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## Lesbian and Gay Love Scripts

Suzanna Rose

Cultural scripts for lesbian and gay love relationships are emerging rapidly as lesbians and gay men seek to define relationships on their own terms rather than subscribe to heterosexual norms. In the past, heterosexist assumptions were used to evaluate lesbian and gay relationships as less stable, less serious, and less loving (Peplau, 1993). However, current attitudes and research on lesbian and gay couples portray a much more positive picture (e.g., Kurdek, 1994). A greater appreciation of lesbian and gay culture has both resulted from and led to a more objective assessment of same-sex relationships. Established and emerging love scripts now are being viewed and developed from a lesbian and gay affirmative standpoint.

*Script* refers to a cognitive schema, or set of stereotypical actions, that is used to organize our interpersonal worlds and guide behavior (Abelson, 1981; Ginsburg, 1988). It represents shared understandings of what typically happens in specific situations. Sexual scripts pertain to the schemas used in sexual contexts not only to decide how to act and feel but also to predict others' behaviors (Gagnon, 1977). For instance, how relationship initiation is affected by the interaction of gender and sexual orientation has been captured brilliantly by comedians Lea DeLaria and Emmett Foster for lesbians and gay men, respectively, in the routines described in Table 8.1. DeLaria's response to the question, "How do I approach a woman I like?" describes one script that reflects the anxiety and indecision many lesbians feel when initiating love relationships. Foster's script focuses on issues gay men confront when physical attractiveness and sexuality are valued more than intimacy in relationships.

Scripts occur on three distinct levels: cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Cultural scripts are schemas that exist at the level of collective life and are sometimes institutionalized. The wedding script is one example of a cultural sexual script. Tradition as well as legal and religious institutions provides guidelines for people concerning what behaviors and emotions are appropriate for the specific roles of bride, groom, mother of the bride, and so on. The sequence of events also is defined clearly.

**TABLE 8.1** Two Comic Views of Lesbian and Gay Relationship Initiation Scripts*Lesbian Relationship Initiation*

**Q: I've seen this woman I really like, but I have no idea how to approach her.**

**A:** This is THE perfect lesbian question. Lesbians have no idea how to approach each other. If lesbians had to procreate, there would be no people in this world.

This is what lesbians do. You see this woman you like and you say to yourself, "Ooh, ooh, I really like her, I mean I REALLY like her. I like her. I like her. You know what? I like her! You know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna get up. I'm gonna go over there and I'm gonna ask that woman to dance 'cause I like her. Yes I do, I like her. I like her. I like her. I like her. I REALLY like her. . . . So I'm gonna get up . . . I'm gonna go over there and I'm gonna ask that girl to dance 'cause I like her. Yes I do, I like her. I like the way she looks, the way she's sitting over there in her little miniskirt sipping her martini. So I'm gonna get up, go over there and ask that girl to dance. Maybe we'll have two dances, three dances, four, dances, maybe she'll tell me her name. We could go out on a date, this could be a relationship. . . . THIS COULD BE A RELATIONSHIP! And all I have to do is GET UP, go over there and ask that girl to dance, so that's what I'm gonna do. Get up and go over and ask her to dance."

Then you go home and write about it in your journal . . .

Lea DeLaria (1995, pp. 64-65)

*Gay Men's Relationship Initiation*

In this routine, a gay man who is staffing the Community Center Hot Line has a telephone conversation with his friend, Jeff, about how empty his life feels:

(To Jeff) I mean, I socialize, go dancing on the weekends, and do the bars occasionally. . . . Dating?! What's that?! They have these dating workshops here but I would never, I mean, I know HOW to date: you ask someone out, you squint over candlelight, you suffer through subtitles, and then go home and mess up my comforter. I just never could get the order of these things right. I'm too rambunctious. I always fuck first, then if they're really good, I say maybe we should go to a movie sometime . . .

Oh, I think "slut" is such an ugly word. Hold on . . .

Hi, that was Kelly . . .

What am I looking for? What do you mean?

No. No, I don't think I'm too picky.

Well, someone who has a really sexy body but doesn't go to the gym too much. Someone who I'll never get tired of having hot sex with, it'll just keep getting better and better. Someone who loves my personality and is tickled by everything I say and do. Someone who has his own life, so I won't feel smothered by him. And someone who has his own money, so I won't wonder if he's after mine; my grandfather worked hard for my money and I'm tired of throwing it away on ingrates. But most of all, someone who will really support me in getting my cabaret act off the ground.

Foster (1995, pp. 71-73)

For example, the bachelor party is supposed to take place before the wedding, not after it. Interpersonal scripts represent the individual's use of cultural scripts in a specific situation. For instance, the wedding script may be modified by an individual to conform to personal values (e.g., the removal of *obey* from the vows) or by past experience (e.g., the inclusion of a prenuptial agreement). Private wishes and desires are embodied at the third, or intrapsychic, level. Included here might be the wish for a private legal ceremony versus a large public celebration.

The first goal in this chapter is to identify what cultural scripts are available to lesbians and gay men concerning love relationships, including the extent to which they have been shaped by heterosexism. The scripts will be drawn from popular culture, as represented in fiction and comedy. The analysis will identify elements contained in the most dominant cultural scripts, including the following: (a) the stage(s) of the relationship addressed, (b) the contribution of gender roles, (c) the extent to which sexual motives are present, (d) the impact of sexual orientation, and (e) the significance of relationships in life. A second goal is to explore the impact scripts may have on behavior by identifying issues of concern in actual relationships, as expressed through self-help books. Last, alternatives scripts available to and emerging from lesbian and gay communities will be discussed.

