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Lesbian courtship scripts

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LESBIAN courtship—or the lack of it—is a topic that recently has captured the popular imagination of lesbians. Current accounts of lesbian dating etiquette (e.g., Sausser, 1986; Tessina, 1989; West, 1989) appear to have originated in response to the confusion surrounding just how two women select and couple with each other. That lesbian relationships typically lack a well-defined courtship stage has been captured in the joke: “Q: What do lesbians bring on a second date? A: A U-Haul.” This humorous description of how quickly lesbians set up house together after meeting a potential partner suggests one of the major ways in which lesbian relationships tend to differ from heterosexual ones. It reflects the aptitude with which two women are able to establish intimacy and the quick merger into couple status that frequently occurs between lesbians.

Another unique characteristic of lesbian courtship has to do with the absence of sex-typed roles involved in the interaction. Freedom from constricted sex roles often is cited as an advantage of same-sex relationships, because individual talents determine who makes the initial approach, organizes and pays for any entertainment or other activity, and what level of sexual intimacy is expressed. However, it also frequently means that neither person is prepared to assume the traditional male role of initiator. Lesbians’ notorious unwillingness to approach a prospective partner has been satirized as the lesbian “sheep” syndrome: Animal behaviorists have observed that female sheep signify sexual readiness by standing stock still in the pasture. A similar phenomenon is observable in lesbian bars. Women often signify sexual interest by avoiding all contact with those very women they are most attracted to.

This chapter will explore the scripts lesbians use in courtship. A script is a schema, or set of stereotypical actions, that is used to organize the world around us (Ginsberg, 1988, p. 28). Scripts serve as a guide for making decisions about what actions to take and for evaluating behaviors (Ginsburg, 1988). In courtship, scripts represent “blueprints” for how and with whom to express sexual desire and romantic interest (Gagnon, 1977, p. 6). The types of scripts lesbians use will be explored and categorized using popular and academic sources as well as our own research. The Boston marriage, representing one type of courtship script for lesbians, will be placed within this context. The term courtship was selected to describe the couple formation state of lesbian relationships because, despite its heterosexual connotations, sociologists define the courtship phase as being emotionally intimate, oriented toward a lasting commitment, and usually sexually exclusive (Laws & Schwartz, 1977, p. 105), characteristics that describe the early stages of many lesbian relationships. The term dating normally is used to refer to relationships having a less serious future orientation, or to the stage preceding courtship; however, as there often is little distinction between the two in practice, courtship and dating will be used interchangeably here.

In order to determine what courtship scripts were available to lesbians today, we examined a wide variety of materials, including lesbian romance novels, “how-to” books aimed at dating, mating, and improving the quality of a relationship, coming-out stories, first-person accounts of falling in love, and empirical research on lesbian courtship, sexuality, and relationships. From these we identified three basic scripts: the friendship script, the romance script, and the sexually explicit script. We regarded these scripts as distinct because they appeared to differ in four significant aspects: the level of emotional intimacy, the importance of sexuality, and the initiation and progress of the relationship.

The friendship script

The friendship script appeared to be the most common courtship script for lesbians (Peplau, 1982). Typically, the two women fall in love and become a couple during the course of a friendship. Emotional intimacy is the hallmark of the friendship script and is viewed as a primary means of developing and maintaining a love relationship. Sexuality often plays a less important role. For instance, physical attraction as a basis for the relationship tends to be downplayed. Even lesbians seeking partners

through the personals columns tend to emphasize their hobbies and interests more than their own or a prospective partner's physical or sexual attributes, unlike gay men and heterosexual women and men (Deaux & Hanna, 1984). A friendship script also is compatible with the egalitarianism lesbians value and seek in relationships (e.g., Peplau & Amaro, 1982). Lesbians tend to choose lovers of similar social status, race, ethnicity, and age (Cotton, 1975), enhancing the likelihood that the common values, interests, and equality basic to friendships are present. Indeed, friends are so highly valued by lesbians that many indicate a reluctance to risk losing the friendship by becoming lovers (e.g., Vetere, 1982). One reason the friendship script may be so common is because, for many lesbians, the process of coming out is likely to occur within a friendship. For instance, Jeannine Gramick (1984) found that women most often develop a lesbian identity as a result of falling in love, often with a friend.

