

Heterosexism and the Study of Women's Romantic and Friend Relationships

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The study of women's relationships has been guided by cultural scripts that are deeply heterosexist. In this article, the impact of cultural scripts on the research agenda is explored concerning two aspects of romantic and friend relationships: sexuality and relationship development. Research on lesbians is used to demonstrate how the inclusion of sexual orientation in relationship research challenges heterosexist assumptions and provides new directions for research.

The study of women's romantic and friend relationships has been deeply affected by theories and research that are implicitly heterosexist (Kitzinger & Perkins, 1993; Wood & Duck, 1995). Heterosexism refers to an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes nonheterosexual forms of behavior, identity, relationship, or community (Herek, 1993). Although current models of relationships do not explicitly demean homosexuals or homosexuality, they generally are derived from cultural scripts that hold heterosexual relationships to be the norm. This assumption has limited research on women's relationships in at least two ways. First, it has caused lesbian relationships to be understudied or studied primarily along dimensions deemed relevant to heterosexual relationships (Wood & Duck, 1995). For example, research has examined whether lesbians have or want enduring relationships or adopt "husband" and "wife" roles (e.g., see Peplau, 1991, for a review). Signs of abnormality among lesbians also have been assessed, such as how dysfunctional, unhappy, deviant, or impoverished they were compared to heterosexual women (Peplau, 1991). This research has been significant in depathologizing lesbian relationships but has not examined lesbians from the standpoint of their own experience (Huston & Schwartz, 1995). Second,

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heterosexist biases have defined what is studied or neglected in terms of heterosexual women's experience. For instance, research on sexuality often focuses exclusively on behaviors or outcomes that are mutually preferred or preferred by men (e.g., sexual intercourse) but excludes others that women considered to be important as well (e.g., touching, female orgasm).

The intent in this chapter is to explore how research on women's sexual orientation might be used to expand our understanding of women's relationships with partners and friends. First, cultural scripts for relationships and their impact on the research agenda will be explored. The second goal is to place lesbians at the center of the analysis of relationships in order to raise new questions as well as to reveal the embedded heterosexism of past research. A selective review of research will be used to illustrate what is known and what might yet be learned about women's relationships.

Cultural Scripts for Romance and Friendship

Social constructions of romance and friendship have profound implications for how behavior is organized through the process of cognitive scripting. Scripts are cognitive structures that shape how knowledge is categorized and used to understand and remember events (Bower, Black, & Turner, 1979; Shank & Abelson, 1977). Simon and Gagnon (1986) proposed that scripts operate on three distinct levels: cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic. Cultural scripts refer specifically to the instructional guides that exist at the level of collective life that instruct individuals in the requirements of specific roles within a relationship. Interpersonal scripts pertain to the application of cultural scenarios by the individual in a specific social context. Intrapsychic scripts represent an individual's private world of wishes and desires. Behavior operates under the combined guidance of these scripts, but in most instances, "doing" the relationship satisfactorily means broadly following a cultural script (Allan, 1993).

Cultural scripts not only serve as blueprints for individual behavior but also have inspired major lines of research concerning relationships. The ideology of heterosexism embedded in cultural scripts has had a particularly distinct influence on what has been studied. Several examples illustrate this point. First, heterosexual marriage has been ritualized in the cultural script for romance. The host of studies done on premarital sex and courtship reflect and reinforce this particular script. In the past, the romance script had a high degree of shared meaning and was seldom challenged. The script loses its predictability for lesbians, however, because there is less shared meaning. The notions of premarital sex and courtship make less sense from a lesbian perspective, given that marital sex as demarcated by a societally recognized legal or religious ritual does not exist for them.

Second, cultural scripts strongly endorse gender roles by prescribing that women and men express different motives and behaviors within relationships.

These roles (e.g., passive female, active male) create dynamics and dependencies that contribute to the idea that heterosexual relations are a likely, natural, and normal outcome of cross-sex interactions. Research on friendship reflects these cultural assumptions. For instance, in studies of cross-sex friendship, it invariably is assumed that cross-sex interactions may have a sexual component (Werking, 1997). In contrast, questions about sexuality rarely are asked when studying same-sex friendships.

