The Ordinary Concept of True Love

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Abstract

When we say that what two people feel for each other is 'true love,' we seem to be doing more than simply clarifying that it is in fact love they feel, as opposed to something else. That is, an experience or relationship might be a genuine or actual instance of *love* without necessarily being an instance of *true love*. But what criteria do people use to determine whether something counts as true love? This chapter explores three hypotheses. The first holds that the ordinary concept of true love picks out love that is highly prototypical. The second, that it picks out love that is especially good or valuable. The third, that people distinguish between psychological states that are 'real' or not, and that it picks out love that is real. Two experiments provide evidence against the first hypothesis and in favor of the second and third. Implications for real-life disagreements about love are also discussed.

Key words: true love, ordinary concept, prototype, goodness, realness, experiments

1. Introduction

There's a difference, it seems, between *love* and *true love*. Just pick your favorite love story, from a book or a movie, or real life, where you find yourself most convinced of the special connection between the lovers. Where, however cynical or unromantic you may be, you might still be tempted to say such things as "They were made for each other," and mean it as more than a cliché. And now imagine that one of them dies. The other one grieves, for a good long while. Enough time passes, and the living partner starts a relationship with someone new.

Imagine that this new person is no mere rebound. They are deeply kind, attractive, intelligent, loyal. The surviving half of our original duo falls in love with them. And suppose they really are in love. In other words, what the two of them feel for each other, or what they have between them, counts as genuine (romantic) love on any plausible view. Even so, you might find yourself thinking, with a touch of sadness perhaps, that no matter how wonderful and worthy this new love-relationship is, the only time our protagonist experienced *true love* was with the one who died.

If you can get yourself to think that (you may have to use your imagination to fill in certain details), then you may be inclined to think that the concept *true love* is in some way distinct from the concept *love*. At least, that is how it seems to us: that you can have or experience the latter without the former. Indeed, people use the phrase 'true love' in ordinary discourse—in pop songs, poems, and private confessions—as though it expressed a concept all its own, and they seem to think this concept is getting at something important. Something that might justify a marriage, or cause an affair, or inspire a move between countries or a change of careers.

Much seems to hang on this concept, but what are its contours? What (if anything) does it refer to? There has been a mountain of scholarship, in philosophy and other disciplines, on the nature of love, but there has been relatively little work on true love as a topic in its own right.

Of course, that is not to say that existing philosophical work never uses the phrase 'true love.' This phrase has occasionally appeared within existing work, but most of these uses are not invoking the concept that will be our primary concern here. Rather, the aim is often to distinguish actual cases of love from phenomena that may superficially appear to be love, but which are really something else: lust, say, or infatuation, or an unhealthy desire to possess the other person. For example, Velleman (1999) writes: "Students and teachers may of course feel desires for intimacy with one another, but such desires are unlikely to be an expression of true love in this context; usually, they express transference-love, in which the other is a target of fantasies."[1] Similarly, Anglin (1991) argues that if an apparent case of love is the result of some deterministic process, "then it is not true love but mere love-behavior."[1] In these examples, we suggest, the aim is not to explore a distinct concept of *true love* but is rather to understand the concept *love* and, specifically, to do so by distinguishing between actual love and the mere appearance of love.

We suspect there is more to true love than this. More, that is, than the mere marking of a boundary between genuine instances of love and its sundry pretenders. And if you bought into our opening example, you should agree. But if the 'true' in true love is not a mere synonym for 'actual' and suchlike—what is it?

There are various ways of tackling this question. To keep things focused, we will be looking at one particular kind of love—so-called romantic love—as illustrated by our opening example. This is not to say that the love between a parent and child, for instance, could never appropriately be described as 'true'. Perhaps it could, and pursuing this suggestion might ultimately shed light on the *scope* of the concept of true love: that is, on the range of cases or kinds of love to which the concept applies. But even within the category of romantic love, it seems to us that some examples are liable to be described as 'true', while other examples, though still counting as legitimate (i.e., actual) cases of romantic love, are not liable to be described that way. We are interested in what distinguishes these two sorts of cases.

As an additional constraint, we will concern ourselves with one particular aspect of this puzzle, namely, with the *ordinary* concept of true love as it applies within this romantic domain. By this, we mean the concept as it exists in the minds of everyday speakers of English, as revealed by the criteria they use to determine which things count as true love and which do not. To make progress on this question, we will be exploring the patterns in people's ordinary judgments about true love.

Naturally, this will involve looking both at cases of agreement and at cases of disagreement. In some cases, people overwhelmingly agree as to whether something counts as true love or not, and in those cases, an account of the ordinary concept should explain why people make the judgments they do. But of course, when it comes to questions of true love, we also often find considerable disagreement. Often, different people look at the very same phenomenon and make opposite judgments about whether it counts as true love. An account of the ordinary concept should also help us understand what it is that people are disagreeing about in these cases. This will be a core aspect of our inquiry.

If we do successfully uncover at least some of the criteria implicit in the ordinary concept, we immediately face a further question as to whether these criteria are the right ones or whether there might be reason to revise them or perhaps to abandon them, or even abandon the concept itself. These are important questions, and we will turn to them in the final section of our paper. But before we can ask whether the ordinary criteria are right or wrong, we will need to have a better understanding of what those ordinary criteria actually are.

1.1. Three hypotheses

In our attempt to understand the ordinary concept of true (romantic) love, we will consider three main hypotheses. The first hypothesis says that true love, on the ordinary concept, is highly *prototypical* love; the second hypothesis says that it is especially *good, valuable,* or *praiseworthy* love, whether or not it is prototypical; the third hypothesis says that, independent of goodness or prototypicality, true love is love that is rooted in the *real,* in a sense we will be discussing further below. We begin by simply laying out these three hypotheses.

1.1.1 Hypothesis 1: Prototypicality

One hypothesis would be that true love is simply highly prototypical love. On this hypothesis, the criteria associated with the concept of love itself are best understood as a matter of degree. If a relationship or experience satisfies these criteria to a certain degree, people might be willing to say that it is an instance of love. But to count as *true love*, it would not be enough just to scrape over some minimal threshold; the relationship or experience would have to satisfy those criteria to a far greater degree.

According to prototype theory—by way of a brief review—members of a category are picked out by a number of features, each of which has a certain amount of weight (the greater the weight, the more important for category membership). Roughly speaking, the more features with the more weight an entity has, the more prototypical it is.[2] So if true love is prototypical love, it would be an instance of love that has most or all of the prototypical features of love that carry the most weight.

As an analogy, think of the concept of a *true jock*. Plausibly, the concept *jock* is a prototype concept. As such, the concept is associated with various features that count in favor of someone's being a member of the category (prioritizing athletics over other activities, holding certain objectifying attitudes towards women, not being particularly invested in high culture, and so on). One natural hypothesis would be that to be a true jock, one has to be a prototypical jock. On this hypothesis, if a person showed many of the features associated with the concept but not quite all, we might be willing on the whole to consider the person a jock, but we would not be willing to consider the

person a true jock. Only a person who showed all of the features, and showed those features to a high degree, could be a true jock.

A question now arises as to whether a similar approach could be applied to the concept of true love. In support of the view that it can, research both in philosophy and in psychology has converged on the claim that the concept *love* is indeed a prototype concept (see below). There is now a good deal of evidence in favor of that claim. The key issue then is whether the concept *true love* is best understood in terms of this prototype.

Within philosophy, Chappell (2018) has defended an account of romantic love that distinguishes 'paradigm' cases from what she calls 'secondary' or 'marginal' cases. She provides strong arguments for the view that this distinction helps us make sense of certain core questions surrounding love. For example, it helps us tell whether someone is really experiencing romantic love in the fullest sense. Take a case in which someone feels strongly benevolent toward another but lacks intimacy or perhaps commitment. Chappell notes that "benevolence is one thing that we call love," but goes on to argue that benevolence alone would not count as "full-blown love."[3] Full-blown or paradigmatic love, she suggests, would require something more.