**Heterosexual Love Scripts**

The love scripts most widely available to lesbians and gay men are ones based on heterosexual relations. Heterosexual scripts are likely to be the first—and perhaps only—love scripts that are learned in childhood, even for those who have *always known* they were lesbian or gay. Two specific heterosexual scripts analyzed previously by Rose (1985) include a *romance script* for women and an *adventure script* for men. The romance script is exemplified in a host of entertainment aimed at girls and women, including fairy tales and contemporary romance novels. For boys and men, relationships occur in the context of an adventure script found in action comic books, adventure novels, and pornography.

In heterosexual love scripts, the socially sanctioned purpose of sexual love is to establish a long-term relationship (Laws & Schwartz, 1977). Thus, once the courtship period has ended, the relationship is assumed to be permanent; further scripting is therefore unnecessary. The story typically ends with the couple living happily ever after. As Simon and Gagnon (1986) have pointed out, the courtship script is drawn almost exclusively from the requirements of (heterosexual) adolescence and young adulthood.

According to script theory, scripts guide both behavior and affect. Gender is a key determinant of how each is expressed in heterosexual scripts. The female role is defined as reactive. Women are to be the objects of desire, that is, to be seductive, to surrender, and to be desirable. The male role is active, dictating that men should take possession of the object of desire, including seducing, conquering, and desiring it or her (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Sexual behaviors parallel this dichotomy, with heterosexual men being designated as the initiators of sexual interaction and as preferring coital/genital activities in relationships more than women do (e.g., Purnine, Carey, & Jorgensen, 1994).

The gender roles described above are embedded in the romance and adventure scripts. In the romance script, four major script elements guide girls and women concerning what to expect during courtship (Rose, 1985). The first two convey that the woman is to be both beautiful and passive. For instance, in *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, and *Rapunzel*, it is the woman's beauty that makes her worthy of love (as well as a threat to other women). In both *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty*, the heroine's passivity is symbolized by her unconscious state; in *Cinderella* and *Rapunzel*, it is expressed by *being* rather than *doing*, that is, by waiting patiently for the man to find her. A third element suggests that obstacles to love are inevitable. Obstacles include evil older women who cast spells on or imprison the beautiful young competitor, and contests that must be won. A fourth element indicates that a male rescuer will overcome these obstacles and reward the beautiful passive woman with his attention. A bit of confusion is sometimes added to the last element when, occasionally, the male rescuer appears to be an actual beast or has "beastlike" qualities (e.g., hostility, indifference) that must be tamed in the service of love. This obstacle of mistaken identity requires that the women be ever vigilant not to overlook any beast/man as being a potential rescuer.

The adventure script contains four key elements that instruct boys and men concerning how to establish relationships (Rose, 1985). The first element focuses on independent achievement. Male protagonists are thrust into the world and have to provide for themselves in fiction ranging from *Jack and the Beanstalk* to *Tarzan* to *Conan the Barbarian*. The plot reassures boys that although it is terrifying to leave friends and family, doing so will lead to success, parental acceptance, and female admiration. Seeking fame and fortune prepares males to overcome the obstacles to love comprised in the second script element. They scale the tower, hack through the thorns, slay the dragon or giant, or search for the treasure. The agentic role assigned to males reinforces the idea that they are the proper initiators of relationships. The third element, a beautiful, defenseless female, operates as both a motive and a reward. However, very little contact occurs between the woman and

man in the typical adventure script; thus, no basis for a conversation is developed, much less a relationship. Perhaps this is why a fourth element often is present: ambivalence about intimacy. The male-as-beast theme suggests that men may not be too well suited for intimate relations. Comic books often utilize a hero/beast persona as the main character. For example, the *Hulk* alternates between being mild-mannered Bruce Banner and his hulk alter ego, a violent green behemoth.

Sexual elements in the romance and adventure script are also gender-specific. In the romance script, they are largely covert. The woman's sexual innocence fuels the man's passion; she is desired, not desiring. It is his privilege and responsibility to awaken her to sexual pleasure. The adventure script has more overtly sexual elements. Phallic sexual imagery permeates descriptions of heroes, who are "hard," "taut," "rigid," and "stand erect" (Snitow, 1979). Adult male literature contains even more explicit images of male sexual potency, women with desirable sexual attributes, and graphic descriptions of sexual acts.

Script theory also details how affect is gender-typed into two sets of affects culturally defined as representing an *inferior female* set of affects (enjoyment, fear, distress, shame) and a *superior male* set (excitement, surprise, anger, disgust) (Mosher & MacIan, 1994). What matters to an individual within a particular sexual script will be guided by the affects associated with it. For instance, the gender socialization of females will focus their attention on script elements that elicit enjoyment rather than the masculine affect of excitement. Such elements might include having a familiar and loved sexual partner or a safe, private place to have sex. Conversely, male socialization will focus men's attention on script elements that elicit excitement, such as the sexual attractiveness of the partner or the novelty of the sexual activity.

Gender-typed affects are a strong component of the romance and adventure scripts. The romance features distress, fear, shame, and joy. The heroine responds to crisis and adversity not with anger and disgust (male affects) but with fear and distress. Sexual shame or embarrassment also often are present. When the woman inadvertently exposes her body to the man (e.g., is seen bathing or has to change clothes after being caught in a downpour), her appropriate response is an embarrassed modesty, not sexual pride. Last, she is free to express joy when she is rescued by and joined with the man. In contrast, masculine affects dominate in the adventure script. The man is excited by the woman's beauty, by competition and conquest, and by male camaraderie. He also is expected to express anger, surprise, and disgust during combat rather than shame, fear, or distress. Script actions that enhance these emotions are emphasized, including chase scenes, the cruelty

of the villains, the shaming or loss of buddies, and the woman's physical attributes.

