

IS ROMANCE DYSFUNCTIONAL?

SUZANNA ROSE

ABSTRACT

Among the forces that shape desire in women and men are the scripts for relationship and sexual expression available in popular fiction. In this paper, the structure and context of two widely available scripts will be explored: a romance script, found in fairy tales and romance novels aimed at females, and an adventure script, incorporated in action comic books, adventure novels, and pornography directed at males. Using a contextual analysis, three aspects of the scripts are studied: a) the stage of the relationship addressed by the scripts; b) the manifest and latent themes revealed; and c) the sexual and non-sexual motives expressed. The position is taken that by encompassing primarily the "courtship" phase of relationships, the scripts provide little guidance relevant to maintaining long-term relationships. The ways in which specific elements of the scripts are likely to be "dysfunctional" in long-term heterosexual, lesbian, and gay male relationships are examined.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the social forces that shape desire is integral to an understanding of sexuality and relationships. Like other social constructions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), sexuality is *scripted*: habitual ways of dealing with sexuality have been institutionalized in family and marital structures and in gender roles. Desire and its expression are embedded in a social context that defines what constitutes a romantic or erotic event. Such institutionalized structures provide a "blueprint" for behaviors and motives sanctioned by the culture, including why one has sex, with whom, when and where it occurs, and what acts are performed (Gagnon, 1977). However, sex research has more often focused on sexual behavior than on the social origins of sexual expression (e.g., Hite, 1979; Hunt, 1975; Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948, 1953). Consequently, the institutions and cultural influences that shape desire are among the least understood or attended aspects of sexuality (Gagnon & Simon, 1973).

While not predictive of individual behavior, sexual scripts provide insight concerning what people have been led to expect from sexual relationships. Congruence or contradictions between script elements and goals and also among scripts can be revealed by analyzing sexual scripts. According to contemporary social constructions of sexuality, the socially

sanctioned purpose of sexual love is to establish and maintain a long-term relationship (Laws & Schwartz, 1977). Assessing how well the sexual scripts available prepare adults to realize the goal of maintaining a relationship is one objective of the present analysis. A second goal is to evaluate the compatibility of different script combinations for couples. Because culture organizes women's and men's sexual motivations differently, examining dominant sexual scripts for both sexes can indicate areas in which the differential shaping of desire could lead to "dysfunction" in relationships.

Among the forces that shape desire in women and men are the scripts for relationships and sexual expression available in popular fiction. Read by a wide audience from childhood on, popular fiction found in fairy tales, romance novels, comic books, adventure stories, and pornography shapes and reinforces different orientations to intimate relationships for women and men. For women, a *romance* script constitutes the prototype for how to conduct a relationship; for men, relationships occur in the context of an *adventure* script.

Although both are basically "courtship" scripts, the romance and adventure script elements differ in terms of: a) the manifest and latent themes that predominate; and b) the sexual and nonsexual motives expressed. In this paper, the themes expressed in the genres described above will be illustrated using examples from contemporary fiction. The implications of romance-adventure script pairings for heterosexual relationships will then be explored. A secondary emphasis of the discussion will focus on the impact these scripts are likely to have on lesbian and gay male relationships.

THE ROMANCE SCRIPT

The romance script is the foundation for a wide variety of entertainment aimed at girls and women. Beginning with the fairy tale and continuing in the gothic, historical and contemporary romance novel, the psychodrama of the romance script is the formation of the couple (Snitow, 1979). Thus, the phase of the relationship most emphasized in fiction intended for female audiences from soap operas to sword-and-sorcery science fiction is the courtship period.

The script provides considerable detail and innumerable permutations of plot concerning how women and men fall in love. During the course of the courtship, the couples collectively manage to overcome a plethora of obstacles to their love and achieve the goal of making a life-long commitment to each other. Abruptly, once the pair has been established as a couple, the story ends. The extent of the script provided for how to weather the remaining course of the relationship is a parsimonious "Happily ever after." With this meagre advice, it is little wonder there is a voracious demand for quizzes in women's magazines on "How good is your marriage?" Outside of a traditional post-courtship *family* script, there are no established scripts for maintaining or evaluating love relationships.

The inadequacy of the ever-popular romantic courtship script in demonstrating how to sustain long-term relationships is obvious. But even more problematic for women in

ongoing relationships are the unrealistic expectations the script engenders and the limiting passive role it prescribes for women.

The fairy tale is the prototype for the romance script. Classic tales like *Rapunzel*, *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, and *Sleeping Beauty* (*Briar Rose*) depict a virtuous young woman held captive in a castle or home by an evil force (often her family, but more frequently a wicked older woman). The young woman is morally superior to her captors by virtue of her obedient, modest, or virgin nature. Thus, the heroine is distinguished from other women by her absolute conformity to the feminine ideal.