Third, cultural scripts maintain that heterosexual romantic love will fulfill one's deepest needs and tend to devalue the support that might be derived from other relationships such as friendship (Miell & Croghan, 1996). This idea is incorporated in psychological theories that organize romantic and friend relationships hierarchically. For instance, attachment theory regards romantic heterosexual relations as being "primary" commitments that involve the integration of three behavioral systems: attachment, parenting, and sexual behavior (Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988). Friendships are regarded as secondary relationships involving only the attachment system (Kenrick & Trost, 1977) and are portrayed as "cooler," more companionate-type relationships (Hatfield & Rapson, 1996).

The above examples demonstrate that cultural scripts operate as a fruitful source of ideas but also may limit what is learned. This point is particularly relevant for lesbians, who typically confront a lack of congruence between cultural norms concerning relationships and the concrete interactional situations in which they find themselves. According to Simon and Gagnon (1986), when such a lack of congruence exists, the discrepancy must be solved at the level of interpersonal scripting. Intrapsychic scripts also are highly relevant when cultural scripts do not apply. Intrapsychic scripts play a more important role in shaping behavior when ambiguities exist between cultural and interpersonal scripts (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Thus, investigations that reflect or reveal interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts may be more relevant for understanding lesbian relationships than those based on cultural scripts. Similarly, aspects of heterosexual women's experience that do not conform to cultural scripts would need to be explored at the interpersonal or intrapsychic level. Some possible starting points for such an endeavor will be illustrated below.

Romantic Relationships

The dominant cultural paradigm for (heterosexual) romantic relations is highly scripted (Gagnon, 1977). In the United States, the script specifies in great detail with whom one is to fall in love (e.g., opposite-sex age mate), why (e.g., for love, passion), how the relationship is to proceed (e.g., dating, engagement, monogamous lifelong marriage), and the launching of the family life cycle (e.g., parenting). Generally, the longevity of a marriage is taken as an indicator of its success, regardless of the level of satisfaction or happiness that is present. In the event

a relationship ends, the close relationship between ex-partners also is expected to end. Only a minority of divorced spouses remain close friends (Ahrons & Wallisch, 1987).

Cultural scripts for heterosexual romance generally conceive of intimacy, sexuality, and power as being combined in one of two ways. In the passionate love constellation, intimacy, and sexuality are intertwined, with more emphasis being given to erotic passion as a distinguishing feature. Power may or may not be expressed along traditional gender lines. The companionate love constellation is characterized by high intimacy and equality, with sexuality being less prominent. In terms of relationship development, some models posit that passionate and companionate love occur sequentially (Berscheid & Hatfield, 1978), others that they occur concurrently (Grote & Frieze, 1994). Regardless of sequencing, however, passionate sexuality is taken to be the defining feature of heterosexual romantic relations.

Intimacy is idealized as the driving force behind romantic relationships; love is portrayed as legitimizing the selection of a marriage partner and as the rationale for continuing the relationship. Sexuality is scripted to parallel deeper emotional commitment, with premarital intercourse being widely accepted when it occurs in the context of love (Reiss, 1967). Contradictory views exist concerning the role of power in the romance script. Peer marriage, defined as a relationship between equals, appears to be the contemporary ideal for romantic relationships (Peplau, 1979; Schwartz, 1994). Competing with this view are numerous religious, legal, and social traditions that hold male dominance and female submissiveness to be the romantic ideal (e.g., Low & Sherrard, 1999).

Gender roles undergird the romantic relationship script. For women, maintaining a relationship is supposed to supersede self-interest, whereas for men, achievement and personal goals are supposed to supersede romantic relationships (e.g., Schlenker, Caron, & Halteman, 1998). Women are expected to do more relationship maintenance in terms of understanding their partner and to strategically bring up issues that need to be resolved (Prusank, Duran, & DeLillo, 1993). It also is a widely held belief that women desire more intimacy in romantic relationships than men and that men are more sexually motivated and less interested in commitment than women (Duran & Prusank, 1997). The right to initiate sex and the right to refuse it are strongly anchored as male and female behaviors, respectively (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Schwartz, 1994).

