Grace is a ballet teacher and a ballerina, which is a stereotypical feminine athlete. Coney sums up Grace’s journey as ballerina in the beginning of the novel. “I’ve been practicing ballet for the last seventeen years, and at some point, I thought I would become a professional dancer” (Coney 39). Ballet is Grace’s first passion in *The Brightest Light of Sunshine*, which sets her character apart from Riley in *Fair Catch*. Steiner has Riley represent football, which is categorized as too violent, aggressive, and inherently male. Coney

has Grace represent ballet, a graceful sport (as her name suggests) that prioritizes flexibility and artistry. The characterization of Grace also fits into the stereotype of a ballerina: Cal describes her as petite, which is expected when someone is described as a ballerina (Coney 34). He even compares her to a fairy, “She’s hilariously small, like one of those fairies Maddie loves so much” (Coney 34). Coney’s characterization of Grace leads to her ‘having it all’ in a literal sense. Grace is small and participates in a stereotypical sport like ballet. By the end of the novel, Grace also gets to ‘have it all’ because she and Cal get back together, while they become guardians for Cal’s younger sister Maddie. Grace also gets her dream career, which is continuing to teach ballet and be a children's book author. Both of these developments happening at the end of the novel allow the character of Grace to get her happily ever after and ‘have it all.’ *The Brightest Light of Sunshine* and *Fair Catch* paint a larger picture of Contemporary Romance and female characters challenging gender roles and gender stereotypes which brings in a larger audience of women readers.

The same online bookish communities that made Colleen Hoover’s *It Ends with Us* an extremely popular bestseller, #BookTok and Bookstagram are taking notice of female characters like Grace and Riley ‘having it all,’ and having a happily ever after. These online communities are no small feat. In 2021, Contemporary Romance novels sold 20 million print copies (wordrated.com). Then that number rose to 26 million in 2022, but in 2023 the number of print copies rose to 36 million (wordrated.com). This major increase in sales happened in just a few years. The reasoning for this many people contribute to gigantic online communities like #BookTok (TikTok) and Bookstagram (Instagram). Currently, a community like #BookTok has over 247.7 billion views. #Bookstagramer on Instagram has over 19.6 million posts. Most of

these users use the same handle on both platforms, but we can conclude that these are gigantic numbers for platforms where Contemporary Romance is the main genre being discussed.

#BookTok has also grown readership in the genre. According to Romance Writers of America, the official association for romance writers in the United States, in 2017 the average Romance reader was aged 35 to 54 (rwa.com). But Deanna Schwartz and Meghan Collins Sullivan, authors of the 2022 NPR (national public radio) article, “Gen Z is driving sales of romance books to the top of bestseller lists,” writes that the age of readership has lowered. They suspect that in 2022 people aged 18 to 54 are reading Contemporary Romance (Schwartz Sullivan npr.com). These online communities are the reason for Contemporary Romance being a huge and bestselling genre. Online users use #Booktok and Bookstagram as ways to connect with each other. It’s extremely easy to look for what you want on these platforms. Elizabeth A. Harris explains in her New York Times article, “I Just Want Something That’s Gay and Happy: LGBTQ Romance is Booming.” Harris explains how someone would search tropes on TikTok, “If you want a Sapphic enemies-to-lovers fantasy book, you can put all those words on TikTok and find 15 recommendations” (nytimes.com). In summary, a user can go to TikTok and put in whatever keywords or tropes they are looking for and then video recommendations will appear. This is mostly done through hashtags like #FairCatch or #TheBrightestLightofSunshine. Users or creators as they are sometimes called have taken notice of female characters in Contemporary Romance ‘having it all.’ They don’t use the term ‘have it all,’ but the language they use aligns them with noticing female characters breaking barriers while achieving their happily ever after, which we can conclude means ‘having it all’ in most cases. Users are specifically taking notice of female characters Riley and Grace ‘having it all,’ in Kandi Steiner’s *Fair Catch* as well as

Lisina Coney's *The Brightest Light of Sunshine*. Users taking notice of these challenges in the Contemporary Romance genre can grow and change the genre in the future.