The two alternative female roles to that of the insipid, unappreciated heroine's in the fairy tale are either that of the good (but dead) mother or that of the wicked older woman/stepmother. The fantasy of the wicked stepmother has usually been interpreted as a splitting up of one person (the mother) into two to keep the image of the unconditionally loving parent uncontaminated (Bettelheim, 1977). The cruel mother displaces the good mother or commits her most evil deeds as the girl reaches puberty (around age 14 in both *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White*).

While the fantasy of the wicked stepmother may serve to enable girls from having to integrate the good and bad mother into one person, it has implications for more than the parent-child struggle. It gives an ambiguous message about female adulthood. On one hand, it is implied that only heterosexual love and marriage will enable escape from the role of wicked, bitter old woman. However, one is also left with the feeling that "happily ever after" only lasts as long as a woman's youth and beauty. Wasn't the cruel queen in *Snow White* perchance once desired by the prince and promised everlasting happiness through marriage? By suggesting that adult maturity, and particularly giving birth to a daughter, contaminates such happiness, the fairy tale contains a latent warning about the inevitable cost of adulthood for women.

The "action" that moves the story forward is the heroine's passive forbearance. In *Snow White*, the prince is overwhelmed with passion for the beautiful heroine lying dead in her glass casket. The message that handsome princes desire comotose women is reiterated in *Sleeping Beauty*. Cursed by an evil wise woman, Briar Rose sticks her finger while spinning thread and sleeps for a hundred years. If bleeding is a metaphor for reaching puberty, the script can be interpreted to mean that until girls are awakened by sexual love (the prince's kiss), it is best for them to remain unconscious from menarche on. That men have a necrophiliac attraction to unconscious women is also a theme that is reinforced.

Unlike fairy tales with male protagonists, "doing" is never the route to a relationship for female heroines. Merely "being," or passively waiting as one is, will lead to the ultimate recognition and reward of being loved. Rapunzel's long hair, used as a ladder, enables the prince to climb to her in her tower prison. Cinderella's small feet identify her as the woman desired and claimed by the suitor. Because in the fairy tale "being," or waiting passively, inevitably leads to sexual awakening, the groundwork has been laid for the erotization of waiting and anticipation that is fully realized in the adult romance script.

In a variant fairy tale script, the obstacle imposed by the wicked older woman is replaced by the prince's concealed identity. In both the *Frog Prince* and *Beauty and the Beast*, finding love depends on the heroine's ability to discern that, despite a repulsive or beast-like appearance, the beast is really the man for her. "If you are careful not to overlook any man or beast as a potential husband," the message goes, "you will be rewarded by the bliss of lifelong marriage." The expectation that women will overlook beastlike qualities in men is also an expectation incorporated in boys' fiction scripts, as will be shown later.

The manifest elements of the romance fairy tale script have been demonstrated to include unappreciated feminine virtue, captivity, rescue, "being," waiting, and openmindedness to every possible suitor, all of which are basically nonsexual. Also encouraged is distance and superficiality between the sexes — the male's status is what attracts the female, her appearance attracts him.

Latent themes encompass both nonsexual and sexual dimensions. The most elemental nonsexual theme of the romantic fairy tale script is one of a desire for regression to an earlier (prenatal) state, symbolized by the sleep and "rebirth" sequence, in which the heroine again receives an all-encompassing (maternal) acceptance and nurturance, supposedly via heterosexual love. Other nonsexual themes include revenge against the unloving parent/mother (the wicked stepmother in *Snow White* is forced to dance herself to death), power over men (Biar Rose's reputed beauty induces men to risk their life to awaken her), desire for recognition (Cinderella's cruel sisters eventually come to admire and love her), and defiance (Rapunzel conceals the visits from the prince). The potent sexual theme of the fairy tale, the (erotic) anticipation of sexual love, is latent.

The fairy tale themes are carried over into the adult romance and embellished. However, the restraining parental figures are replaced by other vaguely sinister forces or obstacles to love as the courtship phase is brought more into focus. The continuing appeal of the basic romance script speaks to its identification of basic female psychological concerns or unfulfilled longings, most of which have little to do with the reality of maintaining a relationship.

Evidence of the allure of the romance script for women of all ages is the record growth of the women's romance fiction market. Romances account for almost 40 percent of mass market paperback sales (Ruggiero & Weston, 1983). Harlequin Romance alone has over twelve million subscribers in North America. In addition, most large drug stores carry selections from five or more different publishers.

There are romances to suit ever predilection. The formula of the traditional Harlequin novel conveys the basic script elements. A young, attractive, single woman, often deprived of parents or guardians as the book opens, is without family or friends (Timson, 1983). As the plot unfolds, the naive, poor to moderately well-to-do woman meets and becomes involved with a handsome, strong, experienced, wealthy man, older than herself by ten to fifteen years (Modeleski, 1980).