The extent to which lesbians conform to the heterosexual romance model is open to speculation. Lesbians are subjected to gender role socialization and more closely resemble heterosexual women in their ways of relating than they do men (Peplau, 1991). Many dimensions of lesbian romance scripts parallel those for heterosexual women (Rose, 1996; Rose, Zand, & Cini, 1993). On the other hand, lesbians highly value equality in their relationships and are more likely than heterosexuals to achieve it (e.g., Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Furthermore, when (and

if) lesbians adopt gender roles in their relationships, gender roles and power are not necessarily organized in the same way as within heterosexual relations (i.e., Nestle, 1992). For instance, some lesbians adopt a traditional feminine reactive role in dating in terms of waiting to be asked out and being courted but reject the role of sexual limit setter (Rose & Zand, in press). Findings such as these suggest that lesbians might create their own modes of relating that may not parallel heterosexual roles.

Sexuality and Romantic Relationships

One area of research that appears to be particularly limited in terms of describing lesbians pertains to the study of sexuality. Sex research to a high degree has tended to focus on elements of behavior that reflect the dominant cultural script for romantic heterosexual relationships. The script holds three steps as essential in heterosexual interactions: preparation for penetration ("foreplay"), intercourse, and male orgasm (Maines, 1999). A high moral value is assigned to the last two steps in this sequence. These elements must be present for the act to be regarded as "the real thing." Additionally, this action sequence is regarded as "good," "normal," "natural," and even "blessed," particularly if it occurs between married, monogamous women and men for the purpose of reproduction (Rubin, 1984). Other behaviors such as female orgasm, oral sex, anal sex, masturbation, and relations between the same sex are not part of the script and generally are regarded as being of lower status (Rubin, 1984).

Research on sexual behavior has mirrored the emphasis placed on intercourse in the cultural script by using it as the criterion variable for premarital sex, marital sexual behavior, and sexual dysfunction. Studies of premarital behavior equate "first experience of sex" with "first experience of intercourse" (Rothblum, 1994). Intercourse with male orgasm also has been codified as a medical norm (Boyle, 1993; Maines, 1999; Tiefer, 1995). Its presence defines marital behavior and its absence, dysfunction.

The narrow view of sexuality that is generated by the cultural script distorts or omits behaviors that represent the interpersonal and intrapsychic sexual scripts of lesbians. Questions based on heterosexual relations may not translate easily for lesbians. For example, two lesbian focus groups conducted by Rose, Cobb, and Pelli (1992) came to the consensus that they used the term "have sex" most often to refer to a sexual episode, that is, a sexual interaction involving multiple sexual behaviors and orgasms and lasting from 5 minutes to 4 hours or more. Thus, an episode would count as one sexual interaction. A new episode would begin only when a clear-cut break in sexual contact occurred—such as a 2-hour nap or time out to vacuum the floor. These preliminary findings suggest that evidence gathered using heterosexist terms such as "intercourse" as a generic cue may lead to inaccurate conclusions about lesbian behavior.

Awareness of the inadequacy of the cultural script for describing lesbian sexuality opens the door for inquiry concerning how adequate the script is for describing heterosexual women's sexuality, as well. Equating "having sex" with intercourse may not entirely be justified for heterosexuals, either. Sanders and Reinisch (1999) reported that almost all heterosexuals surveyed equated intercourse with "having sex" but that penile-anal intercourse and oral-genital contact also would classify as "having sex" for 81% and 40%, respectively. In addition, unpublished data from a focus group I conducted with heterosexual women indicated that all agreed they would *not* count unreciprocated oral sex performed by them on a man as having sex. Thus, assumptions about sexual behavior based on cultural scripts may be inaccurate for both lesbians and heterosexual women.

Cultural scripts also may be implicated in the uneven use of sexual measures within a population. For instance, heterosexuals and gay men—but not lesbians—were asked about anal sex in several studies (e.g., Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994), even though previous research reported that many lesbians engage in it (Jay & Young, 1979). Laumann et al. (1994) reserved questions about vaginal stimulation or penetration for heterosexual couples. Last, behaviors commonly practiced by lesbians such as tribadism (e.g., "grinding," "body rubbing") also typically have been omitted from mainstream sex research.

In sum, research on sexual aspects of lesbian relationships points to the importance of developing a new, more complete catalog of sexual behaviors that are derived from women's experience and perspectives across sexual orientation. Questions about oral sex, anal sex, manual genital stimulation, female orgasm, and multiple orgasm need to be asked routinely, regardless of the sexual orientation of the participants. Behaviors that apply more often to lesbian practices, such as tribadism, should be assessed as well. In addition, consideration should be given to what women define as constituting a sex act or behavior. Heterosexual women as well as lesbians would be better served if focus groups or open-ended questions were used in research to learn what various sexual behaviors mean to the individual.