The importance of relationships in life also is differentiated by gender within heterosexual scripts. Although both scripts also often embed a coming-of-age story within or alongside the courtship, with the youthful female or male stepping into adulthood, the romance script presents the establishment of a relationship as the singular most important life event for women. Marriage is the road to maturity. Other life achievements are usually absent and relations with friends and family are rarely developed. In contrast, the adventure script identifies achievement as the route to adulthood. For men, life's true adventures involve bonding or competing with other males; love relationships are expected to complement these activities, not supersede them.

In summary, gender roles underlie every aspect of heterosexual love scripts, including the content of script elements, their associated affect, and the meaning attributed by individuals to relationships. The complementarity of the romance-adventure script pairing shapes and reinforces a heterosexual sexual orientation. The interdependency of the romance and adventure scripts make other script pairings less likely and less compatible. The courtship plot does not easily move forward for romance-romance or adventure-adventure pairings, should they occur. Nevertheless, heterosexual love scripts set the stage for how relationships are to be conducted and are likely to be incorporated in some fashion into lesbians' and gay men's love scripts.

### Lesbian and Gay Love Scripts

Lesbians and gay men are likely to be affected by the heterosexual love scripts described above in two significant ways. First, the emphasis on the courtship phase is likely to be carried over due to the lack of alternative relationship scripts. Second, enculturation into gender roles also probably will shape the scripts of many lesbians and gay men. Thus, a romance script is likely to be in strong evidence in fiction and comedy aimed at lesbians, whereas an adventure script should be reflected in gay men's entertainment. However, the nonnormative status of same-sex relationships will require some alteration of heterosexual scripts. The stigma associated with homosexuality has several potential consequences for lesbian and gay love scripts. First, because feelings for someone of the same sex are deemed inferior, according to heterosexist standards, same-sex attractions may initially be labeled or encoded as friendship rather than love or attraction. Further relationship development may then follow a friendship script. Second, acknowledging the feelings as sexual requires the individual to begin the process of

accepting a stigmatized identity. The universality of this experience for lesbians and gay men requires that a coming out script be added to whatever original relationship script is followed. Last, the stigma of homosexuality as abnormal may affect specific script elements, such as how public the courtship is or what role family and friends play in the script.

Examples will be used below to illustrate the prototypic romance and adventure script as they are expressed in novels and comedy aimed at lesbians and gay men. Concepts to be explored include the phase of the relationship addressed, specific script elements, the role of sexuality, types of affect expressed, and the importance of relationships in life.

### Lesbian Romance Script

Numerous classic and contemporary lesbian novels rely on the romance script. Quite parallel to the heterosexual romance, the lesbian romance script has been described by Rose, Zand, and Cini (1993) as having the following four primary characteristics: a high level of emotional intimacy, an emphasis on sexual attraction rather than sexual activity, a relatively direct relationship initiation phase, and a quick progression to a commitment. The genre of the lesbian romance is exemplified in *The Price of Salt* (written by mystery writer Patricia Highsmith under the pseudonym Claire Morgan, 1952/1984), reputed to be the first gay novel in the United States to have a happy ending.

*The Price of Salt* describes the courtship between Therese, an aspiring 19-year-old stage designer, and Carol, a wealthy, about-to-divorce woman in her early thirties. The courtship is set within the context of a coming out story; it is the first lesbian relationship for Therese and the first serious same-sex one for Carol. The women are physically attracted to each other immediately when they meet at the department store where Therese works as a clerk and Carol is a customer:

Their eyes met at the same instant, Therese glancing up from a box she was opening, and the woman just turning her head so she looked directly at Therese. She was tall and fair, her long figure graceful in the loose fur coat. . . . Her eyes were gray, colorless, yet dominant as light or fire, and caught by them, Therese could not look away . . . [she] stood there mute. The woman was looking at Therese, too . . . [she] felt sure the woman would come to her. Then Therese saw her walk slowly toward the counter . . . (p. 31)

Therese and Carol approach each other tentatively. Neither is sure about the other's motives; therefore, direct sexual intent is not emphasized. Specific sexual content also is not present, perhaps reflecting what was permissible in terms of publishing in the 1950s but also in keeping with the valuation of emotional intimacy over sexuality. In fact, it is not clear that the relationship

has become sexual until the plot indicates that a detective hired by Carol's ex-husband has made an incriminating tape of their activities in a hotel room.

The obstacle to love in this novel is the ex-husband, who uses the tape and a love letter to gain full custody of their daughter and demand that Carol quit seeing Therese if she wants any visitation privileges. The obstacle to love is overcome when Carol ultimately gives up her parental rights and reunites with Therese. The story ends with the intimation that theirs will be a long-term commitment. The final lines describe Therese, unobserved, watching Carol across a room:

Carol raised her hand slowly and brushed her hair back, once on either side, and Therese smiled because the gesture was Carol, and it was Carol she loved and would always love. . . . It would be Carol, in a thousand cities, a thousand houses, in foreign lands where they would go together, in heaven and in hell. (Morgan, 1952/1984, p. 276)

Other popular lesbian romances such as *Patience and Sarah* (Miller, 1969/1973), *Desert of the Heart* (Rule, 1964), and *Choices* (Toder, 1980/1991) and numerous more recent releases (e.g., Kaplan, 1995; McDaniel, 1991) also describe a courtship between two women that leads to a supposedly permanent union. Greatly similar to the heterosexual romance, the plot commonly focuses on the sweet anticipation of the two joining together as a couple. *Choices* (Toder, 1980/1991) and *Devotion* (Kaplan, 1995) provide examples of a common recent variation on the girl meets girl, loses girl, and gets girl back script. Both stories set the drama within an already established relationship that has become estranged or is threatened and both end with the couple's romantic reunion.