Variations on the traditional script also are available; some even have their own series. For instance, for the young reader, Scholastic Books Service offers its *Wildfire* line

(e.g., *Love Comes to Anne*, *Dreams Can Come True*), while Avon has a *Flare* series (e.g., *You Would If You Loved Me*, "a sensitive story of going all the way" – almost). Harlequin Presents and Candlelight Ecstasy Romances (Dell) cater to an audience that prefers more "spice," whereas sensuality is eschewed in a new series featuring the Christian romance (e.g., Rhapsody books, Harvest House). The slightly older (late 20s!) woman who has a career and an interest in more sensual reading is the target of the Silhouette Desires line. The Second Chance at Love series (Jove) features the romantic courtship script for the divorced or married. Recently, as in the To Have and To Hold (Jove) line, the romance market turned its attention to the post-courtship phase.

In examining the romance script it would be rash to ignore the social context that locates women and men in different spheres within love relationships. In the sexual marketplace, scarcity is equated with value, but the commodities traditionally controlled by women are sexual favors, by men, the economic security of marriage. According to Laws and Schwartz (1977), the stereotyped exchange assumes the following pattern: a nubile woman is encouraged to think of herself as destined for a *passive* future triumph – being chosen by "Mr. Right." Sexual favors are given sparingly and solemnly. Complete sexual access is exchanged only for something equally scarce and valuable: marriage or the promise of marriage (p. 111). Only *before* marriage do women have this kind of starring role and bargaining power, suggesting the psychological motive for women's longing to return vicariously to the courtship period through the romance novel.

Turning to the elements of the adult romance script, one can identify the fairy tale themes in their mature form and content and explore the values they promote about relationships. The manifest themes of the romance parallel those of the fairy tale. The romantic heroine is a virtuous and unappreciated woman, waiting to be validated and consumed by love. The tension in the plot is centered exclusively on the drama of the man's dawning realization of her worth, triggered by her repressed yet unconcealable passionate nature.

In order to maintain her moral superiority and virtue, however, the heroine can never seem to be a goldigger or even interested in pursuing a mate (Modeleski, 1980). Heroines are required throughout to feign (even to themselves) an unbelievable indifference to what must represent the handsomest and wealthiest men in the world. "Monica Slayton is furious that the handsome, cavalier millionaire, Peter Blackstone, wants to have an affair with her" (*Seaswept*, Norris, 1984). What kind of woman does he think she is? The heroine's indignance at being pursued assures us her motives are pure (and stretches the reader's imagination to its limit). Sex will be exchanged only for love and marriage.

Obviously, the story would end here, if the reader took the heroine at her word. But the romance script teaches that women aren't responsible for meaning what they say or saying what they mean. In fact, in relationships, women are advised never to act in their own behalf. Passivity is central to the romance's appeal.

Deprived of any direct route to achieving the only worthy goal of adult life for women, marriage, the challenge is to make the male aware of the heroine's value indirectly. A standard device is to have her life endangered, for example, by an accident or by

contracting some deadly and preferably exotic disease like malaria. It is a surprise and puzzle of the romance that men are so attracted to women that have been feverish, vomiting or unconscious for days. What may be revealed here is the wish to be loved unconditionally. The regressive urge to return to a state of childlike security and nurturance is an impulse expressed in more than one way in the romance. Regardless of how prudish or tiresome the heroine is, or how ridiculously childish her outbursts of temper, the male continues his ardent pursuit. Stubbornness, hostility and defiance are condescendingly overlooked by the hero. The hero's willingness to bathe the heroine, benignly overlook her temper tantrums and treat her firmly and gently is more akin to maternal ministrations than mature peer interactions.

Initially, the male in the romance is not so compassionate. In fact, he is often contemptuous or hostile to the heroine. Readers are schooled overtly in the strange ability to completely reinterpret this behavior, which encourages an acceptance of distance and superficiality between the sexes. Not only will men view shrewishness as "cute," women are told, but the hero's cruel and boorish behavior is really a sign of his intense attraction. As a result, "male brutality comes to be seen as a manifestation, not of contempt, but of love" (Modeleski, 1980, p. 439). The male is more exciting to wonder about than to know (Snitow, 1979). Pleasure lies in the distance between the sexes; the erotic mystery of the male resides therein. The woman's uncertainties about the man create suspense. As in the fairy tale, he *seems* to be a beast or frog, that is, he *seems* horrible, cruel, unkind, or indifferent to the heroine, but who knows? He may be Mr. Right. "She didn't expect to fall in love with the arrogant Damien Savage" (*Savage Interlude*, Mortimer, 1980).