The friendship script provides no guidelines concerning how to initiate the relationship or how to signal friendly versus romantic interest. The progression of the relationship also may be unclear or confusing, especially if the two women perceive the relationship differently. The friendship script may be comfortable for lesbians partly because they are unfamiliar with assuming the role of initiator in a romantic relationship. In general, women have not been socialized to take the lead in courtship or to risk being rejected.

The ambiguity of friendship as a courtship script has both advantages and disadvantages. In a book of lesbian etiquette, Gail Sausser (1986) humorously extolled the advantages of the "fawning friendship" approach to a prospective partner as "often ineffective, but nearly always safe" (p. 85). Conversely, the "fawning friendship approach," referred to earlier as the lesbian "sheep" syndrome, has been lampooned frequently within the lesbian community. Writer Katie McCormick (personal communication, July 1991), has protested:

Personally, I don't think the sheep go far enough. When I feel attracted to someone, I don't just stand there [like sheep], I go out of my way to avoid her — LEST SHE THINK THAT I LIKE HER! I mean, what if she suspected? I could never go out in public again. This commitment to avoid anyone who is an object of my affection or could become such an object supersedes any desire on my part to find love, companionship, or even sex. . . . What I have found is that I have become so highly evolved, I can now have entire relationships without ever even speaking to the person.

Research by Debra Zand (1991) of courtship behaviors of eight white and four African-American lesbians, aged 21 to 32, indicates that the friendship script indeed often allows participants to avoid having to assume the initiator role, but also makes it difficult to know what type of relationship is being pursued or if a love interest is mutual. For example, many of the lesbians interviewed signaled their interest in both prospective friends and lovers using the same pursuit strategy. They spent time with the other person and had long conversations. However, interviewees did not interpret either of these behaviors as signs of romantic interest when they were on the receiving end. More direct signals were required for a participant to realize a woman was attracted to her as a potential lover rather than friend. Direct signals included initiating light physical contact such as briefly holding hands when talking, hugging tightly when greeting, or telling the participant directly of her interest. These results indicate that lesbians using a friendship script may send signals that they themselves would be unlikely to interpret as intended. However, it is possible that lesbians who have been "out" longer than the young women sampled by Zand would not be as confused by the indirect cues.

The friendship script allowed the women to be more reactive, if they so wished. One woman interviewed by Zand explained:

I'm uncomfortable initiating. It feels too vulnerable. I don't want to let any woman know I'm attracted to her unless she's attracted to me. I tend not to think so unless she's told me directly or someone else has. A person that I would be attracted to is often a person I'm very invested in a friendship with. I don't want to jeopardize the friendship. I'll do everything possible not to let them know. Only if it comes out in the open would I be direct.

However, when asked how they distinguished between a friendship and romantic relationship, most of the participants admitted to being confused by the ambiguous signals of the friendship script. Four reported that, unless told directly, they were never able to discern if a woman was interested in them romantically. For example, one woman reported: "I can't really tell. Only after they tell me they're interested do I get it. I've had several women tell me after the fact, but I really don't get it until someone's direct." Two other lesbians said they did not distinguish between friendships and romantic relationships; no clear boundaries between the two were discernible. One noted:

I am attracted to a lot of my women friends on some level. There aren't any lines or definitions. It is kind of nice, but kind of scary too. Being heterosexual is eas-

ier that way because the roles are so much more defined—the boundaries are clearer. Things are just not that way with lesbians. You need a strong sense of self to be able to know, . . . to feel comfortable with boundaries, and to decide where to draw them. I'm just not sure.