User @larryreads on TikTok, is a popular romance novel critic on #BookTok. Lassandra, nicknamed Larry, has built a community of over 500,000 followers from posting about Contemporary Romance novels alone. She uses the previously mentioned quote from *Fair Catch* "If I were a guy, you'd admire me for that," to promote the novel to her followers (Steiner 112). @larryreads posting this video does a few things. For one, it allows other users to read @larryreads favorite quote and possibly buy the novel based on just the quote alone. This contributes to the shareability of #BookTok. Second, the post gives the character, Riley, the power of being a strong female character. Another post that uses similar language is Instagram user @sophs_shelf who says, "I loved seeing the female representation in football and how it wasn't some easy goal to accomplish but that Riley had so much adversity she had to overcome... Even though Riley was a "jock" she wasn't the stereotypical female athlete which I think a lot of girls can relate too" (@sophs_shelf Instagram.com). Both users unknowingly talk about gender roles and gender stereotypes while talking about *Fair Catch*. @larryreads talks about gender roles and Riley's characterization of being aggressive or unemotional. @sophs_shelf talks about gender stereotypes and how Riley isn't a stereotypical female athlete. Along with these things, both users also talk about the love story within *Fair Catch* between Riley and Zeke. These users have taken notice of this character 'having it all.' Steiner's characterization of Riley can be both a strong female character while not being a stereotypical female athlete. @larryreads and @sophs_shelf have noticed that in *Fair Catch* and Riley's

happily ever after she can ‘have it all.’ Another user has noticed this in Grace’s character in *The Brightest Light of Sunshine*.

User @daisy_readsromance on Instagram takes notice of Grace’s “profound level of bravery that truly left me in awe. Her strength and vulnerability, beautifully intertwined, became a source of inspiration” (@daisy_readsromance Instagram.com). This user takes notice of Grace’s strength and vulnerability throughout *The Brightest Light of Sunshine*. Another user, @hooksbooksncoffee on Instagram, takes notice of Grace being a “sweet, kind, and a little shy” character (@hooksbooksncoffee Instagram.com). Once again, these users are noticing gender roles and stereotypes without directly naming them. @daisy_readsromance talks about Coney’s characterization of Grace and her gender role of being a strong female character, while being vulnerable. @hooksbooksncoffee talks about Grace and her character fitting into gender stereotypes because she is sweet and kind. Both users take notice of her relationship throughout the novel with her love interest, Cal, along with his little sister Maddie. As well as her passion for ballet. These users don’t use the idea ‘have it all,’ but they have described the idea in their posts. They post that Coney’s characterization of Grace, ‘has it all’ because she can be both brave and kind, she can be both a strong female character and a little shy. Therefore, these users believe that the character of Grace can ‘have it all’ including getting her happily ever after.

This brief journey into online bookish communities like #BookTok and Bookstagram is necessary. I want you to see that even though users online don’t explicitly say the words gender roles, gender stereotypes, or ‘having it all’ they are still posting videos that fit into that context. The language they use and the way they talk about female characters, Riley and Grace, show that the characters are challenging gender roles and stereotypes like being a strong female character

or a female athlete, and the users love it. From what I have shared above, these users are praising authors Steiner and Coney for creating characters with these characteristics. The dichotomy of gender roles and the challenge of gender stereotypes that these characters have suggest that they 'have it all' apart from their happily ever after. But adding onto their happily ever after makes users like the ones above and readers that don't post on social media see these female characters as examples of what it means for a woman to 'have it all.' You should agree this matters because online communities and the Contemporary Romance genre are only growing, and so far these are only a snippet of the conversations happening. The future of these platforms and online bookish communities is far reaching. These platforms will hopefully do more than they already have for the Contemporary Romance genre. These online communities' success for example is helping authors themselves break into the publishing industry.

Because of these online communities, many self-published authors are getting picked up by traditional publishing. One example is the author of *Icebreaker*, a grumpy/sunshine sports romance, Hannah Grace. Elisabeth Egan at the New York Times wrote an article about Hannah Grace, titled, "Who Is Hannah Grace? And Why Won't She Show Her Face?" In the article, Egan reveals Grace's journey to traditional publishing, which wasn't really a journey at all. Egan writes, "In August 2022, Grace self-published 'Icebreaker' under an imprint named for her dogs, Pig and Bear, and it quickly attracted a massive audience through the Kindle Unlimited Program (with a boost from TikTok). Last November, the book was acquired by Atria" (Egan nytimes.com). By her success on TikTok Hannah Grace was able to sign a contract with Simon and Shuster sub label Atria in November of 2022 (@hannahgraceauthor). This means that Grace reached enough popularity in four months to put her on the map of a major publisher. This story