Perhaps it is not remarkable, then, that the heroine regards the male with askance. But the strength of the heroine's ambivalence towards the male hints more at a deeply rooted distrust of relationships than merely a virtuous disinterest in sex (Rose & McHugh, 1981). In the gothic romance, the castle is a symbol of these fears; book jackets frequently portray the heroine fleeing from the castle, which represents both potential luxury and imprisonment. Or perhaps the fear is of the sex act, and the castle represents a phallic object that seems too large. Or does the heroine simply dread the idea of cleaning all those rooms once the courtship is over? Whatever, the goal of the writer is to lay these fears to rest and convince the reader that regardless of the cost, marriage is worth it.

Snitow (1979) has described the latent sexual elements of the romance as "soft" pornography. Women in the romance are in a continual state of potential sexuality doing what women do all day — bending over, sleeping. These commonplace actions are noticed by the male and fire his passion. Innocent self-exposure is another stock strategy for sexualizing everyday actions. Sudden downpours mold the heroine's clothes to her body, exposing her physical charms to the male. Inclement weather, not her own desire, inadvertently "forces" her to change into borrowed attire that is slightly too tight, of course. Illness provides a circuitous route to developing the latent sexual tension in the script, too. Often the hero has to undress and bathe the sick heroine, allowing him to explore her body without her conscious consent. Or sudden cramps while swimming require the man to rescue the heroine and massage her legs.

The theme of power over the male is intertwined with erotic elements. The hero has eyes for no one but the heroine. One gets the impression he is figuratively on his knees, at the mercy of this outstanding woman who has distinguished herself primarily by refusing to have sex outside marriage. The imagery is one of male arousal: the hero's body is always "taut," "hard," and "lean." According to Snitow (1979), the basic drama of the courtship/romance focuses on whether the male can be "softened" enough to provide the security the woman wants, while still remaining "hard" enough to provide good sex.

Although there are many latent sexual elements of the romance, the true sexual core is the shiveringly delightful and erotic *anticipation* of fulfillment that is artificially and agonizingly drawn out. In *Seaswept*, although Monica Slayton has twice made love with Peter Blackstone, in a nine-page span she kisses him once but also tells him fourteen times she isn't interested in him. In the interim, vivid descriptions of her passionate thoughts about him are detailed. What is symbolically satisfied here is the power to prolong and control the arousal phase of the sexual encounter.

In summary, it has been demonstrated that the adult romance script develops and embellishes the fairy tale version. Continuing themes manifested are ones regarding escape, security, desire for recognition, power over men, the mystery of the male, and passivity as an exulted state. The latent themes are sexual with one exception, the regressive longing for a wholly nurturing parent. Latent sexual themes include the desire to prolong sexual anticipation, for sexual abandon and spontaneity, and for acceptance as a sexual being.

If a woman hopes to have a satisfying and enduring relationship, how adequate a script does the romance provide? The preceding analysis indicates it encourages women to limit their vision of the world exclusively to relationships and look to them to answer all their basic psychological needs. Furthermore, because the manifest themes are nonsexual ones, the romance fails to provide a model of sexual agency for women. The implications of these themes and related expectations for relationships will be considered further after examining the male adventure script.

THE ADVENTURE SCRIPT

In the romance script, males are transformed from active, aroused and non-emotional characters to ones that are intensely passionate, patient and attentive. How familiar are men with the script women expect them to fulfill? Are males exposed to heroes who become sensitive and ardent bridegrooms at the end of the novel? Quite the contrary, most elements of the male adventure script are unreconcilable with the romance script, as will be demonstrated.

Beginning with the adventure fairy tale, two themes are reinforced for male characters: independence and conquest. Unlike fairy tale heroines who are released from imprisonment through heterosexual relationships, heroes are thrust into the world unwillingly and have to provide for themselves. The plot reassures boys that severing connections with

family, although terrifying, will lead to success, parental acceptance, and female admiration. But adult love relationships are ensconced on the periphery of life.

One illustrative example is the tale of *Jack and the Beanstalk*. As interpreted by Bettelheim (1977), this tale depicts the stages of development a boy must go through to reach maturity, a maturity equated with independence and action. The withdrawal of maternal nurturance is symbolized by Mother telling Jack he has to sell the cow, Milky White, because it no longer gives milk. The father-son struggle of the Oedipal drama is represented by the two versions of the father: one, the good father, is the man who helps Jack by giving him magic seeds (a symbol of male adulthood and sexual potency) in exchange for the cow. In Jack's sleep, the seeds sprout into a mighty stalk, an obvious phallic symbol. The stalk provides the means for Jack to climb into the clouds and steal three magic objects from and slay the cannibalistic ogre, or bad father. In contrast to the romantic fairy tale where the response to female sexual maturity is passive, in *Jack* and many similar tales (e.g., *Iron Hans*), male sexuality, agency, and adulthood are inseparable. Boys are assured they can act on their own behalf and that adult potency, both nonsexual and sexual, depends on them assuming this responsibility.