Research in psychology has provided evidence that supports this view. Such research suggests that the ordinary concept of love is indeed a prototype concept, and that it has a number of features apart from just benevolence. Among ordinary people, the most significant of these features appear to be *intimacy*, *passion*, and *commitment*.[4] Roughly speaking, *intimacy* involves feelings of closeness and connectedness, and a motive to promote the well-being of the other (i.e., a motive of benevolence). *Passion* encompasses romantic feelings, including physical attraction and sexual desire. And *commitment* refers to the promise or intention to stay together despite obstacles, along with the belief that the relationship will last.[5]

What then does it mean for a person or couple to experience true love? In keeping with the jock analogy, as we noted, one hypothesis is that the person or couple experiences prototypical love. Perhaps people would be willing to categorize a relationship that exhibited just a few of the prototypical features of love as an instance of love, but only a relationship that had all of the features, and to high degree, as an instance of true love.[6]

Let's try this idea out. Imagine a young couple. The partners are consumed by passionate, sexual feelings for each other, and they can't imagine the relationship ever ending. But they don't really know each other at a deeper level, so their feelings of intimacy and commitment are potentially premature. It might be right to say that there is at least some sense in which what they feel for each other is love—perhaps they are even 'in love' in a way that is often valorized in pop songs and movies[7]—but at the same time, without their having developed a stronger sense of mutual understanding and emotional closeness sufficient to ground a more durable commitment, it might be hard to characterize their relationship as an instance of *true love*.

Conversely, imagine a long-married couple that has considerable commitment toward their relationship, as evidenced by its sheer longevity, but who have emotionally drifted apart over the years and have a waning sense of romantic passion. Their relationship might well be an instance of love, but again, this would probably not be the first couple you would choose to illustrate the concept of true love.

By contrast, a couple that is emotionally intimate, profoundly committed, and smoldering with passion even after the so-called honeymoon phase—that is, a couple that strongly exhibits each of the most central, prototypical dimensions of the ordinary love concept—would seem to be a couple that experiences true love on almost any reasonable conception. Our first candidate hypothesis, then, is that true love is highly prototypical love.

1.1.2. Hypothesis 2: Goodness

The hypothesis that true love is prototypical love is a plausible first pass, or so we think. But upon reflection, it may not be the whole picture. Instead, it seems that we can imagine loving relationships that are not at all prototypical in the way we just described, but which, if you closely examine them and come to appreciate what makes them valuable, good, or praiseworthy, would still seem to count as true love.

To illustrate this idea, we will tell you about a couple who escaped to the United States from Poland together after the invasion of the Nazis. They were set up by their respective families when they were younger, and went along with what was expected of them. They got married, moved in together, and developed a simple routine that became familiar. Their relationship didn't involve much deep conversation, and sexual contact was strictly biblical. But by the time the Nazis came, they had built a contented life together. No passion, not much in the way of (overt) emotional disclosure, but a committed partnership nevertheless.

Now imagine their harrowing escape; the miles they traveled together under harsh conditions; what they risked to keep each other alive; what they sacrificed in the way of personal freedom to make sure they found safety as a couple. At several points, we can suppose, each one had the opportunity to abandon the other for a more secure path forward. But they didn't hesitate to risk their lives to protect their relationship. Clearly something about their bond was profound.

Now, it seems clear that this is not a *prototypical* case of romantic love: the couple never poured their hearts out to each other, and sexual passion was never a feature of their relationship. But something about their quiet commitment, and the lengths they went to in order to keep each other safe from harm—and to preserve their way of life in a new country—might seem to warrant the claim that what they had between them was, nevertheless, true love. If our intuitions about this case are not idiosyncratic, there must be more to the concept of true love than mere prototypicality.

What might that something more be? One possibility is that it is something normative: something tied to the notion of goodness or praiseworthiness. In other words, when we say that what this couple has is true love, we are, perhaps among other things, expressing a favorable moral attitude toward their love or toward their relationship more broadly.

The notion that love simpliciter might be a normative concept has support from the existing literature. As Jenkins (2017) has noted, "the word 'love' packs a powerful rhetorical punch [and] its associated valence is typically positive rather than negative." To use the word 'love' in reference to an unhealthy or otherwise dysfunctional relationship, Jenkins argues, can be a "dangerously rhetorically effective way of concealing how bad" the relationship really is.[8] Espousing a similar view, hooks (2000) argues that love requires honesty, trust, and respect, and is fundamentally inconsistent with certain negative attitudes or behaviors: "Abuse and neglect," hooks argues, "negate

love" whereas care and affirmation, which are "the opposite of abuse and humiliation, are the foundation of love. No one can rightfully claim to be loving when behaving abusively."[9]

Inspired by these ideas, one natural hypothesis would be that people reserve the phrase 'true love' for instances of love that excel along this normative dimension. In other words, perhaps people use this phrase only for instances of love that are especially admirable, or that most fully embody what is valuable, good, or praiseworthy about love.

This hypothesis immediately generates predictions for our question about when people will agree versus disagree about whether something counts as true love. In certain cases, almost everyone will think that a certain instance of love manifests something of deep value (perhaps our story about a couple escaping the Nazis would generate this reaction), and in those cases, the hypothesis predicts that almost everyone should agree that this instance counts as true love. By contrast, in other cases, people with opposing values will have correspondingly opposing views about whether a given instance of love manifests something of deep value. In those cases, the hypothesis predicts that different people should have very different judgments about whether the instance counts as true love. Those people who think that the case manifests something of deep value should say that it is true love, while those who think that it does not should disagree and say that it is not true love.

Importantly, however—and this something we will be testing below—the hypothesis predicts a substantial amount of agreement about whether something is true love *among those who agree about whether it is good or bad.* For example, among those people who think that a given instance of love is wrong or depraved, there should be strong agreement as to whether that instance of love counts as true love (i.e., agreement that it does not).

1.1.3. Hypothesis 3: Realness

Although there is certainly something tempting about the hypothesis that people use the phrase 'true love' only for relationships that they believe to be valuable, good, or praiseworthy, certain strands within existing research suggest a subtler view. As May (2013) has argued, there is a rich tradition in Western thought according to which love, and romantic love in particular, may be risky and all-consuming: dangerous to oneself or others and even threatening to the very fabric of society.[10] Love can be a sort of madness. In fact, the idea that a bond must be 'healthy,' consistent with the well-being of the lovers, or something that is fit to be praised to count as love is in some respects a recent innovation. Could there be relationships that are not good—or even highly dysfunctional in certain respects—where it would still be right to say that the couple experienced true love?

Consider Morgan and Robin. Until meeting one another, their relationships had all been fairly uninspired. Suddenly here was a person who made them feel totally alive, filling them with an electric, almost addictive desire. They were that couple at the party who seem so in tune with one another that it makes you wonder about your own relationship. And yet, their love was also tumultuous. A day might begin happily and end in a bitter argument. Their fights occasionally spun out of control (once, Morgan had all the locks changed and Robin couldn't get back into the apartment for three days). But even in the darkest of times, they felt a passionate connection. Both were convinced that no one else could ever understand them—in all their unique peculiarity—quite so well; and they felt that if they weren't together, they would be missing out on what was most essential in life.

Suppose that, one day, exhausted from all the drama, they decide to break up for good. They both feel it is time to start building a stable future—to start looking for the kind of partner their parents would approve of. They don't feel an immediate connection to these new prospects, and they find themselves putting a lot more effort into enjoying one another's company (is it really necessary to spend multiple weekends together going in detail over potential mutual funds?). Although these relationships lack the intensity they once felt for each other, they are invested in making things work, and over the years, they come to really value their new lives. They can't help but marvel at how much happier they are now. And they aren't faking their feelings: they have in fact grown to love their new partners. Even so, we can imagine them thinking to themselves from time to time, perhaps lying awake at night reflecting on old memories, that the other was their 'one true love.' Like the couple from the beginning of this paper.