Relationship Development

Research on relationship development is a second area that may not adequately encompass lesbians because of its reliance on cultural scripts. The dominant pattern for heterosexual relationship development is portrayed as a steady progression through dating, deepening intimacy, first intercourse, commitment, and marriage (Sprecher & McKinney, 1993). Women are assigned the role of limit setter in the sexual sphere in order to preserve their reputation and to allow time to assess how adequately the man will fulfill the provider role. Research on courtship behavior supports the idea of the steady progression model. On average, it takes

about 4 months for young adult heterosexuals to progress from first date to first intercourse (Sprecher & McKinney, 1993).

The extent to which lesbians fit the dominant heterosexual pattern in terms of relationship development is not known. According to Tanner (1987), the steady progression pattern adhered to by heterosexuals is not common among lesbians. Lesbians appeared to speed through all phases of a relationship more quickly than heterosexuals (Tanner, 1987). Cini and Malafi (1991) reported that young lesbian couples were having deep emotional talks as well as sexual contact on both a first and fifth date. A number of clinical and personal accounts support the idea that a "microwave" process—bringing a U-Haul on a second date and moving in together—is typical for lesbians. The "light speed" quality of lesbian relationships was noted by Susan Krieger: "A two-year lesbian relationship lasts for a century and leaves the parties to it forever changed" (1996, p. 35).

The lesbian script described above has been widely pathologized, disputed, and analyzed. In the past, it was taken to confirm heterosexuals' stereotypes that lesbian relationships were more sexually focused, less loving, less satisfying, and more prone to conflict than those of heterosexuals (Testa, Kinder, & Ironson, 1987). These explanations largely were based on a comparison that subtly—and sometimes obviously—held heterosexual women to be the standard against which lesbians were measured.

Placing lesbians at the center of analysis, however, shifts the research emphasis from comparing lesbians with heterosexual women to identifying alternative scripts for relationship development. It reinforces the idea that variations may tell us as much about relationships as norms. The more salient research questions become "What patterns of relationship development characterize different populations or communities?" and "What contributes to different patterns?" Some research already has begun to move in the direction of identifying alternative pathways of heterosexual relationship development (e.g., Cate, Huston, & Nesselrode, 1986; Peplau, Rubin, & Hill, 1977; Surra, 1985). The discrepancy between the dominant script for heterosexual women (steady progression) and lesbians (rapid progression) suggests that the study of pathways is a fruitful direction for future research. Variations among lesbians also would be of interest. For instance, although the rapid-merger script might be widely endorsed by lesbians, a slow progression pattern also has been used to describe numerous lesbian relationships that evolved via a close friendship (e.g., Vetere, 1982). Other lesbians have romantic but asexual relationships (Rothblum & Brehony, 1993). Verifying these pathways empirically would be worthwhile.

In summary, new insights about women's relationships are overlooked when heterosexist assumptions are unacknowledged. As shown above, current research suggests that the behavior of lesbians—and sometimes of heterosexual women—may not be congruent with cultural scripts for romantic relationship in two areas: sexuality and relationship development. Using lesbian experience as the center of

analysis would generate new areas of inquiry that could lead to the development of more comprehensive theories.

Friendship

If sexual passion is the chief feature of romantic relationship scripts, intimacy is the core element of friendship. Current conceptions portray friendship, intimacy, and self-disclosure as being almost synonymous. Intimacy, sexuality, and power in friendship are expected to combine in a companionate love blend of high emotional closeness, equality, and low sexuality. The picture of friendship as a positive, close, personal relationship that is freely chosen is one that permits considerable flexibility in its contours. Indeed, friendship tends to be less formally scripted than romantic relationships and is regarded as one of the least institutionalized of all relationships (Allan, 1993). As a "voluntary" relationship, it is not coerced or even facilitated by social roles or rules (Palisi & Ransford, 1987). At minimum, friends are expected to fulfill six responsibilities: to stand up for their friend in the friend's absence, share news of success, show emotional support, trust and confide in each other, volunteer help in time of need, and strive to make the friend happy when in each other's company (Argyle & Henderson, 1984). Equality is regarded as a hallmark of friendship; differences in interpersonal power or material resources are expected to be leveled between friends; if not, the friendship may not survive. Friendships are expected to last only as long as they continue to be satisfying. Gender roles are implicated strongly in cultural scripts for friendship. Women's same-sex friendships generally are conceived as being more intimate and emotionally expressive than men's, and men's friendships as being more activity oriented (Duck & Wright, 1993).