In folk tales like *Paul Bunyan*, "doing" is again the avenue to success. Fame may also result in female admiration, but it is peripheral to the main joy life has to offer, male peer approval, as represented by the lumber camp. The figure of the good giant, loved by his (male) friends and feared by his enemies, satisfies deep needs for recognition and allays concerns about vulnerability and dependency. Paul Bunyan was big enough to fell a tree in four strokes; the diameter of his pancake griddle was as tall as a fir tree. Bunyan's size and voracious appetite, both symbolizing an immense desire to be nourished, provides reassurances to boys that excesses, if harnessed in the service of Good, will be marveled at and revered.

The huge size and strength of male characters are too obvious to ignore, especially in light of the fact that hulklime female counterparts don't exist in children's fiction. The usual psychoanalytic explanation of the monster as the powerful father figure perhaps explains one motive for the theme. However, a Gestalt approach, wherein different characters can be regarded as representing different aspects of the self, lends itself to an interpretation of the monster that may reveal and reinforce deeply rooted male fears about relationships.

The comic book provides an excellent data base for examining the core adventure script and monster symbolism, as well as a glimpse at the ingenuous male psyche. The popularity of the comic book continues unabated among male youths; indeed, the multimillion dollar industry is booming. However, the comic book is no longer the exclusive property of the juvenile. In the past two years, eight new adult-theme comic book companies have sprung up (Ferrigno, 1984). The average buyer of adult (?) comics like *Skateman* (a former roller derby star who skates through the streets protecting society from crime), is a male between the ages of 16 to 35.

The comic offers a wide variety of incredibly talented superhumans with which to identify, including Iron Fist, Power Man, the Avengers, the Thing, John Storm the Human

Torch, and the Hulk. The usual plot line is as follows: the hero/monster, through no fault of his own, is somehow endowed with superhuman strength or powers. However, the monster/hero persona only appears under stress. Usually, for some unexplained reason the forces of Evil set out to persecute the hero in his human form, eliciting the Jekyll-Hyde transformation. Thereafter, the monster/hero and the evil forces (who bear an uncanny resemblance to the hero in appearance and behavior) proceed to bash, maim, and insult each other for about twenty pages, until the hero is victorious, whereupon he resumes his human form. Sometimes a love relationship is thrown in perfunctorily, usually as a device to spur the hero to more strenuous efforts in battle. But there is no mistaking the fact that in the comic, life's true adventures involve battling with other males, not settling down "happily ever after."

At a surface level, the comic adventure script certainly supports traditional male values of competition, aggression and independence. At a deeper level, it is possible to view the drama as representing an internal struggle between conscience and more primitive emotions. Both the desire to be wildly undisciplined and the fear of being out of control are expressed.

A recent issue of the *Hulk* (1984) illustrates this point. Accidental exposure to gamma rays triggered the original conversion of mild-mannered Bruce Banner into the Hulk, a violent green behemoth. When Banner is attacked, the Hulk persona emerges. Although people fear the Hulk, enough of the Banner persona remains in the Hulk's consciousness to keep the Hulk a good guy. In one issue, however, this flicker of the original Bruce Banner seems to have been snuffed out, and the Hulk goes berserk. As he tears New York City apart, a collection of superheroes and former friends try to stop him, to no avail. Who is this man in risk of losing his humanity, if not the male reader? But the good heroes can also be seen as another aspect of the psyche that longs to establish connection with others. The good superhumans don't want to harm the Hulk and, in battle after battle, keep hoping the spark of Banner (the conscience) will return to subdue the beast. When this doesn't happen, the Hulk is exiled off-world.

Ambivalence towards connection with others underlies the comic script, revealing that what is being played out are fears about and reactions to dependency. The male heroes armor themselves against their dependency needs with huge muscles and superhuman powers. That males perceive connection and relationships as threatening is borne out by research. Gilligan (1982) summarized a study that had college students write stories about pictures from the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). When writing about seemingly tranquil scenes of a couple sitting on a bench by a river, 21 percent of the males portrayed the scene as leading to violence and destruction – suicide, kidnapping, stabbing, homicide, or rape. In comparison, none of the women projected violence onto this scene.

The TAT script written by males, with its sudden persecution of the hero or his affiliates by evil forces, is too similar to the comic script to be ignored as coincidental. The paranoid fears about relationships, control, and vulnerability expressed in similar form in both causes one to wonder whether those 21 percent were comic book affectionados.