A few made some slight distinctions between friendship and romance. Four indicated that they would tend to disclose personal information more rapidly if they were romantically interested in a woman than they would if pursuing a friendship. Another common distinction involved feeling less self-conscious with potential friends than lovers. As one woman related:

I'm not as delicate with my interactions with friends. I'm less self-conscious with friends. Less concerned with whether I'm well groomed or whether I will say the wrong things. I'll tease and horse around with friends, but I don't tease women I'm interested in.

About half the participants reported not viewing a relationship as having gone beyond friendship until the couple has had sex. As one woman stated:

I can tell by the way I feel the morning after. After I have sex with a woman, I want to be with her. A strong sexual bond develops and I start moving things into her house. After I make love, I feel like, in a way, we claim each other.

Many also indicated that another way to tell that the relationship had entered the romantic realm was if the couple had made a verbal commitment to spend time together, work through conflicts, and be lovers.

The ambiguity of the friendship script as a sexual signal sometimes has an intriguing romanticizing effect, because it increases the tension over whether the relationship will ever be consummated. The uncertainty serves as an obstacle to love, a script device that is a regular component of the romance script described next. By the time the two women finally realize their feelings are mutual, they fall exhausted and grateful into each other's arms.

In summary, the friendship script emphasizes emotional intimacy over sexuality, does not designate a clear role for the initiator, and prescribes a gradual—and often ambiguous—progression toward romantic involvement.

The romance script

The romance script emerged as the second distinct and next most popular courtship pattern in lesbian fiction and practice. Its appeal in fic-

tion was evidenced by the tremendous explosion in romance books available from lesbian presses such as Naiad. The classic plot for the lesbian romance intertwines emotional intimacy and sexual attraction, with one or both women being magnetically drawn to the other. The "love at first sight" formula grounds the script. Initiation in the romance is much more direct than in the friendship script, and the relationship progresses very quickly toward commitment. For example, in the *Edge of Passion*, Micki, a successful buyer in a Boston department store, meets Angela, a younger TV journalist, at a gay bar in Provincetown (Smith, 1991). They are immediately attracted to each other, dance, and make out in a dark corner. Micki implores Angela to "slow down," asserting that what has happened between them "isn't connected to anything else." However, Angela insists, "Yes, it is. It's our beginning" (p. 13). While still at the bar, Angela experiences a moment when she "felt Micki's flesh reach out to her, when she'd felt the lines between the two of them dissolve, so that there was only one being, one beat, one pulse" (p. 16).

Sexuality is much more overtly present in the romance script than the friendship one, but the extent to which it is acted upon varies. More often than not, it is consummated; exciting sex scenes are almost obligatory. Books on display in women's bookstores often fall open to the "hot" scenes. However, sex is most palatable when served with love. If the couple is not already in love before having sex, they are sure to be after unparalleled lovemaking: "Never before had she [Kate Delafield] known such orgasmic rapture throughout a night. Never had she suspected that she could. Or that she would ever want to. Or need to" (Forrest, 1989, p. 190).

However, as Suzanna Rose observes, the true sexual core of the romance is not the sex act itself, but the delightful *anticipation* of fulfillment, the longing for union (Rose, 1985, p. 256). Like the classic Greek romances, the themes of removal to a distant place, captivity, isolation, escape, search, and pursuit characterize the lesbian romance novel. Typically, the smooth progression of the budding romance is jeopardized by some obstacle to love. The subsequent separation or threat of separation stimulates the lovers' (and readers') concerns over whether the longed-for union will be achieved. Once the pair overcome the age, class, or race barriers and is united, they supposedly live happily ever after. It is rare for a romance ever to deal with the issue of how to maintain a long-term relationship.