If they would be reasonable in thinking that, how could this be explained? We can imagine different potential answers, but here is one to try: Although their relationship was in many respects unstable and unhealthy, what Robin and Morgan felt for each other was very *real*. Indeed, one can imagine them looking back at the time they spent together and thinking: "That was such a painful period, but even so, it was the only time in my life I felt fully in touch with something real." Perhaps this notion of what we will call 'realness' plays a role in people's ordinary concept of true love.

In saying this, we do not mean to be introducing a new technical term. Rather, the suggestion is that people ordinarily distinguish between psychological states, ways of relating, or even periods of their lives that are, in a particular sense, 'real' and those that are not. People might mark this distinction by using sentences like: "I was so angry about what happened, but at least I was feeling something *real*." Or: "I thought I was doing something meaningful with my life, but it was only when I quit that other job and started working full-time as an artist that I truly experienced anything *real*." Although this distinction can be applied to the case of love, or so we propose, the distinction itself does not seem specific to that emotion. Instead, it is a distinction that people can apply to a range of phenomena, including different psychological states (desire, happiness, sadness, hatred, and so forth).

Suppose we go with this hypothesis for the moment. The question that immediately arises is: How do people distinguish between those experiences, for example of love, that are real as opposed to not real—or perhaps less real? One approach to answering this question might be to invoke the notion of a 'true self.' A body of empirical work suggests that people quite naturally think that some emotions, thoughts, or actions reflect an agent's true self, while others do not.[11] Very roughly, this research suggests that a person's true self is typically regarded as some fundamental part of who they are: not something due to mere socialization, or a desire to fit in, for example.

If people think that a given psychological state does not reflect the agent's true self, they will see that state as having a peculiar status. Take, for example, the experience of happiness, where this is judged not to reflect the agent's true self. Typically, people will say that there is a sense in which the agent is in fact happy—they don't deny that basic description—but they will also say that there is a deeper sense in which she isn't happy: the happiness is not rooted in her truest self.

Researchers have not reached a consensus about how best to make sense of this sort of judgment, and, beyond that, it is an open question whether judgments about the 'realness' of an experience should be understood in terms of the true self at all. We will not be attempting to address those

issues here. Rather, we are raising the notion of a true self to give a sense of how one might try to explain what people *mean* when they judge that a psychological state is (or isn't) 'real'. But giving such an explanation is not the aim of this paper. Instead, our focus is on the more basic question of whether people's ordinary concept of true love is structured around such realness judgments.

Even in the absence of a detailed account of what realness is, however, the realness hypothesis makes certain testable predictions. Suppose people agree that what Robin and Morgan feel for each other is love, and our goal is to predict whether they will think it counts as true love. According to the realness hypothesis, their judgments about this question should be predicted by their judgments about the realness of what Robin and Morgan feel. Moreover, judgments of realness should predict judgments of true love even controlling for prototypicality and goodness. To see this, suppose that people determine that Robin and Morgan's relationship is not a prototypical example of love and that, ultimately, it is not even good. It might seem, then, that they should also fail to regard the relationship, or perhaps what Robin and Morgan feel for each other within the context of the relationship, as an instance of true love. But the realness hypothesis makes a different prediction. It holds that there is a further sort of judgment people can make—a judgment about the realness of what Robin and Morgan feel—and to the extent that people judge this feeling to be real, they should judge that it is true love after all.

To bring out what is surprising and important in this hypothesis, it might be helpful to contrast the phrase 'true love' with other phrases that use the word 'true.' Suppose that John appears to be in some sense a jock, and we are wondering whether people will agree that he is a 'true jock.' Clearly, people's judgments about this would have nothing to do with whether they agreed with a statement like: 'John is real.' It is perfectly obvious that John himself is real, and the only question is whether he falls into a certain category. Thus, the best way to predict whether people think John is a true jock might be to see whether they agree with a statement like: 'John is an especially clear and paradigmatic example of a jock.'

On the realness hypothesis, the phrase 'true love' should be understood very differently. Suppose again that what Robin and Morgan feel for each other is in some sense love, and we want to predict whether people will judge that it is true love. The realness hypothesis predicts that such judgments will *not* turn on whether people think their feelings fit into some category (e.g., the category of love). Instead, it predicts that people's judgments will depend on whether they think the feelings Robin and Morgan have for each other are *real*. In other words, people's judgments would not best be predicted by their agreement with a statement like: 'What Robin and Morgan feel for each other is an especially clear and paradigmatic example of love.' Rather, they should be predicted by agreement with a statement like: 'What Robin and Morgan feel for each other is real.'

2. Experimental studies

We have presented three hypotheses. The first is that true love, on the ordinary concept, is highly *prototypical* love. The second is that true love is love that is fundamentally *good*. The third is that true love is love that is *real*.

Although these three hypotheses differ from one another at a deeper theoretical level, they will often overlap in practice. For example, since the prototypical features of love are themselves typically considered good, our first and second hypotheses will make similar predictions in most cases. And

our second and third hypotheses will make similar predictions in most cases as well: presumably, people will think that if a couple is experiencing love that is real, they are experiencing something good. They might even think that experiencing something real is good in itself.

To tease these hypotheses apart, then, it will be necessary to examine certain cases where prototypicality, goodness, and realness do not coincide, or where they independently vary, and assess the relative contribution of each dimension to intuitive judgments about the existence of true love in a given relationship. That is what we set out to do in a pair of empirical studies.

2.1. Study 1

Our first study looked at prototypicality and realness. We manipulated three features that were associated with prototypical love in previous studies (intimacy, passion, commitment) and also independently manipulated realness. Participants were then asked (a) whether the relationship was an example of prototypical love and (b) whether the relationship was an example of true love.

On the prototypicality hypothesis, according to which true love just is prototypical love, judgments about true love should show the same pattern as judgments about prototypical love. By contrast, on the realness hypothesis, judgments about true love might come apart from judgments about prototypical love, and we should instead find that such judgments are especially influenced by realness.

2.1.1. Method

Open Science. This study, including planned analyses and exclusion criteria, was pre-registered at http://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=z68ka6. The open data and materials are available at https://osf.io/ezysq.

Participants. Eight hundred and four US participants were recruited on Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and received $0.35 for their time. Participants were excluded from the final sample prior to data analysis if they completed the survey in under 100 seconds ($n = 74$), provided an incorrect answer to a comprehension check ($n = 269$), or provided an incorrect answer to Captcha test ($n = 50$). Our final sample included 481 participants (228 female, 248 male, 5 other; $M_{age} = 35.94$, $SD = 11.06$).

Procedure. Participants completed an online survey with a between-subjects design. In the first section, we familiarized participants with the notion of a "prototype" by presenting them with examples of more or less prototypical chairs (see the exact study materials online at the above link for specifics). In the next two sections, they read descriptions of hypothetical entities and judged the extent to which each entity is a prototypical example of a certain concept. They rated prototypicality on a sliding scale from 0-100 (0 = Not at all a prototypical x; 100 = Completely prototypical x). Participants were also asked to make an additional judgment about each entity unrelated to prototypically (also using a 100-point sliding scale). The purpose of these two sections was to ensure that participants were comfortable making prototypicality judgments before moving onto the main section of the survey. We also wanted them to expect a second, variable question that was unrelated to prototypicality so that the "true love" question would not stand out when they came to it.

In the main section of the survey, participants read about a hypothetical relationship between Mario and Jasmine. Each participant was presented with one of sixteen conditions, which varied along four dimensions – intimacy, passion, commitment, and realness. See Table 1.

Table 1. Vignettes used in Experiment 1. Each participant was randomly assigned to receive one version of each of the four paragraphs, yielding sixteen different possibilities in total.