is not unique to Grace though; some other authors this happened to are Lyla Sage, Kennedy Ryan, and Sophie Lark. For example, Sage self-published her romance novel, *Done and Dusted*, in June of 2023. By October it was picked up by Dial Press and became a national bestseller (sltrib.com). A publishing company that's known for picking these authors is Bloom Books Publishing, where Ryan and Lark are found. So, these online bookish communities are at the forefront of determining the 'next big thing' in Contemporary Romance and getting authors a publishing deal. Not only have authors' lives been changed because of #BookTok, users have begun to enjoy reading again. Users online are starting to post about how their reading habits are different because of #BookTok and Bookstagram.

Readers are already sharing the impact that #BookTok has had on them. Many readers talk about how long since they picked up a novel, let alone read one. User @kendallsreads on TikTok talks about this exact impact in her 2023 TikTok post. She says that in 2021 she picked up a book for the first time in a decade. In her caption @kendallsreads writes, "Falling back in love with reading as an adult has been one of the biggest highlights of my life! And my obsession is real and it's a personality trait at this point" (@kendallsreads TikTok.com). She is just one example of this phenomenon considering this user has over 40 comments of other readers agreeing with her. Another user, @books.with.cel, specifically cites Contemporary Romance for being the reason she fell back into love with reading. In her video she recommends certain Contemporary Romance series for others who want to love reading again (@books.with.cel TikTok.com). People expressing their newfound love of reading online is just one reason online bookish communities will continue to grow and flourish. Readers have also become more intimate in their posts.

These users becoming more intimate means they are sharing parts of themselves that they connect to Contemporary Romance characters. Exposing certain parts of their personalities online can be an intimate decision for some people. User @glavreads, or Cathrine, talks about Contemporary Romance female characters that she relates to because of their ‘grumpy’ personalities. She says, “I don’t usually relate to fictional characters,” but then she says she relates to “grumpy heroines who use sarcasm to keep people at a distance and avoid being vulnerable” (@glavreads TikTok.com). Saying something like this on the internet is a big step towards sharing yourself. As we all know, your digital footprint is forever. @glavreads’ posts about relating to these Contemporary Romance heroines will live forever on the internet. @glavreads’ post pushes us to imagine the future of #BookTok as well as other online communities, but most importantly it allows us to imagine the future of the Contemporary Romance genre.

Readers can share their opinions and their love for these novels with each other. They can also share how they relate to certain characters – and therefore find community. Contemporary Romance authors have their own opinions about the genre. Author Kennedy Ryan in an interview with Audible says, “I see Romance as the best landscape to have difficult conversations because there’s a guaranteed joy at the end” (@Audible TikTok.com). The Contemporary Romance genre depends on that “guaranteed joy” or more notably happily ever after at the end. Authors can focus on difficult subjects like domestic abusive (Colleen Hoover) and sexual assault (Lisina Coney) because readers know that in the end there will be a happily ever after. The happily ever after is the only rule in Contemporary Romance, according to the Romance Writers of America, the female character will also ‘have it all,’ no matter what the

character's 'all' is by the end of the novel (rwa.com). Author Dylan Allen also agrees, she says that not only are Romance writers some of the best writers right now. She says to readers, "You will leave feeling happy, hopeful, and that's a promise" (@dylanallenbooks TikTok.com).

Readers of the genre leave the novel they are reading feeling hopeful because of the happily ever after, but they also leave fulfilled and connected like @glavreads describes herself to be.

Ultimately, the Contemporary Romance genre shows the evolution of women through time meaning Romance novels of the past depict women and their perceived roles in society through time. Contemporary Romance author Julia Amante published a LinkedIn article titled, "Romance Novels Taught Me That Women Make Amazing Leaders," where she writes that the genre inspires women to see themselves as what they can be (Amante LinkedIn.com).