Friendship Development

The heterosexism of relationship scripts may play a role in friendship development in ways that have not yet been fully explored. Heterosexual women's relations with partners and friends occur within a context that highly values marriage as a social institution (O'Connor, 1992). As a result, their friendships occur within and are predominantly shaped by the marital relationship. The acceptable role for women's friendships in this scenario is to complement the marriage. Although married women's friendships might provide help and intimacy that lessens the demands made on the spouse, they may also produce feelings of jealousy and conflicting commitments. Traditional methods for dealing with this include devaluing these friendships, limiting their importance, and upholding the primacy of the marital relationship by discouraging visits with women friends when the husband is home. Even single women's friendships have been studied within a context dominated by the acceptance of heterosexual relationships (O'Connor,

1992). Once single heterosexual women begin seriously considering marriage, they begin to conform to traditional stereotypes by not going to bars and restricting their interactions with friends to respectable activities (Green, Hebron, & Woodward, 1990).

The extent to which the development of lesbians' same-sex friendships mirror those of heterosexual women's remains to be determined. Little research has been done on lesbian friendship, and few comparisons are available. However, both qualitative and quantitative differences might be expected. Lesbians are not confined by heterosexual marriage and are not required by convention to subordinate their friendships to the marriage. In addition, although all women are subject to male dominance in ways that might inhibit their freedom of affiliation (e.g., fear of rape, male dominance of bars and other public spaces), lesbians may have more opportunities for friendship because of their economic independence and the availability of places to meet within the lesbian subculture. As a result, it might be that lesbians are likely to have more close women friends than heterosexual women and to engage in more interactions that include both intimacy and shared activities. However, these hypotheses have not been tested.

Desire and opportunities for cross-sex friendship also may be affected by sexual orientation. Heterosexual married women often form cross-sex friendships via their spouse (e.g., Booth & Hess, 1974) and also may inhabit social settings that would contribute to forming cross-sex friendships. Alternatively, lesbians may develop cross-sex friendships through their involvement with gay men in community activities.

Sexuality and Women's Friendship

Considerations of the role of sexuality in friendship have been strongly influenced by the cultural script defining friendship as a platonic relationship. Friendship generally is described as a close, loving relationship that has many of the same features of romantic relations; the one exception is that sexuality is absent. Its absence particularly from same-sex friendship arises from heterosexist norms that reserve sexuality exclusively for cross-sex relations. Thus, whereas sexuality is excised from same-sex friendships, the potential for it is believed to reside within any cross-sex friendship (e.g., Werking, 1997). These scripts affect what is known about friendship, because researchers tend to overlook questions that do not conform to them. Thus, same-sex friendships are "found" to be platonic because few or no questions are asked about sexuality. In turn, the available empirical evidence is taken to support the cultural construction of friendships as asexual.

A focus on women's sexual orientation raises issues that question this assumption. For lesbians, the dividing line between potential friends and lovers is often murky. Several factors play into this lack of clarity. First and perhaps most obviously, heterosexual women may use gender as a cue to identify who is a potential

candidate for romance versus friendship by drawing romantic partners from their male acquaintances and friends from among female acquaintances. The fact that heterosexual women occasionally form close platonic cross-sex friendships does little to alter the social expectation that friendship between a woman and a man is highly likely to have romantic overtones (Werking, 1997). In contrast, lesbians typically draw both lovers and friends from their pool of same-sex acquaintances, requiring the relationship path for each to be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Second, lesbians appear to be less likely than heterosexual women to view friendships as substantially different from romantic relationships. The companionate basis of both types of relationships is highly valued by lesbians, and lesbian authors have contended that the distinction that is made between "love relationships" and "friendship" is artificial, in that friendships *are* love relationships (e.g., Kitzinger & Perkins, 1993). Additionally, friends fulfill unique functions for lesbians that might increase their value compared to heterosexual women, including acting as a "surrogate" family, serving as a buffer against the socially devalued status of lesbians, providing role models for being a lesbian, and offering reminders of the history and progress of love relationships (Stanley, 1996).