Other parallels between the lesbian and heterosexual romance scripts are found in terms of how sexuality is represented, what affects are emphasized, and the importance of relationships in life. In terms of sexuality, one or both of the women are portrayed as "innocent," but the innocence is more emotional than a lack of actual sexual experience. The sexual awakening occurs within the context of responding to another woman's love. Thus, the emotional element heightens sexual desire more than specific or explicit sexual acts (few of which are mentioned). Traditionally feminine affects also are strongly in evidence in the lesbian romance, including fear and distress over being separated or discovered, shame at being publicly embarrassed, and enjoyment at being united. The lesbian heroine typically does not aggressively pursue the object of her desire, lash out at her enemies, or relish their defeat.

Finally, although a coming out and coming-of-age script often are incorporated within the lesbian romance, they usually converge on the estab-

lishment of a permanent relationship as the route to happiness and maturity. For example, in *Patience and Sarah* (Miller, 1969/1973), a story about a lesbian couple based on the life of Mary Ann Willson, an American primitive painter of the early 1800s, the lovers realize they have "found their mate" after the first kiss.

Comedy reiterates the themes present in fiction; the romance script is a cornerstone of what is considered to be funny by contemporary lesbians. First, lesbians' desire for intimacy and commitment has been lampooned by many humorists. For example, Lea DeLaria (1995) advises lesbians,

Keep your sense of humor, especially when dealing with women because we are a pain in the ass. Believe me, sometimes I wish I was straight. You screw a guy, he falls asleep. That's it. None of this "What are you thinking?" (p. 65)

The quick merger that results from high levels of intimacy also has been described by Gail Sausser (1990) as leading to some strange courtship rituals:

Women go places together in small impenetrable groups. If you talk to a strange woman she's liable to think you are coming on to her. That is why in order to meet lesbians, you have to pretend you have no intention of picking them up. You get to know women on committees or in activities and then get so attracted to one another you end up kissing, and then she moves in with you. (p. 21)

Sexual inhibition and loss of desire in long-term relationships are a second target for lesbian humor. For example, a lesbian comedy team called Planet Q (1995) describes the phenomenon of Lesbian Bed Death. In the routine, a commentator enters the bedroom of a lesbian couple who have just decided not to have sex because they are too tired. She announces,

What you have just witnessed is the beginning of the end of a three-year lesbian relationship. Although Kathy and Elaine may not be ready to admit it, their sex lives are being slowly, yet painlessly eaten away by a silent killer that is creeping into bedrooms from Northampton to Santa Cruz. Normally healthy, sexually active lesbians are going to bed . . . and going to sleep. (p. 131)

The commentator goes on to explain that Lesbian Bed Death (LBD) is one of the most deadly but little known killers that "sends approximately 60% of lesbians into couples' counseling at one or more times during a relationship." However, she reassures them that, although no single cause of LBD has been found, "working round the clock on a cure are doctors, psychic herbalists, and folk singers" (Planet Q, 1995, p. 132).

Stereotypically, lesbians opt for monogamous rather than nonmonogamous solutions to the loss of passion. Comic Sarah Cytron has described one of her own as follows:

Relationships are not easy. Harriett and I have been together over 8 years, and by this time the sex life isn't what it was. So I keep trying to jazz it up. Sometimes when we're making love, I'll put on an accent so she'll think she's with somebody new. But she complains. She says, "Look, I'm just not attracted to your grandmother." (Cytron & Malinowitz, 1995, p. 33)

A last theme that is more thoroughly developed in lesbian comedy than in romance fiction is the concept that beauty is only skin deep. This concept appears to be translated by lesbians into a lack of concern about physical beauty that, in turn, has provided a foil for many jokes (e.g., "The term *lesbian fashion* is an oxymoron"). Similarly, comic Kate Clinton's routine concerning "Why Lesbians Became Extinct," in the year 7969, provides an amusing explanation that focuses on lesbians' notorious interest in comfort over appearance. In the skit, archaeologists have "uncovered scuffed, but perfectly intact Vibram-soled footwear, 'Doc Martens,' which still had a half-life of about a billion years." The scientists speculate that "their huge, weighted soles made it difficult for lesbians to flee from their predators" and that in some cases, particularly for the larger sized footwear, "lesbians undecided on this style looked down at their feet and actually died of fright" (Clinton, 1995, p. 6).

In summary, the lesbian romance as expressed in fiction and comedy contains many aspects of the heterosexual romance script, including an emphasis on the courtship phase; passive or reactive female roles; feminine affects; and a high value on intimate, committed relationships. In addition, less priority is given to active sexuality, physical attractiveness, and personal achievement.

#### Gay Male Adventure Script

A typical love script for gay men found in popular fiction closely follows the heterosexual adventure script. Independent achievement, the ability to surmount obstacles to love, the physical beauty of the loved one, and ambivalence about intimacy are common themes. *The Front Runner* (Warren, 1974) is a prototype of the gay adventure coming-of-age script. It describes the love relationship between Harlan, a college track coach in his late 30s, and Billy Sive, a young athlete with Olympic potential. Billy's athletic prowess is used as a device to satisfy both his own and Harlan's ambitions. At the time the two meet, Harlan has been blackballed for several years from

coaching at major universities due to an unfounded rumor that he had sex with one of his male students. However, he has built a reputation for himself as a coach at a small, progressive college. Billy and his two friends seek Harlan out as their coach after being thrown off a major team for being gay. Thus, the pair's love for each other satisfies their desires for both success and love.

The obstacles to love in *The Front Runner* are both internal and external. Although Harlan is the older of the two, he is less accepting of his own homosexuality. The story describes his struggle to accept his own nature. Harlan resolves his feelings when he realizes that Billy's performance is being negatively affected by the sexual tension between them: "It occurred to me then that the only way Billy Sive was going to get to Montreal [the Olympics] was through my bed" (p. 98). Once the two become lovers, external obstacles such as prejudice and discrimination from people, the media, and the Amateur Athletic Association come into play. The lovers respond by binding more strongly together, allying with their friends, and using the legal resources of the nascent gay movement.