Contemporary Romance inspires women to see they can be strong, but sensitive, gentle, but tough, a girly football player like Riley in *Fair Catch* or a rational ballerina in *The Brightest Light of Sunshine*. They show that women can indeed, 'have it all.' The Contemporary Romance genre has a huge following, which is bigger than it ever had before, showing no signs of slowing down. #BookTok and other online communities are full of mostly women talking and interacting with each other about being inspired and possibly empowered. Enough to share the most intimate and sometimes insecure parts of their personalities with other readers through Contemporary Romance novels. The genre puts people's idea of intimate subjects like love, sex, and trauma on display right on the page. Contemporary Romance rejects the notion that women are only capable of love if they are 'nice' and have 'womanly' hobbies. The genre also rejects Tyson's definition of patriarchy as "a system that when it wants to undermine a behavior portrays that behavior as feminine (Tyson 101). Because in a Contemporary Romance novel feminine gender

roles and stereotypes are also seen in male characters, while masculine gender roles and stereotypes are also seen in female characters. I argue that while modern Romance novels still follow classic romance tropes like Grumpy/Sunshine, Opposites Attract, and Enemies to Lovers, female characters in these novels show that women can be career driven and relationship driven. These novels do this by challenging gender roles and gender stereotypes. There are no sacrifices in a romance novel: the woman can have her dream career and a healthy relationship without real-life worry because of the promise of happily ever after. Readers of the Contemporary Romance genre can escape into a novel knowing female characters will 'have it all.' But these readers don't have to worry about real life implications in Contemporary Romance novels and their Romance heroines 'having it all' because every novel ends with a happily ever after. Possibly in the future, the Romance novel will be bigger than it has been, maybe it will die down, but what we do know is that these novels and their connection to women will never go away.

Works Cited

Advanced Solutions International, Inc. "About the Romance Genre." *Romance Writers of*

America. The Voice of Romance Fiction., 2017,

www.rwa.org/Online/Romance_Genre/About_Romance_Genre.aspx.

Amante, Julia. "Romance Novels Taught Me That Women Make Amazing Leaders."

LinkedIn, 5 Feb. 2021,

[www.linkedin.com/pulse/romance-novels-taught-me-women-make-amazing-leaders-j](http://www.linkedin.com/pulse/romance-novels-taught-me-women-make-amazing-leaders-julia-amante)

[ulia-amante](http://www.linkedin.com/pulse/romance-novels-taught-me-women-make-amazing-leaders-julia-amante).

Audible. "Videos." TikTok. 19 November 2023.

https://www.tiktok.com/@audible/video/7303273728144690475?is_from_webap

[p=1&web_id=7333675574181627435](https://www.tiktok.com/@audible/video/7303273728144690475?is_from_webapp=1&web_id=7333675574181627435)

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. Edited by Vivien Jones, Penguin Classics, 2003.

Bourgoin, Mary. "You Can't Be a Mother and 'Have It All.'" *The Washington Post*, The

Washington Post, 26 Nov. 1983,

[www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1983/11/27/you-can-t-be-a-mother-and-h](http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1983/11/27/you-can-t-be-a-mother-and-have-it-all/abb26ab9-b3be-4633-a83e-2c728057175b/)

[ave-it-all/abb26ab9-b3be-4633-a83e-2c728057175b/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1983/11/27/you-can-t-be-a-mother-and-have-it-all/abb26ab9-b3be-4633-a83e-2c728057175b/).

Boyd, Elizabeth Reid. "Trashy, Sexist, Downright Dangerous? In Defense of Romantic

Fiction." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 14 Feb. 2017,

[www.theguardian.com/books/2017/feb/14/trashy-sexist-downright-dangerous-in-d](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/feb/14/trashy-sexist-downright-dangerous-in-defense-of-romantic-fiction)

[efence-of-romantic-fiction](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/feb/14/trashy-sexist-downright-dangerous-in-defense-of-romantic-fiction).

Burnett, Elena, et al. “Even as Overall Book Sales Are Declining, Romance Novels Are on the Rise.” *NPR*, NPR, 2 June 2023,
www.npr.org/2023/06/02/1179850128/even-as-overall-book-sales-are-declining-romance-novels-are-on-the-rise.

Cheyne, Ria. “Desirable Futures: Romance.” *Disability, Literature, Genre: Representation and Affect in Contemporary Fiction*, Liverpool University Press, 2019, pp. 135–60. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvsn3pp7.9>. Accessed 25 Apr. 2024.