By now it should be obvious that the adventure script says very little about love relationships directly, except perhaps to convey that even anticipating a relationship is something to be dreaded. Nevertheless, adventure, like romance, must be characterized as a courtship script because it indicates that for men, the route to establishing a relationship is through achievement. The courtship occurs through conquest and the demonstration of prowess that the woman is to observe and admire. The themes of the romance, i.e., the tension of anticipation and patient attentiveness to the woman, have no place in this world. In the adventure script, one gets the impression that winning or "having" a woman is important as a symbol of success, nothing more. She is certainly not a central element of the plot.

The regressive longing to return to a state of innocence and unconditional acceptance is a latent theme of the adventure script. The recurrent image of man as beast, able despite disfigurement or a terrifying appearance to find a woman who will love him, represents this wish. In classic stories from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* to the contemporary horror movies like *Dr. Phibes*, *The Mummy*, and *King Kong*, the male beast not only yearns for, but is sometimes desired by a human female. (Apparently, a very little charm goes a long way with women).

One stock image of women in the adventure script is that of the defenseless female, preyed upon by wild beasts or evil men. The heroine's fainting spells are the vehicle for her to arrive at a state of unconsciousness where the Mummy or Dracula can take advantage of her. The (male) predator — (female) prey theme is the only one in which the adventure and romance scripts mirror each other. The forcefulness with which these complementary roles are reiterated indicates the depth of societal concern that men remain the initiators of love relationships.

The notion that women practically belong to another species is another latent theme of the adventure script. Even in adult oriented science-fiction, spy novels and private-eye type mysteries, women are an unknown quantity. Repeatedly, from James Bond to Travis Magee, misplaced trust in a woman results in danger to the hero. What is expressed by this is more than an unabashedly sexist view of women. The characterization of women as betraying or entrapping also serves to prove that men are very different from women. Consequently, the threat of overidentifying with the female and the accompanying loss of masculinity involved is reduced.

In adolescent and adult male reading, the lure of the adventure script persists undiminished, but explicitly sexual elements are added, drawing out the latent sexual aspects of the youthful adventure script. It is no coincidence that Doc Savage, Conan the Barbarian, or the Hulk are "hard," "rigid," and "stand erect." The phallic imagery is overwhelmingly apparent. It is interesting to note, however, that only phallic sexual imagery is present in either the romance or adventure scripts. What this implies to both sexes is that there is only one kind of sexual potency — the male kind.

In adulthood, variant adventure scripts assume an explicitly sexual tone, so much so that it becomes a *sex-adventure* script. The old elements of the script, including aggression and competition, are carried over into a sexual context. The sexual component of

the script is best examined through themes expressed in pornography. The values promoted include those of breaking sexual taboos, sex without intimacy or commitment, variety in both partners and acts, and the brazen pursuit of physical gratification. The emphasis on the purely sexual is conveyed in the photo-fantasy *Three Through a Window*, a ten-page story told by photographs: the narrator observes an attractive woman hitchhiking and watches as she is picked up by a good-looking man and a beautiful woman traveling together. Intrigued, the narrator follows the threesome, who go to an elegant mansion. By lurking around the place, the narrator is able to watch while the two women seduce and perform oral sex on the man in front of a window, conveniently. In this sexual script, the desire for the unconventional is satisfied by the inclusion of exhibitionistic and voyeuristic elements and unorthodox sexual practices (*ménage à trois*, oral sex).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine pornographic themes in their entirety. Nevertheless, it becomes apparent from even a superficial perusal that long-term relationships are anathema to the spirit of pornography. A steady stream of interchangeably beautiful women grace the pages of *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and other magazines. The antidote for boredom in either pictorials or fiction is variety in sexual partners, positions, or practices. Intimacy and commitment have no place in the hedonistic pursuit of immediate sexual gratification. It seems these components would more likely prepare men to follow an extramarital sex script than a monogamous one.

In conclusion, the adventure script has been demonstrated to convey manifest messages to males about the role of autonomy and achievement in development. Certain sexual themes are also overtly developed, including explicit eroticism, immediate gratification, sexual experimentation, breaking sexual taboos, and freedom to indulge in explicit sexual fantasies. The covert message of the script, however, is that achievement, autonomy, and sexuality are inextricably intertwined: success depends on potency, potency on success. If such an equation is accepted, fears about human frailties are necessarily relegated to the unconscious. It is in the latent themes of the adventure script that buried fears and hopes surface, fears of dependency, of not being masculine enough, of relationships, and hopes for love and approval. Thus, in almost perfect complementarity to the romance script, the adventure script informs men how to get their sexual needs met, and mystifies them regarding how to satisfy their dependency needs. The consequences for relationships will constitute the next focus for discussion.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RELATIONSHIPS