The physical beauty of both Billy and Harlan is described in considerable detail. Harlan sizes up Billy upon meeting him in a manner closely resembling a modern personal advertisement: "My coach's eye measured his slender body at five-foot-eleven and weighed him at around 138 pounds. . . . His face . . . was pleasantly handsome, fine-cut, with high cheekbones, a high forehead, a blunt nose, a good mouth . . ." (pp. 4-5). Harlan also remarks on Billy's beautiful, clear blue-gray eyes, light-brown curls, and racehorse legs. In turn, Harlan describes himself as "macho gay" and as physically fit as his students. His sexual attractiveness and worldliness are affirmed by the reputation he developed as a "well hung" stud when working for a time as a very high-priced hustler in New York City.

Ambivalence about intimacy also is expressed in *The Front Runner*. Harlan's internalized homophobia, combined with a realistic fear of persecution for being gay, has prevented him for 20 years from developing a love relationship. His fears are magnified the night before he and Billy make love for the first time:

I spent the whole night . . . torturing myself with thoughts. I was going to do the wrong thing. I was going to destroy his running career, just to satisfy my selfish feelings. If we became lovers, the fury would hit us. It would obliterate us. It might even destroy our feeling for each other. I wasn't so sure that love could survive something like that. (p. 105)

Harlan's concern about the destructive power of love is well founded. They make it to the Olympics, but Billy is shot and killed during his race—presumably for being gay.

The gay male and heterosexual adventure scripts are also similar in terms of how sexuality is expressed, what affects are present, and the priority given to relationships. Literature aimed at gay men often is quite explicit. The specific postures, body parts, and organs associated with physical desire; the nuances of touch and taste; and the primitive, animalistic quality of sexual acts are eloquently, and sometimes obsessively, described. For example, the back cover of *Bayou Boy* (Eighner, 1993), published by Bad Boy Press, refers to the book as "a collection of hot, hard stories" that explore "the many ways men work up a sweat in the steamy southwest." Likewise, Johnnie Ray Rousseau, a 22-year-old gay pop singer in *Eight Days a Week* indicates to a friend that he is in love with Keith Keller, a white banker with "muscles to die for" by remarking: "It's [love] the real thing, Snooks. I can feel it in my heart. In my bones. In my anus" (Duplechan, 1985, p. 108).

Congruent with the emphasis on explicit sexuality, excitement is one of the major affects portrayed. A particular sexual ideal that is used to enhance excitement is the image of white male beefcake, that is, a young white male with a muscular, hairless torso and "washboard" abdomen (Browning, 1994). Excitement is also associated with competition (e.g., Billy's races in *The Front Runner*) and engaging with the enemy. For example, in a classic slay-the-dragon plot, the protagonist of *Lethal Silence: Mission #6*, Alex Kane, battles right-wing mercenaries whose aim it is to "squash gay men underfoot" (Preston, 1993). Fear and shame normally are channeled into anger. In *The Man: A Hero for Our Time*, a gay man whose lover was killed by a gay basher becomes *The Man*, a masked avenger who "protects the lives of the innocent" (Drake, 1995).

Finally, in the gay male adventure script, coming of age is not equated with establishing a relationship, as it is in the romance script. For example, in the gay classic, *The Best Little Boy in the World* (Reid, 1973), the protagonist's coming out/coming-of-age story ends with him concluding, "I knew I was not ready, if I ever would be, for a full-time kind of relationship" (p. 217). In those cases when a permanent relationship is established, personal ambition is portrayed as superseding it. For example, Harlan in *The Front Runner* explains,

there's something we ought to agree on. For the moment, this [the relationship] has to take its place in what we're trying to do [train for the Olympics]. If it interferes, it might cause you to fail. That might spoil our feeling for each other too. (p. 113)

Comedy directed at gay men and their relationships echoes the themes found in adventure fiction. First, the emphasis many gay men are believed to place on physical attractiveness is captured in a comment by comic Steve

Moore (1995): "I'll be 40 in June. That's 130 in gay years" (p. 111). Image is clearly important in gay male culture. According to *The Unofficial Gay Manual*, "Many guys find a look that works for them and perfect it, until it becomes their persona" (Dilallo & Krumholz, 1994, p. 59). The manual then describes 13 basic gay male personas and the subliminal messages they send, including The Person-in-Black ("I'm too sexy for my shirt."), the Gym Dandy ("Look, but don't touch."), the Sugar Daddy ("Money can buy me love."), and the Poodle ("Only my hairdresser knows for sure.") (pp. 59-66). Readers are also informed that bad bodies, unsightly body hair, and poor taste in clothes are among the top 10 turn-offs for guys looking for love (p. 118).

Intimacy in a relationship appears to be an elusive quality for many gay men, according to other humorous advice given in *The Unofficial Gay Manual*. In a chapter titled "Someday My Prince Will Come: Dating in a World of Potential Future Ex-Lovers," the authors ask the question, "Why do so many men of steel have heels of helium?" (p. 118) and indicate that "some guys would rather be committed than find themselves in a committed relationship" (p. 140). Another stereotypic expectation is that each man will "have his own," that is, be a self-supporting peer. Actual or prospective partners who do not pull their own weight financially or in terms of status are viewed as less desirable. For example, *The Unofficial Gay Manual* suggests that it is a bad sign when a date suddenly remembers that he "forgot" his wallet when the check comes. Readers are advised, "Don't fall for it; no one really forgets his wallet" (p. 128).