	High	Low
Intimacy	Mario and Jasmine have a warm, close, and comfortable relationship, where they trust each other and actively support each other's emotional needs. They communicate well and know they can count on each other when times get tough. And they often share deeply personal information, so they feel they really understand each other.	Mario and Jasmine don't always feel that warm and close in their relationship. They definitely care about each other's emotional needs, but they tend to wait for specific problems to come up before offering their support. They also struggle a bit with communication, and have some trust issues around this, mostly to do with feeling misunderstood. So sharing information that is too deep or personal can feel uncomfortable.
Passion	On top of that, they find each other very physically attractive. Even just seeing each other fills them with excitement – it feels almost magical. So they're always on each other's minds and they often fantasize about each other when they're apart. They have a hard time imagining life without each other, or anyone who could make them happier.	On top of that, they aren't particularly attracted to each other physically. They definitely enjoy seeing each other – it just doesn't have that sense of magic or excitement about it. So, while they have fond thoughts now and then when they cross each other's minds, fantasies are pretty rare. Sometimes, they find themselves imagining what a relationship would be like with someone they had more romantic feelings for.
Comm-itment	When they reflect on things, they realize they are committed to maintaining their connection, despite potential temptations, and even when they find each other hard to deal with. They feel confident in their love for each other and, somewhere deep down, believe it will last for the rest of their lives. At the end of the day, they feel a strong sense of responsibility for each other and plan to continue their relationship as long as they can.	When they reflect on things, they realize they are somewhat unsure about their actual commitment to the relationship. They understand that things might get rocky, or that others might come between them, and they don't want to set unrealistic expectations. Still, they love each other, and things feel pretty stable for now. But who knows about the rest of their lives? At the end of the day, they feel a certain amount of responsibility for each other, and they plan to continue their relationship as long as it works out.
Realness	One day, Mario was talking with his best friend Aaron. Aaron was telling him about an important event in his life from a couple of years back. "It's the only time in my life where things just felt really real, you know?" Aaron then asked Mario if his relationship with Jasmine made him feel that way. "You know what? Yes. Looking back on everything I've experienced in my life, I sometimes feel like my relationship with Jasmine is the only thing that's real."	One day, Mario was talking with his best friend Aaron. Aaron was telling him about an important event in his life from a couple of years back. "It's the only time in my life where things just felt really real, you know?" Aaron then asked Mario if his relationship with Jasmine made him feel that way. "You know what? That's a good question. I guess I need to think about it a little bit."

After reading the vignette, participants were asked to judge the extent to which Mario and Jasmine's relationship is an example of prototypical love, and the extent to which their relationship is an example of true love. Both questions were presented at the same time on the same page.

> **Prototypicality.** *To what extent would you say that Mario and Jasmine's relationship is an example of prototypical love?*

> **True Love.** *To what extent would you say that Mario and Jasmine's relationship is an example of true love?*

Participants rated prototypicality on a sliding scale from 0-100 (0 = Not at all prototypical love; 100 = Completely prototypical love). Similarly, they rated true love on a sliding scale from 0-100 (0 = Not at all true love; 100 = Completely true love).

Participants then completed a comprehension check in which they were asked whether Mario felt certain that his relationship with Jasmine was 'real.' They could either answer 'Yes' or 'No.' Because we are interested in the effect of realness on true love judgments and prototypicality judgments, it was essential that participants answered this question correctly for their given vignette. Those who answered incorrectly were excluded from the final sample, as noted above.

Finally, participants provided information about gender, age, and political orientation. They also completed a Captcha test to prove that they are human. Those who answered incorrectly were excluded from the final sample.

2.1.2. Results

Although these data could be analyzed in a number of different ways, our concern here was with one specific question. The study looked at the influence of four different factors (intimacy, passion, commitment, realness) on judgments about two different questions (prototypical love, true love). For each of the different factors, we wanted to know whether it had the same impact on the two questions or whether it had different impacts.

We therefore used a mixed-model repeated measures ANOVA, with question type (prototypicality vs. true love) as a within-subjects factor and intimacy, passion, commitment, and realness as between-subjects factors. Our pre-registered prediction was that the effect of realness would be greater on true love judgments than on prototypicality judgments.

There were significant main effects of question type, $F(1,464) = 6.55$, $p = .011$, $\eta_p^2 = .014$, intimacy, $F(1,465) = 31.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .064$, passion, $F(1,465) = 54.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .105$, and realness, $F(1,465) = 91.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .165$. These were qualified by significant two-way interactions between intimacy and passion, $F(1,465) = 5.64$, $p = .018$, $\eta_p^2 = .012$, and passion and realness, $F(1,465) = 10.94$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .023$. There were no other interactions nor main effects for the between-subjects comparisons.

Turning now to the key research question, we looked to see whether there were any interactions between question type and the other factors. As predicted, there was a significant interaction between question type and realness, $F(1,465) = 16.716$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .035$. There was also an interaction between question type and intimacy, $F(1,465) = 7.34$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .016$. To decompose these interactions, we conducted two separate 2 (realness: high, low) x 2 (intimacy: high, low) x 2 (passion: high, low) x 2 (commitment: high, low) ANOVAs on each question type (prototypicality, true love).

The effect sizes for each factor on judgments of prototypicality and true love are depicted in Figure 1. The panel on the left shows the degree to which each factor impacted people's judgments about prototypical love; the panel on the right shows the degree to which each factor impacted judgments about true love.
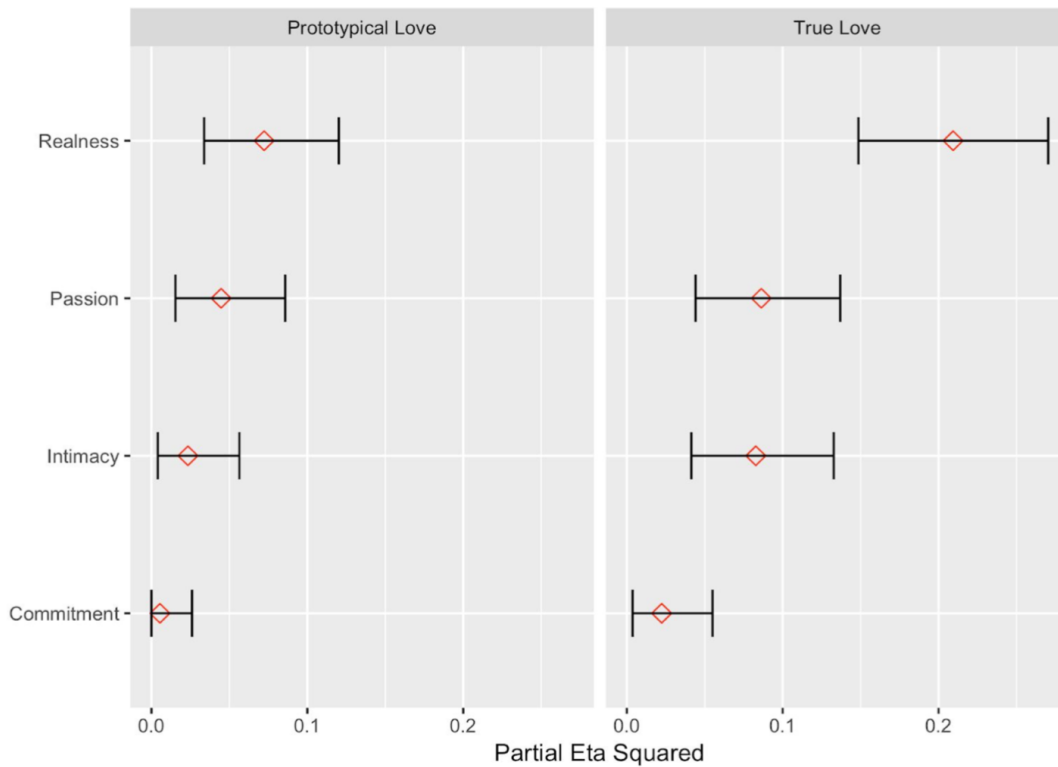
Figure 1. Effect sizes (η_P) of realness, passion, intimacy, and commitment on judgments of prototypicality and trueness in Study 1. Error bars show 95% confidence interval.