Third, friendship appears to be a core aspect of romantic relationships among lesbians to perhaps a greater extent than for heterosexual women. Numerous accounts of lesbian relationships indicate that one common courtship pattern, particularly in first relationships, is to fall in love with a friend (e.g., Vetere, 1982; Rose & Zand, in press). Many lesbians also believe that friendship even more than passion is an important element of a romantic relationship (Rose & Zand, in press). Perhaps because two lesbians often are friends before they get involved, many are able to remain friends if the sexual relationship ends. Remaining close friends with ex-lovers appears to be a distinctive feature of many lesbian relationships (Clunis & Green, 1993).

Cultural scripts portray heterosexual women's friendships as being less passionate, or at least less passionately felt, than those of lesbians. This idea bears deeper examination. Evidence indicates that heterosexual women often are deeply emotionally connected to their close women friends. Descriptions of intimate, nonsexual friendships between women examined by Crumpacker and Vander Haegen (1987) had a startling intensity. The vivid accounts revealed details of heartbreaks, painful rejections, and vows not to trust again. The emotional quality was clearly parallel to a romantic relationship. Support for the notion that same-sex friendships might have a sexual as well as an emotional component was provided by Davis (1929/1972) based on a survey of the sexual behaviors of 2,200 women. More than half of the single women indicated they had experienced intense emotional relationships with women and over a quarter admitted the relationship was carried to the point of overt homosexual expression (hugging, kissing and/or genital contact). In addition, about a third of the married women reported having intense emotional relationships with women, and 16% indicated that overt

homosexual expression had been present. Although these findings represent relationships between women from a different era, they provide evidence that sexuality may be present in same-sex friendships and that it can be tapped by asking relevant questions.

The perceived or actual absence of sexuality from heterosexual women's friendships might be explained in several ways that could be explored empirically. First, perhaps heterosexual women have learned better than lesbians how to split sexuality from intimacy in same-sex relations. Second, the lack of a language for sexuality that is not focused on genital contact might cause such experiences to be forgotten or remain unarticulated (Rothblum, 1994). Third, perhaps some heterosexual women have and are aware of sexual feelings for same-sex friends. This issue has not been explored in contemporary studies of friendship. Cultural scripts that define same-sex friendships as platonic perhaps have led to this oversight.

In sum, lesbian and heterosexual women alike have equal and deeply intimate relationships with friends. However, heterosexist scripts create different social contexts for the friendships that affect their functioning and formation. The apparent lack of similarity between lesbians and heterosexual women in terms of the sexual dimension of friendship also is noticeable and explanations for it are worthy of investigation.

Conclusion

The analysis of lesbian and heterosexual women's relationships presented above suggests that a heterosexist bias in relationship research partly may be traced to the use of cultural scripts to generate lines of inquiry. According to script theory, cultural scripts may not be adequate for understanding the behavior of individuals for whom those scripts may be less relevant or have less shared meaning (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Cultural scripts for romantic relations and friendship operate from a heterosexual norm that often does not map onto the situations in which lesbians find themselves. A small body of research on lesbians now exists that challenges the dominance of cultural scripts as a universal guide and suggests the need to study behavior using a broader framework. It appears that some aspects of heterosexual women's experience might also be better represented by a reduced reliance on cultural scripts in selecting research questions.

Previous biases cannot be remedied by merely adding lesbians to the sample. Heterosexism operates at a deeper level within cultural scripts than merely denying the existence of lesbians or failing to include them in the study of relationships. It shapes what is considered to be worthy of investigation and how behavior is defined. In order to generate a less biased approach, a deeper analysis and overhaul of assumptions must be conducted. Script theory suggests that interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts are important influences on behavior when cultural scripts are discrepant from the situations individuals confront. Eliciting those knowledge

structures is one potentially fruitful direction for future research that might be pursued using qualitative, open-ended, and participatory methods. More attention to the variation that exists in definitions of romantic relationships and friendship would reveal other constructions of relationships that are in use. The dominance of cultural scripts also would be challenged by a more extensive exploration of the connections between sexual orientation, gender roles, and the social context of relationships. The new narratives, patterns, visions of gender, and units of analysis generated by this process might help to develop new, more representative theories of relationships.

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