Gay men who do manage to establish relationships are advised to be prepared for roving eyes and problems with intimacy. Couples are advised that a mortgage might prove to be a stronger bond than any marriage license:

If you really love each other, don't be afraid of committing yourselves to some major joint investment. . . . You'll be glad to have that mortgage when your other half comes home with groceries in his arms and some hunk on his mind. (Dilallo & Krumholtz, 1994, pp. 142-143)

External solutions to relationship problems are satirized:

If you're both feeling ambivalent toward your relationship, simple acquisitions such as Pratesi bedding, a multiple CD player or a food processor may lift you out of the doldrums. If the winter of your discontent is particularly harsh, you may need an antique or an original piece of art to relight the fire. (p. 149)

In summary, the gay male adventure script, as portrayed in fiction and comedy, incorporates many components of the heterosexual adventure script.



The courtship phase without subsequent marriage is emphasized, as are a proactive and agentic male role, an explicit sexuality, masculine affects, and a value that love relationships should not interfere with personal ambition.

### Impact on Lesbian and Gay Couples

Cultural scripts are believed to act as guides for interpersonal scripts, according to script theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). If so, one might expect to find the romance and adventure scripts reflected in actual behavior. Self-help books are one source of information that may be used to determine what behaviors are presumed to be widespread among lesbian and gay couples. If advice books include themes similar to those identified in cultural scripts, it would suggest that couples are conforming to those scripts to some extent. A discussion of seven recent advice books for lesbian and gay couples is presented below to illustrate that the romance and adventure scripts are being reflected in how actual relationships are conducted, as predicted by script theory. Three of the advice books focus exclusively on lesbian couples (Clunis & Green, 1993; Johnson, 1990; McDaniel, 1995), two exclusively on gay male couples (Driggs & Finn, 1991; Marcus, 1992), and two on both lesbian and gay couples (Berzon, 1988; Tessina, 1989).

The courtship focus of love scripts poses an obstacle for lesbian and gay male couples, according to the self-help books examined here. Most authors included an extensive discussion of problems the couple is likely to face once the honeymoon is over. The assumption is that many lesbians and gay men have not been prepared adequately for the realities of a long-term commitment. Idealized cultural images of "wedded bliss" were singled out as creating unrealistic expectations for couples, particularly in the areas of sexual desire and marital harmony.

Actual lesbian relationships are portrayed by self-help books as operating from a romance-romance script pairing. For example, on the back jacket *Staying Power: Long-Term Lesbian Couples*, by Susan Johnson (1990), is advertised as being "the book about the one goal that most lesbians express as an ambition—the creation and nurturance of a lifetime love affair." Similarly, in *Lesbian Couples: Creating Healthy Relationships for the '90s*, authors Merilee Clunis and Dorsey Green (1993) begin with the assumption that, as women, lesbians have learned to prize couple relationships; therefore, both women in a lesbian couple will feel responsible for making the relationship work (p. 4).

Self-help books also assume that establishing intimacy is easily achieved for lesbians but that setting boundaries will be more problematic. According to Judith McDaniel (1995), in *The Lesbian Couple's Guide: Finding the*

*Right Woman and Creating a Life Together*, every couple she interviewed understood her when she referred to "merger madness," "the lesbian melt-down," or "the codependency tango" as being a issues in lesbian relationships. Tina Tessina (1989), in *Gay Relationships for Men and Women*, also indicates that "many lesbian women have a tendency to overreact about commitment, often rushing into relationships without taking the time to develop a solid foundation based on love, mutuality, and an in-depth knowledge of themselves and of their partners" (p. 62). Generally, difficulties are described as arising when lesbian partners "fuse," or become extensions of each other. To help avoid this problem, Clunis and Green (1993) include a chapter on "Separateness and Togetherness," in which they elaborate on the importance of maintaining one's personal boundaries when in a relationship.

Concerns about lesbian sexuality more often focus on sexual frequency, initiation, and desire than on conflicts about specific sexual practices, sexual satisfaction, or performance. Sexual excitement is portrayed as being enhanced primarily by intimacy and affection. For instance, of the 19 tips for enhancing relationships cited by Clunis and Green (1993), only 3 focus on sexual actions and none is sexually explicit, for example, "try out some new lovemaking techniques," "cultivate some sexual fantasies," and "tell stories or fantasies to your partner while you are touching her" (pp. 74-75). In addition, topics such as celibacy, "couples for whom sex is not important" (Johnson, 1990), and "We're lovers but we're not having sex" (McDaniel, 1995) are more likely to appear in books targeting lesbians than ones aimed at both lesbians and gay men or solely at gay men.

Self-help books also provide confirmation that an adventure-adventure script pairing shapes the interpersonal scripts of gay men couples. Key problems that are seen as likely to arise closely resemble elements of the adventure script, including those related to personal achievement, intimacy, physical attractiveness, and sexual expressivity. First, intimacy is approached quite differently when the focus is on gay men. For instance, in *Intimacy Between Men*, John Driggs and Stephen Finn (1991) devote considerable attention toward persuading gay men that intimacy is a worthy goal, though it is difficult to achieve. They begin a section describing the rewards of intimacy: "At this point you may be thinking, 'This [developing intimacy] sounds like a lot of work! What's in it for me?'" (p. 16). The authors go on to explain seven benefits of emotional closeness. They also encourage gay men to learn to distinguish sexuality from intimacy. However, at this point, perhaps fearing that the very idea of intimacy may be aversive, the authors hasten to reassure the reader: "Don't worry, you will not have this calling [for intimacy] until you are ready for it. You will not catch it from this book" (p. 90).