As the figure shows, the effect of intimacy on true love judgments, $F(1,465) = 43.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .085$, was greater than its effect on prototypicality judgments, $F(1,465) = 10.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .022$. And as predicted, the effect of realness on true love judgments, $F(1,465) = 118.08$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .203$, was much greater than its effect on prototypicality judgments, $F(1,465) = 32.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .065$.

2.1.3. Discussion

In this first study, we found that the pattern of people's judgments about true love was quite different from the pattern of people's judgments about prototypical love. This finding provides strong evidence against the prototypicality hypothesis. Given the substantial difference between the pattern found for true love judgments and the pattern found for prototypical love judgments, it is unlikely that the concept of true love is simply the concept of prototypical love.

Our data revealed two different respects in which the pattern of people's true love judgments departed from that of their prototypical love judgments. First, as predicted, realness had a far larger impact on true love judgments than on prototypical love judgments. Second, intimacy had a somewhat larger impact on true love judgments than on prototypical love judgments. It is possible that these are best understood as two independent effects, but it is also possible that the effect for intimacy could be understood as a byproduct of the effect on realness. That is, it might be that

intimacy has a somewhat larger impact on true love judgments because intimacy is itself regarded, at least to some extent, as a cue to realness.

The fact that realness had such a large impact on true love judgments—far larger than the impact of any other factor—provides at least some prima facie support for the realness hypothesis. However, one might also think that this result is misleading. After all, as we alluded to above, realness could itself be regarded as something good, at least within the domain of love, so even if the goodness hypothesis were correct, one might still expect to find an impact of realness on true love judgments. We explore this issue more directly in the next study.

2.2. Study 2

In this second study, we turned to a different approach. We constructed a set of cases about which we expected to find a large amount of disagreement, with some participants saying that a given case was clearly an example of true love and other participants saying that the very same case was clearly not an example of true love. We then asked whether each individual participant's true love judgment in these cases could be predicted by that participant's own judgments of goodness and of realness.

This method allows us to disentangle these two factors in a way that would not be possible with the method used in our previous study. If we simply tell participants in one condition that a couple is experiencing something real, the participants in that condition will presumably show a tendency on the whole to infer that the couple is experiencing something good, and vice versa. This fact limits our ability to distinguish the influence of these two factors. By contrast, in the present design, we can take advantage of the natural variance across participants in judgments of goodness and realness. In some cases, for example, we might find that some participants agree about whether a given case exhibits goodness, but disagree about whether it exhibits realness. We can then ask whether this natural variance in each type of judgment predicts attributions of true love.

The design of this second study sets up three potential predictions. One possibility is that, once one controls for goodness, the effect of realness on true love judgments is no longer significant. This would suggest that it is really the goodness of a relationship, rather than its realness, that is at the heart of such judgments. A second prediction is the inverse: that once one controls for realness, the effect of goodness disappears. This would suggest that realness is the driving factor. A third possibility is that each factor has an independent effect, even when controlling for the other. This would suggest that both factors actually play a role.

2.2.1. Method

Open Science. This study, including planned analyses and exclusion criteria, was pre-registered at http://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=sr2ri7. The open data and materials are available at https://osf.io/ezysq.

Participants. Three hundred and fifty US participants were recruited on Mechanical Turk (Mturk) and received $0.35 for their time. Participants were excluded from the final sample prior to data analysis if they failed to complete the survey ($n = 0$), provided an incorrect answer to a comprehension check ($n = 60$), or provided an incorrect answer to a Captcha test ($n = 11$). Our final sample included 285 participants (134 female, 150 male, 1 other; $M_{age} = 34.43$, $SD = 11.17$).

Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three vignettes detailing a hypothetical relationship between Mario and Jasmine. The *abuse* vignette describes a passionate relationship interspersed with physical aggression. The *puppy love* vignette describes a simple but happy relationship between two elementary school children, unencumbered by the complexities of adult relationships. The *age difference* vignette describes a forbidden relationship between a professor and a student who seem to understand each other on a deeper level (see Appendix for the exact wording of the vignettes).

After reading one of the vignettes just described, participants were asked to judge the extent to which the relationship between the couple, who were named Mario and Jasmine in each vignette, was an example of true love.

> **True Love.** *To what extent would you say that Mario and Jasmine's relationship is an example of true love?*

Participants made their ratings on a sliding scale from 0-100 (0 = Not at all true love; 100 = Completely true love). On the next page, they were asked to judge the extent to which Mario and Jasmine's relationship was characterized by realness and goodness.

> **Realness.** *When thinking about Jasmine and Mario's relationship, people might have different intuitions. Some people might think that their relationship is, in some respects, unconventional, but still that what they have between them is ultimately real. Others might disagree and say that, despite appearances, Jasmine and Mario aren't actually connecting on a real level. What do you think? Do you think that what Jasmine and Mario have between them is real?*

> **Goodness.** *When thinking about Jasmine and Mario's relationship, people might have different intuitions. Some people might think that there are certain flaws in how they relate to each other, but that, ultimately, their relationship is good. Others might disagree, and say that, although their relationship is positive in certain ways, ultimately, they have a bad relationship. What do you think? Do you think that what Jasmine and Mario have between them is good?*

Participants rated realness on a sliding scale from 0-100 (0 = Completely not real; 100 = Completely real) and goodness on a sliding scale from 0-100 (0 = Completely bad; 100 = Completely good).

Participants then completed a comprehension check in which they were asked to judge whether a statement about the vignette was true or false. Those who answered incorrectly were excluded from the final sample.

Finally, participants provided information about gender, age, and political orientation. They also completed a Captcha test to prove that they are human. Those who answered incorrectly were excluded from the final sample.

2.2.2. Results

Data were analyzed using linear mixed effect models, with goodness and realness as fixed effects and vignette as a random effect (random intercepts only). All analyses were conducted in R using the lme4 and lmerTest packages.

There was a significant effect such that participants who gave higher goodness judgments also gave higher true love judgments, $B = 0.54$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = 8.91$, $p < 0.001$, $CI = [0.42, 0.66]$. However, even controlling for the effect of goodness, there was still a significant effect of realness on true love judgments: $B = 0.40$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 7.32$, $p < 0.001$, $CI = [0.29, 0.50]$.