It has been shown that the romance and adventure scripts differentially shape women's and men's sexual expression and expectations for relationships. By focusing exclusively on the courtship phase, the scripts prepare both to crave the intensity of the period when a couple is just coming to know each other. However, the specific content of the courtship script, in terms of manifest and latent themes and sexual and nonsexual motives, are so far removed from the realities of long-term relationships that disappointment must inevitably increase with familiarity. This is not to say that all women and men will adhere to either the romance or adventure script, or that they are the only sexual scripts

available. What is being argued is that these two scripts are one aspect of sexuality that culturally constructs a person's "sex print." A sex print is "an individual's erotic signature . . . which conveys . . . an individualized script that elicits erotic desire" (Person, 1980, p. 620). Subjectively, the sex print is perceived as deeply rooted and inborn, but at least some of the social origins of sexual motivation are evident from the script analysis.

Specific problems in heterosexual relationships can be linked to the constraints of the romance-adventure script pairing. For women whose sex print conforms to the romance script, disappointments likely to occur after the courtship include a loss of influence over the male, exposure to male frailty, and lack of erotic anticipation preceding sexual encounters. Due to the repression of sexuality scripted in the romance, inhibited sexual desire or dysfunction might occur. While a script that promotes sexual inhibitions in women seems an improbable complement to the lusty one for men, this "muting of female erotic impulsivity" (Dinnerstein, 1976) serves a social function aimed more at preserving family structures than at enhancing relationship satisfaction.

Adventure-scripted men, too, will most assuredly meet with frustration when paired with a romance-scripted woman. The loss of female admiration that occurs as he ceases to be a mystery to her, the lack of sexual novelty, and the continuing distrust of intimacy associated with fears of loss of masculinity if he identifies too strongly with her, will lead to predictable areas of conflict. Her need for attention would be perceived as too demanding. Her desire to be courted before sexual encounters might be resented. His unwillingness to communicate and his desire for sexual variation could be interpreted by her as "unromantic" and possibly threatening to her security in marriage.

Even so, such relationships can attain an equilibrium, although it may be an unstable one. The explicit sexual scripting of the adventure script can compensate for the sexual passivity inherent in the romance. In this way, female sexual needs are met without her assuming responsibility for them. Moreover, the emphasis on responsiveness rather than initiation in relationships guarantees that women will have no blueprint for *initiating* an extramarital affair or for beginning, maintaining, or ending a relationship.

One element that jeopardizes such seemingly perfect complementarity is the hypersexuality of the adventure script. Person (1980) has suggested that male hypersexuality serves nonsexual needs in addition to sexual ones. Specifically, sexual encounters may be sought compulsively to demonstrate masculinity and power as well as satisfy sexual urges. They may also be a means for indirectly achieving interpersonal contact and gratifying dependency needs. If so, motives other than a desire for sexual novelty alone will encourage an extramarital sex script.

Another way in which this script pairing can result in equilibrium is because men's wish for dependency is satisfied by having women scripted to assume the responsibility for wanting a commitment. Her insistence on marriage absolves him of having to acknowledge his need for security (Firestone, 1970). He is not required to learn how to satisfy directly his basic human needs for affiliation, intimacy, and receiving care. Women's disappointed expectations for intimacy, however, may disturb the delicate equilibrium of the complementary scripts.

Although tradition dictates the romance-adventure pairing for heterosexual couples, other script combinations are possible: a (female) adventure-(male) romance one, a romance-romance pairing, and an adventure-adventure combination. The first, a sex role reversed adventure-romance dyad would be expected to encounter the same type of sexual and relationship dysfunction of the traditional arrangement, though perhaps to a greater extent in the sexual area. If coitus is regarded by the couple as the only acceptable form of sexual expression, a repressed male sexuality might result in impotence. That this type of pairing occurs relatively infrequently (or is hidden), attests to the strength of the social forces molding our sex print and hints at the social pressure such a relationship is unlikely to endure successfully.

The outcome of a romance-romance combination is best illustrated by lesbian relationships. Because the lesbian "follows conventional feminine patterns in developing her commitment to sexuality" (Gagnon & Simon, 1973, p. 178), it is to be expected that the romance script will shape her sex print. One immediate problem in relationships that the romance script is likely to create (if it is perceived as such), would be in the area of who initiates sex. Recent research by Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) indicates this is indeed an issue in lesbian relationships, which may account for lesbians' lower rate of sex compared to heterosexual or gay male couples.

Since the romance script fosters a repressed sexuality, however, the issue of infrequent sex probably won't lead to a breakup. Instead, sexuality in lesbian relationships may be deemphasized or sexual dysfunction tolerated. On the other hand, because anticipation and emotional intensity supercede immediate sexual gratification in the romance, lesbian sexual interactions may be highly satisfying and intimate when they do occur. Partially supporting this prediction is research by Masters and Johnson (1979) showing that lesbians have less of a genital focus in sex and more emphasis on "foreplay" than heterosexual couples.