The significance of sexuality in gay men's relationships, as encoded in the adventure script, also appears in full relief in self-help books. Books



aimed solely at gay men or jointly at lesbians and gay men all contained more explicit and specific discussions of sexuality and monogamy than the three focused exclusively on lesbians. The content usually goes beyond the obligatory mention of safer sex techniques. Included are topics such as the hazards of sexual rigidity (e.g., the desire for a specific body type or genital size) and sexual addiction (Driggs & Finn, 1991); the inhibiting effect on sexuality of the handsome, brawny, beefcake image upheld as a gay male ideal (Berzon, 1988); specific sexual games such as cross-dressing and bondage and discipline (Tessina, 1989); how to stop oneself from being sexual before getting to know a man (Marcus 1992); and very detailed descriptions of open relationship contracts (Marcus, 1992; Tessina, 1989).

Finally, the emphasis on personal achievement in the adventure script appears to be played out in gay men's relationships in terms of the importance placed on social status (including physical attractiveness), competition, and defeating one's enemies. For instance, in *Permanent Partners*, Berzon (1988) cautions gay men against getting caught up in gender roles dictating that "real" men must be self-supporting. She argues that some couples may be happier if one of the pair is a stay-at-home partner. Similarly, Driggs and Finn (1991) warn gay men that "all that glitters is not gold." Choosing a partner based on personal appearance, position, or wealth has led to disappointment in relationships for many gay men. Competition also contributes to two common dilemmas, including "Anything you can do, I can do better" and "It's my turn to be on top."

In summary, self-help books provide evidence to support the idea that the lesbian and gay love scripts described earlier have a strong impact on actual relationships. A congruence between love scripts and advice books was found along at least four dimensions, including the courtship phase and gender roles concerning intimacy, independence, and sexuality in relationships. The congruence suggests that cultural scripts provide many elements for interpersonal scripts used by lesbian and gay male couples.

### Alternative Scripts

The love scripts described earlier do not represent the universe of possibilities for lesbian and gay relationship scripts. Alternative scripts can be identified within lesbian and gay culture that have developed in response to influences other than heterosexual norms, such as race, community values, and HIV/AIDS. Race brings unique elements to love scripts, including both a concern with how racism affects own-race and cross-race relationships and a celebration of cultural differences. Values that have evolved within lesbian and gay communities bring other dimensions to love scripts. One recent

development has been the value shift from "perversity" to "diversity" within lesbian/gay rhetoric. Previously marginalized sexual minorities such as bisexuals, transsexuals, and sadomasochists are now being tolerated under the civil rights agenda adopted in most large communities, if not accepted. This has opened the way for more gender blending and sexual variety to occur in love scripts. Feminism is a second value that has had a profound effect on white lesbian communities, in particular, in terms of attitudes toward specific sexual practices, monogamy, physical beauty, butch-femme roles, and the value of friendship and equality in relationships. Within white gay male communities, at least two additional value systems are in operation. One focuses on achievement and its accoutrements as important elements in courtship and love, including the status, material success, and physical attractiveness of oneself or partner. Developed partly as a response to HIV, the second value system emphasizes the need to create emotional and kinship ties with partners and friends that transcend wealth and beauty.

This broad assortment of influences has resulted in several alternative love scripts, including race-relevant, gender-blended, friendship, and buddy scripts. Race-relevant scripts both incorporate a racial/cultural context and address the consequences for lesbians and gay men of color for assimilating with the white community. For example, in *Say Jesus and Come to Me*, evangelist Myrtle Black falls in love with Travis Lee, a successful singer, against a backdrop of racial and political conflicts (Shockley, 1982). The murder of two black prostitutes leads Myrtle to organize a march for equality for women of all races. Along the way, Myrtle and Travis must contend with homophobia and sexism within the black community and racism from the white community. Race-relevant scripts are more in evidence among writings of lesbians than gay men of color. Among the topics explored recently by or about lesbians of color are erotica (Lee & Silvera, 1995), interracial love relationships (Hardy, 1993), the experience of lesbians of color in general within their communities and relationships (Silvera, 1991), and experiences specifically of Latina (Ramos, 1987) and Chicana lesbians (Trujillo, 1991).

Race-relevant scripts involving gay men of color are less common and more likely to reflect white stereotypes. For instance, in pornography, gay men of color are almost always shown as submissive to white men and seldom talk to or show sexual interest in other men of color (Browning, 1994). However, gay men of color are beginning to represent themselves more frequently in popular culture. Recent African American titles include *B-Boy Blues*, a story about Mitchell Crawford and his vision of lust and love, Raheim Rivers, who is 6 feet tall and 215 pounds of mocha-chocolate muscle (Hardy, 1994), and *In the Life*, an anthology about what it means to be black and gay in America (Beam, 1986).

*Gender-blended* scripts combine healthy doses of romance and adventure scripts within each partner's role. Many gender-blended scripts contain an element of fantasy, particularly in terms of the adventure components. For example, one of the most popular genres among lesbians is the lesbian detective novel (e.g., Maney, 1994; Scoppettone, 1994). Although few lesbians actually appear to be employed as detectives, the appeal of the lesbian detective as heroine remains strong, perhaps because it provides a convenient way to bring intrigue and action into the plot. The romantic aspects are usually less idealized than in the traditional romance, reflecting the classic stereotype of the hard-boiled private eye, but the lesbian sleuth is never so cynical that she's unable to respond to love. Gender-blended scripts for lesbians that include explicit sexuality are also more available. For instance, *Getting Wet: Tales of Lesbian Seduction* is advertised as "sex fiction that gets under the covers and rolls them back" (Allain & Elwin, 1992).