Figure 2 shows the results for all three variables. Looking at this figure, one can get a more qualitative sense of the patterns in people's judgments. For example, consider the puppy love vignette. In that vignette, almost all participants thought that the relationship was a very good one (i.e., the vast majority of points are toward the right-hand side on the x-axis). However, even among these participants, there was considerable disagreement about whether the couple had true love (as seen in the large amount of spread on the y-axis). Judgments of these cases were then predicted by realness (shown in the color of each point). That is, even among participants who agreed that the relationship was a good one, those who thought the couple were experiencing something real tended to say that they had true love, while those who thought that they were not experiencing something real tended to say that they did not have true love.
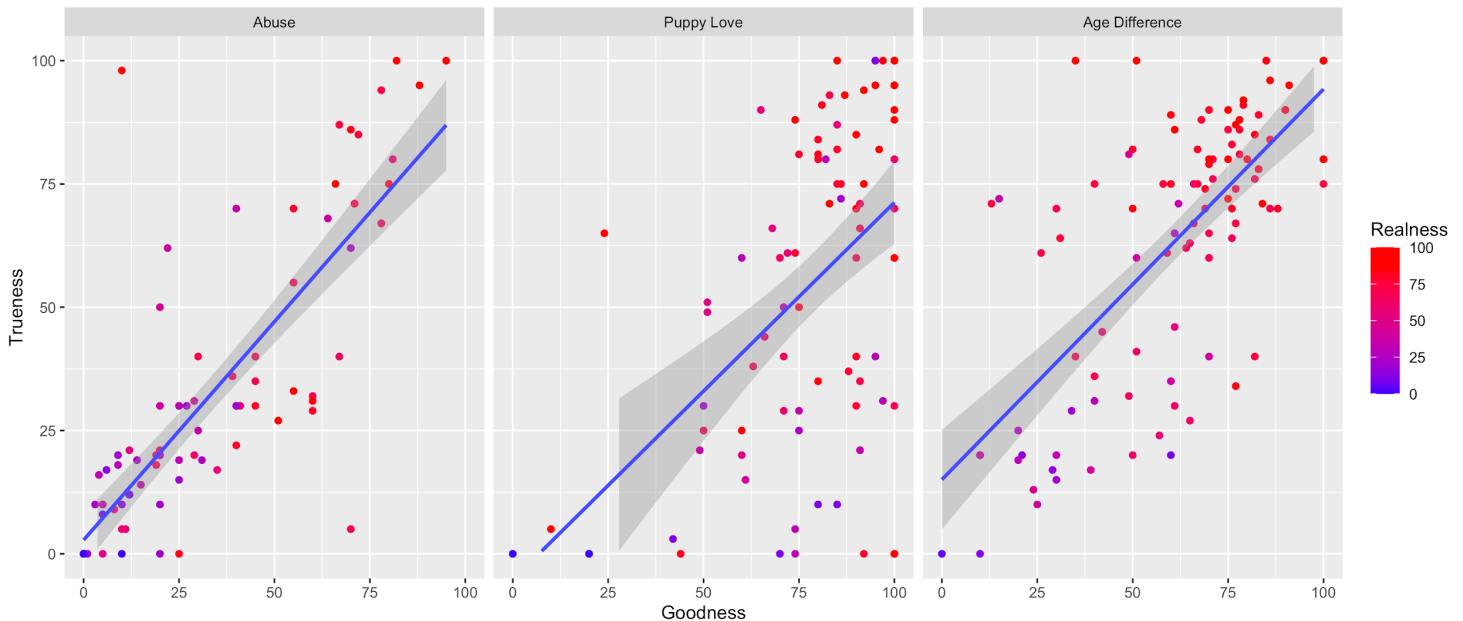

Figure 2. Scatterplot showing results from Study 2. X-axis shows goodness. Y-axis shows true love. Color shows realness.

2.2.3. Discussion

In this second study, we looked at cases in which there was substantial disagreement between different participants as to whether something was an example of true love. We then asked whether

participants' judgments in those cases were predicted by their goodness judgments and by their realness judgments. The results showed two different effects.

First, true love judgments were predicted by goodness judgments. This effect is very much in keeping with existing theoretical work on love[12] and provides evidence that existing theories are getting at something important about people's ordinary attributions.

Second, and notably, even controlling for goodness judgments, true love judgments were predicted by realness judgments. So we can tentatively conclude that, over and above the role of goodness in people's ordinary judgments of true love, there is also an important role for realness.

3. General Discussion

We began by noting that there is a conceptual difference between love and true love. Although the phrase 'true love' may sometimes be used to distinguish actual cases of love from merely apparent ones, we argued that *true love* is a concept in its own right, and a seemingly important one in many of our lives. How should this concept be understood? To answer this question, we tested three main hypotheses.

First, the hypothesis that true love is simply prototypical love. As we noted in the Introduction, previous work in both philosophy and psychology has argued that *love* is a prototype concept. The results of Study 1 strongly support this view: the more a relationship was characterized by paradigmatically loving features, the more the relationship was judged to be an instance of prototypical love. But equally strongly, the results of our first study contradict the hypothesis that *true love* and *prototypical love* are themselves the same concept: rather, these concepts are markedly distinct. Most notably, our manipulation of realness had very different effects on judgments about whether a relationship was an instance of prototypical versus true love. Since people's application of these concepts responded differently to the same manipulation, we have reason to reject the view that they are the same concept.

Second, the hypothesis that true love is love that is especially good or valuable. We found that perceived relationship goodness positively predicts judgments of true love, even controlling for perceived realness. This is exactly what should be expected given existing accounts of the normative significance of describing something as 'love'.[13] Our results provide support for these accounts, and also for the claim that this same point applies to people's use of the phrase 'true love.' Further research should continue to explore this effect. One key question will be whether the effect of goodness is best understood as reflecting something about the nature of people's very concept of true love or whether it is more a matter of people simply being reluctant to apply the words 'true love' to something they regard as bad.

Third, the hypothesis that true love is love that is real. The present findings provide strong support for this third hypothesis. In Study 1, the manipulation of realness had by far the largest effect on judgments of true love, going beyond such features as intimacy, passion, and commitment. In Study 2, realness judgments predicted true love judgments even when controlling for goodness judgments. Taken together, then, the results of these studies suggest a link between the ordinary concept of true love and judgments of realness.

Note that our results point to something distinctive about phrases like 'true love' that would not be seen with other sorts of phrases that include the word 'true.' For example, in Study 2, participants were not asked to judge the extent to which Mario and Jasmine have 'real love.' Instead, they were simply asked whether what Mario and Jasmine have between them is 'real.' In other words, participants who did not see their relationship as an instance of true love tended to think that what they had between them was just not real. By contrast, this sort of judgment would not make sense for other phrases that include the word 'true.' As we noted above, if people think that John is not a true jock, this would not be explained by their thinking that John himself is not real. Similarly, if people think that a certain sculpture is not a true work of art, it is likely not because they think the sculpture itself is not real, and so on.

It is an open question how we should understand people's judgments that certain emotions or experiences are not 'real.' We suggested earlier that one way to understand such judgments could be in terms of the notion of a 'true self' and we sketched out a potential explanation along those lines. But we also noted that researchers disagree about how best to interpret 'true self' judgments, and we stated that we were not proposing to take a stand on whether people's ordinary judgments of realness actually should be understood in terms of this notion. We expect that the best approach to addressing such questions will be to expand the inquiry beyond the concept of true love and explore judgments of realness in other domains, or with respect to other kinds of emotions. That is, instead of just looking at judgments of realness insofar as they are relevant to the concept of true love, one might want to explore more generally why people see certain experiences as 'real' and others as 'not real' (or 'less real'). This is an important issue for further research.[14]

However, even in the absence of a fully worked-out account of realness, it seems that we can use the observed link between judgments of realness and judgments of true love to explain certain otherwise puzzling aspects of the ordinary concept of true love. Consider the different examples of true love we sketched out at the beginning of this paper: between the Polish couple and between Robin and Morgan. A remarkable fact about these relationships is that they had very different features, even seeming to be near-opposites. The Polish couple had little in the way of emotional closeness or intimacy, and virtually no romantic passion, yet were extraordinarily committed to the relationship. Robin and Morgan, by contrast, were extremely close emotionally and practically burning with romantic passion, yet ultimately, chose to end the relationship in order to find stability and calm with others. If we assume that the concept of true love is closely linked to judgments of realness, we can begin to see why these apparently radically different relationships may both be seen as examples of true love. Though the two relationships differ when it comes to many of their salient features (intimacy, passion, commitment, and so on), there is another respect in which they are actually deeply similar. In both cases, the love that the people feel for each other seems to be real.

Moreover, the account may help us to understand why people so often disagree about whether a given relationship is an instance of true love. Two people can look at the very same romantic relationship, be possessed of the very same facts about it, and reach opposite conclusions about whether it is an instance of true love. We think realness may also have a role in explaining such disagreements, as we alluded to in the Introduction, and as we will now explore more directly.

3.1. Differences and disagreements

People often disagree about true love: what it is, whether it exists, who has it, and so on. For a concrete example, consider our *age difference* vignette (see Appendix), which concerns a relationship between an older professor and his young undergraduate student. Many people responded that this was clearly a case of true love, while many others responded that it was clearly not a case of true love. Disagreements like this one seem to point to something fundamental about the concept of true love and the role it plays in the way people understand their lives and relationships.