Intimacy is a second area of relationships likely to be affected by a romance-romance pairing. Without one of the dyad scripted to avoid or distrust intimacy, the possibility of "fusion" of the couple occurs. Whether or not overidentification with one's partner is a characteristic of lesbian relationships remains to be established empirically.

Overall, a romance-romance script would be expected to result in very stable and highly compatible relationships. Romance novels aimed at lesbian audiences tend to support the predictions made here. The exclusive focus on the psychodrama of the courtship mirrors the heterosexual romance. The obstacles to love are somewhat different and less artificial, though. Instead of the contrived barrier imposed by the heroine's denial of her attraction to the hero and his mysterious harshness, roadblocks to the lesbian romance typically pertain to the risk associated with accepting a stigmatized sexual identity. Additionally, in contrast to the heterosexual romance which plays on antagonisms between the sexes to heighten arousal, complete accord is a prerequisite for sexual encounters in the lesbian version. Fusion of the couple into one perfect, harmonious whole is the sought for outcome.

Because males learn the adventure script, one would expect that gay male relationships would illustrate the adventure-adventure combination. (However, it is not being suggested that this is the scripting for *all* gay male relationships.) The adventure script squared should lead to high compatibility with an emphasis on sexual variety, but low stability due to an avoidance of intimacy and commitment.

These predictions are supported by recent investigations. For example, gay male couples have a greater frequency of sex than heterosexual or lesbian couples (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Interest in sexual experimentation as indicated by number of sexual partners is also higher for gay men than for other groups (Bell & Weinberg, 1978). Gay males are less "closed-coupled," i.e., sexually faithful to their partners, than lesbians (Bell & Weinberg, 1978). Lastly, the heterosexual male sex-adventure script appears to be replicated in pornography directed at gay men, where a variety of handsome, youthful fantasy partners are ever available.

In terms of intimacy and commitment in gay male relationships, little research has been done. Peplau and Cochran (1981) studied 128 gay men between the ages of 18-65, 49 percent of whom reported not being involved in an ongoing romantic/sexual relationship. They reported that men who had low scores on a dyadic attachment measure had less frequent and intimate interactions with their partner. Also, relationships for men who strongly valued autonomy were of shorter duration. An "extramarital" sex script was in evidence as well. Most of the men (73 percent) had at least one additional sex partner since the relationship began, over half within the last two months. Although these findings did not directly test the proposed model, they are in agreement with the prediction that adventure-adventure pairings are likely to be unstable unless, perhaps, rules are negotiated for conducting sexually open relationships. This pattern is more evidenced in gay male couples than heterosexual or lesbian ones described by Blumstein and Schwartz (1983).

CONCLUSIONS

The intent in the present paper has been to examine how social constructions of sexuality shape desire in women and men and the consequences of sexual scripting for relationships. The romance and adventure script identified and explored here have profound implications for relationships. Their projected inadequacy for providing a blueprint for maintaining satisfying relationships suggests a need for new scripts. What is called for are scripts that provide explicit instruction concerning how to satisfy the sexual and dependency concerns that are currently latent in the romance and adventure script, respectively. Otherwise, the balance achieved in heterosexual relationships is likely to be unstable. As indicated, the romance-adventure pairing does not adequately help the couple either to maintain a long-term relationship or to develop a highly compatible one. Lesbian and gay male couples may be at an advantage compared to heterosexuals in one respect: at least their scripts are highly compatible.

As external events remove some of the societal buttresses for the romance-adventure combination, it is expected that those relationships will become increasingly unstable. Already, change in women's options outside of marriage and the increased availability

of information concerning sexuality have reduced the social forces that helped to maintain such relationships.

Recent changes in the romance novel reflect these cultural changes. Many romance series are providing a more sexually explicit script for women. The heroine is also likely to have a career, as opposed to a job. Although an obsessive concern with relationships still informs the plot, the groundwork is being laid for the script to include some of the more positive aspects of the adventure script.

In contrast, the traditional male adventure script shows little sign of change. This does not mean that men remain continually conforming to it. With age and confidence, adherence to a nonintimate, nonmonogamous, sexually experimental relationships script may soften. What is alarming about the rigidity of the script is what it implies about the enduring and detrimental linkage of male sexuality with masculinity. As long as these two are intertwined in male identity, that is, as long as sexuality, autonomy, power, and success are equated, men will not easily be free to develop scripts in which "non-masculine" dependency needs can be met directly. Thus, the relationship dysfunction associated with the adventure script will persist.

*Suzanna Rose, Department of Psychology, University of Missouri-St. Louis,
8001 Natural Bridge Road, St. Louis, MO 63121*

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