For gay men, gender-blended scripts add elements of romance to the core adventure story. The quest for success or the ideal sexual experience, or feats of daring and revenge, are presented as being enhanced by true love. In fact, being open to love has been presented as a risk and challenge itself in newer writings about gay men's relationships, especially in light of AIDS. For example, under the heading, "be very brave," Steven Saylor (1995) explains the importance of love in response to the horrible risk imposed by HIV:

And so the paradox: The more we love and cherish another person, the greater the rewards of the relationship and the deeper and truer the colors of the whole world become; yet at the same time, the more we love, the more vulnerable we become. . . . What I'm trying to say, I suppose, is go ahead and love, no matter how awful the risk. I gaze into the uncertain future, and I say to myself, and to you, with all the love I have: Be brave, be very brave. (pp. 104, 106)

The third alternative script, *friendship*, has long been established as a major love script for lesbians and gay men. As noted earlier, early feelings of same-sex attraction may be encoded as friendship rather than love due to the lack of available scripts modeling same-sex love relationships. Research indicates that most lesbians and gay men have a best friend relationship with their partner and, like friends, tend to be similar in interests, resources, and skills (Peplau, 1993). For some lesbians, a friendship may sustain a love relationship that does not involve sexuality. Such relationships have been labeled "Boston marriages" (Rothblum & Brehony, 1993). Boston marriages are indistinguishable from lesbian lover relationships, with the exception of the lack of sexual activity. The pair typically view themselves and are viewed by the community as a couple, engage in shared activities that are rarely done

by friends (such as making out wills and buying property), and are physically affectionate with each other.

The friendship script is also sustained among gay male couples, many of whom negotiate open relationships to allow for sexual novelty, but at the same time preserve the security and intimacy of the love relationship through friendship. Gay men in open relationships usually negotiate rules that preserve the primacy of the couple emotionally, including limiting the amount of contact with outside partners to "one-night stands" or "no emotional involvement" (Hickson et al., 1992).

The fourth alternative, the *buddy* script, shifts the focus from the couple to the individual who operates within a network of "family" relationships comprising ex-lovers, friends, and some blood relatives. Love relationships generally have less priority than in the traditional scripts. The motto of the buddy script could be summed up as, "Lovers may come and go, but friends are here to stay" or, as Ethan Mordden stated it, "[M]y family is my buddies" (Mordden, 1986, p. 189). Both lesbian and gay male versions of the buddy script exist. For example, some lesbians regard friendship so highly that they are often reluctant to become lovers with friends for fear of losing the friendship if the romance does not work out. Lesbians also have a well-earned reputation for surrounding themselves with ex-lovers as friends (e.g., Becker, 1988) and for traveling in "packs." As Lea DeLaria (1995) explains, it is nearly impossible for a single dyke to get a date, because

lesbians always travel in a group, always in a pack, because you never know when someone is going to throw a really good game of softball. With very few exceptions, everyone in this group is attached to someone else in this group and they are all EACH OTHER'S EX-LOVERS!! You want to say to them, "Hey, girls, why not let me put some new blood in this family. All the kids are gonna be retarded." (p. 57)

The buddy script as actualized by gay men incorporates personal freedom within the structure of a community household (Browning, 1994). Browning has argued that gay men have shown a unique ability to blend sex with friendship that makes sex ordinary, even recreational. More complex types of intimacy are able to occur once sex is not tied to the restrictive laws of marriage. As a result, gay men have re-formed sex into a tool for building diverse forms of comradeship. The dialectical role of friendship, sex, and attraction in gay men's lives has been further elaborated by White (quoted in Nardi, 1992):

Friendship . . . intertwines with sexual adventure and almost always outlasts it; a casual encounter can lead to a life-long, romantic but sexless friendship.

. . . [S]ex, love and friendship may overlap but are by no means wholly congruent. In this society, moreover, it is friendship that provides the emotional and social continuity, whereas sexuality is not more and no less than occasion for gallantry. (p. 115)

In summary, at least four alternative scripts have been identified that reflect unique influences and values within lesbian and gay communities. Overall, the alternative scripts provide definite challenges to the dominant lesbian and gay love scripts that are founded on heterosexual norms. Taken collectively, they reject white viewpoints, gender roles, and the value that a couple relationship represents the ultimate experience of intimacy. In addition, new alternative scripts continue to emerge that alter or reject the couple as the primary bond, including a lesbian or gay parenting script (e.g., Quinn, 1995) and a sister-brother script between gay men and lesbians (Nestle & Preston, 1994). The alternative scripts provide avenues for living in and with relationships that are increasingly lesbian and gay affirmative.

### Conclusion

The lesbian and gay men's love scripts identified here appear to be operating at both the cultural and the interpersonal levels. The two most dominant cultural scripts, lesbian romance and gay male adventure, were found to be *institutionalized* to the extent that a considerable amount of popular fiction adheres to these two basic plots. Furthermore, the two scripts strongly parallel heterosexual love scripts by emphasizing the courtship phase and gender roles concerning intimacy, sexuality, achievement, agency, affects, and the primacy of relationships in life. An analysis of self-help books aimed at lesbian and gay male couples suggests that these cultural scripts have a strong impact on interpersonal ones, as hypothesized by script theory. Problems typically found among couples were ones likely to arise from enactment of the cultural scripts, such as lack of sexual desire in lesbian relationships and difficulties with intimacy for gay male couples. However, not all scripts available to lesbians and gay men were based on heterosexist norms. At least four alternative scripts were described that challenge or expand the dominant cultural scripts by bringing race, gender blending, friendship, and new definitions of family into the picture.

As knowledge structures, scripts serve three basic functions. They help the individual manage complex environments, operate as interpretive frameworks for evaluating events, and serve as performative structures for smooth interactions during social routines (Ginsburg, 1988). The emergence of love scripts specific to lesbian and gay relationships that has occurred in popular

fiction over the past few decades suggests that new norms are beginning to operate. As new scripts proliferate, the ways lesbians and gay men organize information about relationships, evaluate them, and behave in same-sex couples are increasingly likely to be more self- and community-defined.

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