The present findings cannot directly tell us which of the opposing views in such cases is the correct one, but they do provide valuable insight into the nature of such disagreement itself. Imagine a person who accepts that there is something very wrong in the relationship described by the age difference vignette, but who nevertheless maintains that the characters in it are experiencing true love. Now imagine a critic who disagrees with this person, asserting that what the characters feel for each other in the vignette is not true love. In light of the present findings, it seems that there are two distinct ways in which such a critic could argue for her view.

One approach would be to draw on the criteria associated with the ordinary concept of true love. In this first approach, the critic would accept the criteria revealed in the studies reported here, and she would then argue that the case in question doesn't actually fulfill those criteria. For example, focusing on the realness criterion, she could say: "You may think that they are experiencing something real, but you are suffering from a delusion. No relationship between an older professor and a much younger student—especially one he directly supervises—can be rooted in the kind of realness that is necessary for true love."

Alternatively, the critic could argue against the criteria themselves. For example, she could argue that the ordinary criteria for applying the concept of true love are themselves flawed, and that we should instead adopt criteria according to which nothing can count as true love without being (sufficiently) good. She might then say: "It may well be that their feelings for each other are real. And I recognize that realness is one of the main criteria we ordinarily use to decide whether something counts as true love. But their relationship is deeply wrong, and for that reason, we should reject any criterion according to which their feelings for one another count as true love."

In short, there are at least two different ways in which people might disagree about true love. First, they might disagree about whether a particular relationship or experience fulfills the criteria associated with the ordinary concept. And second, they might disagree on a deeper level: they might disagree about the criteria themselves. Let us now take a closer look at each kind of disagreement in turn.

3.1.1. Disagreement about fulfilling criteria

The results of the present studies shed at least some light on the sorts of disagreements about true love that are rife in ordinary life. In Study 2, we find considerable disagreement between participants about whether the characters in each vignette were experiencing true love, but most of this disagreement simply mirrored the disagreement they showed on the questions about goodness and realness. Among participants who agreed about those other questions, there was actually relatively little disagreement about whether what the characters had between them was an instance of true love.

These results provide some support for a broader picture of the nature of ordinary disagreements regarding true love. On this picture, most of the disagreement is of the first of the two types described above. People share an understanding of the criteria something has to fulfill to count as true love, but they disagree about whether individual cases do or do not fulfill these criteria.

To flesh out this picture, we would need a better understanding of the disagreement people show regarding each of the criteria themselves. When it comes to judgments of goodness, this disagreement seems at least relatively straightforward. We can easily imagine a case in which two people agree that the criteria involve a role for goodness but just have radically different views about which things are good. The key question now is whether we can make sense of the idea that an analogous situation might arise when it comes to realness. Can we make sense of the idea that two people might agree that the criteria involve a role for realness but have radically different views about which things are real?

There does seem to be some intuitive sense in which this is possible. To dramatize the point, take the *puppy love* vignette (see Appendix). We can imagine one person saying, "What could be more *real* than the innocent, uncomplicated, uncorrupted love of two youngsters who have nothing but pure affection for one another?" Whereas another might say: "To the contrary, a love that has not endured any struggles, nor been tested by life's various predicaments, is just kid stuff—it isn't *real* in the way required for true love." Here, the two people seem to have deeply different views about which individual things count as real, but it does not seem that they are just talking past each other. Instead, it seems that they share a certain concept—the concept of realness—and simply disagree about which things fall under that concept.

In short, people have quite different views about which individual things count as 'true love', but the present findings suggest that this is not simply because different people are using that phrase in completely different ways. Rather, it seems that people share certain criteria for the use of this phrase, and are then engaged in a substantive disagreement about which things fulfill those criteria. A key step along the way to developing a better understanding of the nature of that substantive disagreement will be to develop a better understanding of the ordinary concept of realness.

3.1.2. Disagreement about the criteria themselves

Suppose that two people disagree, not about whether a given relationship meets some shared criterion for true love, but about whether a given criterion, such as realness, is the *right* criterion for picking out category members. There are at least two ways in which someone might take issue with the ordinary concept of true love by disagreeing about one or more of its criteria. Specifically, there could be a *naturalistic* disagreement about the criteria, and there could be a *normative* disagreement about the criteria.

A *naturalistic* disagreement would be premised on the belief that there really is such a thing as true love in the word, and that the ordinary concept of true love, in placing so much emphasis on realness, say, does not succeed in uniquely picking it out. A scientific reductionist, for example, might identify true love with some biological process related to reproduction, or a particular brain state, and argue that it is *this* feature which ought to be central to the concept on grounds of descriptive accuracy. A proponent of this view, then, might then wish to engage in what has been called *naturalist conceptual engineering*.[15] That is, the proponent might try to promote what they take to

be a more *accurate* or finely discriminating conception of true love and encourage its wider adoption among ordinary people.

A *normative* disagreement would be premised on a different kind of belief. This would be a moral or sociopolitical belief that the ordinary concept of true love is not *desirable* in its current form, given certain normative ends. As Haslanger (2000) argues, the operative concept of X may be different from what she calls the 'manifest' concept (the concept people explicitly take themselves to be applying when they pick out X); and this in turn may be different from what she calls the 'target' concept—the concept people *should* apply when picking out X, all things considered.[16]

To see what a normative disagreement about the concept of true love might look like, let us imagine someone speaking to a troubled friend, perhaps one of the characters in our *abuse* vignette (see Appendix). "If your partner abuses you," we'll imagine this person saying, "no matter how much you may feel affection for each other ... what you have between you is not *true love*." Now suppose this was a direct response to the other person saying: "I know the abuse is wrong, but what we have is *true love* and that is more important than anything else." We would have two different uses, then, of the same concept that are mutually incompatible.

Suppose that both of these (hypothetically) operative uses were circulating in the language community. Depending on our aims and values, we might think that it would be normatively *better*— all things considered—if the use that excludes abuse became more intuitive and widely employed, while the use that is compatible with abuse became counterintuitive among most ordinary language users. Supposing that was our goal, we might wish to undertake what Haslanger calls an 'ameliorative' project, or what has recently been termed *moral conceptual engineering*. That is, we might try to promote the first use of true love and encourage its greater uptake among ordinary people.

4. Conclusion

The concept of true love is important. It matters to people's lives, and it is often cited as a justification for decisions or behaviors that might (otherwise) be seen as extreme or unwarranted. "Why did you leave your spouse of thirty years?" "Because I found true love with someone else." "Why did you quit your job and move to Europe?" "Because I found true love with someone who lives in Portugal." People will disagree about whether, or to what extent, such appeals can in fact justify certain acts or choices. And they will disagree about which relationships qualify as true love.

The present findings do not directly resolve these disagreements, but they do shed light on the nature of the disagreements themselves. As we have seen, these findings help us understand the criteria underlying the disagreements found in ordinary life, and they help us understand what we would be seeking to modify if we sought to modify those criteria. Putting this point in a slightly different way: the findings help us understand what we disagree about when we disagree about true love.[17]

5. Appendix (Study 2 vignettes)

Puppy Love. When Jasmine was in 6th grade, she fell head over heels for a boy named Mario. Every day after school, they would take a walk in the park and let their imaginations run wild. Seeing each other was always the highlight of their day. Their bond was solidified during a school trip to France. They would sneak out in the dead of night and explore the streets of Paris together. Near the end of the trip, after a string of exhilarating escapades, they shared their first kiss. It felt so natural, so safe. Simultaneously innocent and totally electric.

Nothing about their relationship was ever complicated. They never had to endure hardships together or make real sacrifices for each other. They never worried about whether they shared the same values or whether their life trajectories were in line. Such things never occurred to them. At that young age, the notions of sexual intimacy and long-term commitment weren't even on their radar. Just being together in the moment was enough. Everything was so simple and felt so fun and beautiful.