Choyke, Kelly. *The Power of Popular Romance Culture: Community, Fandom, and Sexual Politics*. 2019. Ohio University, Doctoral dissertation. *OhioLINK Electronic Theses and Dissertations Center*,
http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=ohiou1573739424523163.

Coney, Lisina. “I can’t believe I’m typing this...” Instagram. 28 June 2023.
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CuCi3ccoFux/>

Coney, Lisina. *The Brightest Light of Sunshine*. Page & Vine, 2023.

Curcic, Dimitrije. “Romance Novel Sales Statistics.” *WordsRated*, 20 Nov. 2023,
wordsrated.com/romance-novel-sales-statistics/.

@daisy_readsromance. “ARC Review...” Instagram. 17 October 2023.
https://www.instagram.com/p/CyhE_OwvAK7/

@dylanallenbooks. "Videos." TikTok. 28 December 2023.

https://www.tiktok.com/@dylanallenbooks/video/7317703231965056287?is_from_webapp=1&web_id=7333675574181627435

Egan, Elisabeth. "Who Is Hannah Grace? And Why Won't She Show Her Face?" *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 2 Nov. 2023,

www.nytimes.com/2023/11/02/books/review/wildfire-hannah-grace.html.

Foster, Chloe, "The Impact of Social Media on the Publishing Industry: A Case Study of Author Colleen Hoover" (2023). Paper 771. <https://dc.etsu.edu/honors/771>

@glavreads. "Videos." TikTok. 17 April 2023.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@glavreads/photo/7358972972213751083>

Grace, Hannah. "The news is finally out..." Instagram. 16 November 2022.

https://www.instagram.com/p/ClCyTyho5B_/?hl=en&img_index=1

Harris, Elizabeth A. "'I Just Want Something That's Gay and Happy': L.G.B.T.Q.

Romance Is Booming." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 30 Mar.

2022, www.nytimes.com/2022/03/30/books/lgbtq-romance-novels.html.

Hoover, Colleen. *It Ends with Us*. Simon & Schuster, 2023.

"*It Ends With Us*." colleenhoover.com, www.colleenhoover.com/products/it-ends-with-us.

Jayswal, Palak. "A Utah Romance Author's First Book Became a National Bestseller.

Here's How She Beat the Pressure of Success for the Second." *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 3 Mar. 2024,

www.sltrib.com/artsliving/2024/03/03/utah-author-lyla-sage-found/.

@larryreads. "Videos." TikTok. 23 September 2022.

https://www.tiktok.com/@larryreads/video/7146712248457661738?is_from_webapp=1&web_id=7333675574181627435

"*Pride and Prejudice* Summary." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., www.britannica.com/topic/Bennet-family.

Regis, Pamela. *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.

Rodia, Tina. "How the Idea of 'Having It All' Makes Women Feel Terrible about Themselves." *The Washington Post*, The Washington Post, 15 Jan. 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/01/15/how-the-idea-of-having-it-all-makes-women-feel-terrible-about-themselves/.

Schwartz, Deanna, and Meghan Collins Sullivan. "Gen Z Is Driving Sales of Romance Books to the Top of Bestseller Lists." *NPR*, NPR, 29 Aug. 2022, www.npr.org/2022/08/29/1119886246/gen-z-is-driving-sales-of-romance-books-to-the-top-of-bestseller-lists.

@sophs_shelf. "*Fair Catch...*" Instagram. 3 June 2022.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CeWgim4Lfia/>

Steiner, Kandi. *Fair Catch*. Kandi Steiner, 2022.

Szalai, Jennifer. "The Complicated Origins of 'Having It All.'" *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 2 Jan. 2015,

www.nytimes.com/2015/01/04/magazine/the-complicated-origins-of-having-it-all.html?auth=login-google1tap&login=google1tap.

Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015.

Wilkinson, Amy. "Can Women Have It All and What's Your 'All' Anyway?" *LinkedIn*, 5 July 2023,

www.linkedin.com/pulse/can-women-have-all-whats-your-anyway-amy-wilkinson.

Willingham, AJ. "Colleen Hoover Is the Hottest Author in America. She Also May Be the Most Controversial." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 27 Aug. 2023,

www.cnn.com/2023/08/27/entertainment/colleen-hoover-books-controversy-cec/index.htm