Now Jasmine is an adult, and in a committed relationship with a man named Jim. With Jim, things are not so simple. They care deeply about each other and feel warmly about each other on most days. They support each other through difficult times. But there is the usual mess of adult life to deal with: paying bills, getting along with in-laws, quarreling over little things after a long day at work. When she finds herself exhausted from all the tensions and complexities of her current relationship, Jasmine often thinks about her relationship with Mario from all those years back. She knows it seems silly, but sometimes, she feels as though her relationship with Mario was the only time she was ever really in love. It was pure in a way her adult relationships never were, or even could be.

Abuse. Jasmine has been in a romantic relationship with Mario for seven years. Mario is tough. It's part of why she was attracted to him in the first place. His brooding eyes, his physical strength. She knows that he would protect her from danger. When other men objectify her or make suggestive comments, Mario steps in without hesitation, and sends them scampering away at the mere sight of his imposing frame. He is loyal. A man of few words. But when he speaks, it is with intention. He also has deep practical knowledge, a way of being in tune with the environment. When Jasmine and Mario make love, it's like two parallel universes coming together and they lose themselves in the ecstasy of connection. Jasmine has never felt this alive with another man—a feeling of intensity and fullness that infuses her life with indescribable energy and meaning.

Mario is completely devoted to Jasmine. He has never had eyes for anyone else. He is usually kind and gentle, but sometimes, his emotions get the better of him. He punched a wall in their apartment once, breaking through the plaster (he quickly apologized and then repaired the wall himself). On another occasion, he knocked over a piece of furniture in frustration, causing a piece to crack. One time, Mario even hit Jasmine when he was really angry about something she had said, leaving a scar above one of her eyebrows. At first, she was in shock. She considered leaving him. But she decided to stay when he broke down and told her about his own abusive childhood and agreed to work on his anger.

In time, Jasmine came to think of Mario's aggressive episodes as somehow bound up with his protective nature. A kind of misdirection of the very strength and decisiveness that made her feel so safe when they weren't fighting. She even grew to like the little scar above her eyebrow—a reminder of Mario's ability to overpower her. This makes her feel vulnerable in a way that resonates with

something deep inside her. His unpredictable aggression, interrupting long periods of quiet care and companionship, makes her want to surrender herself to him, to give herself over to him completely. There is an ever-present, charged tension between them, part eroticism, part fear, part mutual obsession.

Age Gap. Mario is a 50-year-old professor at a prestigious university. He recently got to know a very bright 21-year-old undergraduate student from one of his classes named Jasmine. When they first met to discuss her senior thesis research over coffee, they immediately realized just how much chemistry they had, despite their very different ages and life experiences. Throughout his whole career, Mario has always felt distant from other people given his eccentric personality and unusual worldview. Most of his colleagues don't know what to make of him, but Jasmine seems to understand him on a deeper level.

Everything he says just clicks with her and she appreciates all of his strange idiosyncrasies. Furthermore, Mario is incredibly impressed by Jasmine's insight. (Her friends have always called her an 'old soul' and consider her wise beyond her years.) He often forgets that he is in the presence of an undergraduate student and views her as an equal. He has always fantasized about being with a much younger woman, and Jasmine has always had a thing for older men. Every time they met up, there was sexual tension in the air. One thing led to another, and now they're in a discreet romantic relationship.

Mario and Jasmine both know that they are violating university policy – especially given Mario's supervisory role over Jasmine – and they go to great lengths to conceal their relationship from other students, colleagues, and administrators. Ultimately, they feel that whatever might be met with disapproval about their relationship is overshadowed by the level of sync they feel together – intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and physically.

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Notes:

[1] David J. Velleman, "Love as a Moral Emotion." *Ethics* 109.2 (1999): 338-374.

[2] W. S. Anglin, Free Will and the Christian Faith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 20.

[2] Eleanor Rosch and Carolyn B. Mervis, "Family Resemblances: Studies in the Internal Structure of Categories." *Cognitive Psychology* 7.4 (1975): 573-605; Edward E. Smith and Douglas L. Medin, Categories and Concepts (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

[3] Sophie Grace Chappell, "Love and Knowledge," in The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Love, ed. C. Grau & A. Smuts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 8.

[4] Arthur Aron and Lori Westbay, "Dimensions of the Prototype of Love." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70.3 (1996): 535-551.

[5] Robert J. Sternberg, "A Triangular Theory of Love." *Psychological Review* 93.2 (1986): 119-135.

[6] Note that this hypothesis is not committed to any specific view about which features are included in the prototype. For example, there are subtle but real differences between the account in Chappell (2018, see note 4) and the account in Aron and Westbay (1996, see note 5), and these accounts thus generate different predictions about which specific qualities of a relationship will most strongly influence people's judgments about whether the relationship is a prototypical example of love. The hypothesis under discussion here does not itself take a position on any of these issues, however.

Rather, it says that the features of a relationship that influence people's prototypical love judgments—whatever those features turn out to be—will be the very same features that influence people's true love judgments, and that they will do so in the same way and to the same degree. So, although we happen to use the features of love unearthed by Aron and Westbay's classic empirical work to test this hypothesis, we might just as well have used the features proposed by Chappell, or even other features not included in either account (see, e.g., Carrie Jenkins, What Love Is [New York: Basic Books, 2017]; Brian D. Earp and Julian Savulescu, "Love's Dimensions," in Love Drugs: The Chemical Future of Relationships [Redwood, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020]). The key point is that, if prototypical love and true love are in fact the same concept, then, whatever the effect of a given set of features on judgments about the former, it should be roughly the same as the effect of equivalent features on judgments about the latter.

[7] For a critical discussion of love being conceived this way, see John Cottingham, "Love and Religion" in The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Love, ed. C. Grau & A. Smuts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[8] C. S. I. Jenkins, "'Addicted'? To 'love'?" *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 24.1 (2017): 93-96, pp. 94-95.

[9] bell hooks, All About Love: New Visions (New York: Harper, 2000), p. 22.

[10] Simon May, Love: A History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

[11] See for example, Julian De Freitas and Mina Cikara, "Deep Down My Enemy Is Good: Thinking About the True Self Reduces Intergroup Bias." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 74 (2018): 307-316; Andrew G. Christy, Rebecca J. Schlegel, and Andrei Cimpian. "Why Do People Believe in a 'True Self'? The Role of Essentialist Reasoning About Personal Identity and the Self." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 117.2 (2019): 386-416; Nina Strohminger, Joshua Knobe, and George Newman. "The True Self: A Psychological Concept Distinct from the Self." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 12.4 (2017): 551-560.

[12] See Jenkins (2017), note 8; hooks (2000), note 9.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] In particular, it might be helpful to look at judgments of realness insofar as they are related to people's ordinary judgments of happiness. Existing studies show that people are reluctant to say that an agent is happy when that agent has a morally bad life—see Jonathan Phillips et al. "True Happiness: The Role of Morality in the Folk Concept of Happiness." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 146.2 (2017): 165-181—and studies find that this tendency is mediated in part by judgments about whether agents actually are happy deep down in their true selves: see George E. Newman, Julian De Freitas, and Joshua Knobe. "Beliefs About the True Self Explain Asymmetries Based on Moral Judgment." *Cognitive Science* 39.1 (2015): 96-125. This effect seems likely to be related in some important way to the ones we have been exploring in the present paper. For further discussion, see Jonathan Phillips, Luke Misenheimer, and Joshua Knobe. "The Ordinary Concept of Happiness (And Others Like It)." *Emotion Review* 3.3 (2011): 320-322.

[15] Walter Veit and Heather Browning, "Two Kinds of Conceptual Engineering." *PhilSciArxiv* (2020), http://philsciarchive.pitt.edu/17452/

[16] Sally Haslanger, Resisting Reality (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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