The "girl meets girl, girl loses (or almost loses) girl, girl gets girl"

treatment has some unique twists not contained in the heterosexual "boy meets girl" version. First, the lesbian romance novel frequently contains obstacles that represent real social barriers to establishing a same-sex love relationship that don't arise so often in heterosexual courtship. Parents intervene to separate the young women lovers, angry husbands have the lovers tailed by a private detective or physically abuse the wife, or one of the pair struggles to accept her lesbianism. Second, because there are no polarized gender roles to serve as an obstacle in lesbian relationships, no distance between the sexes to conquer, lesbian romances rely more on age, class, or race differences as plot devices. For example, will 40-year-old Kate Delafield be able to resist the amorous overtures of a "too young" 26-year-old Aimee Grant? Will the wealthy debutante be able to find happiness with a lesbian born on the wrong side of the tracks? Third, more harmonious relationships are depicted in lesbian than heterosexual romances, where the woman often must interpret the man's hostility or indifference as a sign of love and eventually win him over (Snitow, 1979, p. 250). Consequently, lesbian couples achieve intimacy more quickly.

Research by Marie Cini and Teresa Malafi (1991) of lesbian dating suggests that the romance script is followed by some lesbians in practice as well as fiction. Numerous lesbians Cini and Malafi approached were not able to participate in the research because they had gotten involved with a friend and had never dated. However, 23 lesbians between the ages of 18 and 24 were able to describe their thoughts, feelings, and actions on an actual first and fifth date with someone new. Because respondents were asked explicitly to describe their dating experiences, none reported going out with a friend. All the dates were with women they did not know very well, thus setting the stage for the intrigue of the romance script. The anxiety of spending an evening with an unfamiliar person was apparent in their experiences, which played out in a rather traditional date format.

Both sexual attraction and emotional intimacy were important elements of the respondents' first date scripts. In contrast to the lack of emphasis on physical appearance in the friendship script, most of the women's predate thoughts revolved around appearance, signifying a desire to be physically attractive to the other woman. They expressed considerable concern about their looks: "Am I attractive enough for her to like me? I feel fat and ugly." "I usually don't worry about how I look —

but this time I'm really attentive to it." "How do I look? Do I look good? Do I look strong and centered?" "What should I wear? I want to make a good impression." "Should I smoke?" "I wish I had lost that 10 pounds." "What if I wear something she thinks is stupid and she dismisses me right away?"

Respondents also were quite attuned to how the physical rapport was developing. They often mentioned wondering when would be an appropriate time to add a physical component — a touch, a kiss — and how they would respond if the other woman initiated it. Unlike heterosexual women, however, lesbians did not report the need to control sexual activity. Whereas heterosexual women generally make the decision about when to "let" sex happen, lesbians indicated a more mutual decision-making process for initiating physical intimacy.

The respondents' comments also indicated that they used the first date to evaluate their dates' potential as a partner in a committed relationship. As hypothesized above, even at this early juncture, many respondents were interested in discovering if their date was "Ms. Right." Assessing their interest in each other was a significant part of the script. As one woman phrased it: "Could I grow with this woman? Can I see her in my future?"

Accounts of the respondents' fifth date experiences further illustrated the rapid progression or "instant merger" often associated with lesbian relationships (Cini, 1990, p. 7). Respondents usually reported being both sexually and emotionally involved by the fifth date: "OK. If I made it to the fifth time out it means I plan on this being a long-term relationship. . . . Maybe I'll be with her for the rest of my life." "I like the idea that I'm part of a couple and that others know we're a couple." "Yes, I love her." "I don't want to be anywhere else but with her." "Could I spend the rest of my life with this woman?"

The strong attachment that most lesbians reported by the fifth date generally was grounded in highly intimate talks or deep emotional sharing. In fact, it appeared that even if lesbians did not start a relationship by becoming friends, they quickly moved to establish an intimate friendship as part of the coupling process. Some of these talks are described as follows: "Much more open with my feelings, less concerned about protecting my feelings." "I listen to her, putting the pieces of her together." "I hope we look deep into each other's eyes and tell each other deep personal things."

In conclusion, the romance script describes emotional intimacy and physical attraction as being intertwined and obvious from the outset. The attraction fuels the intimacy but may or may not be consummated sexually. Relationship initiation is direct and purposeful, and the couple is expected to enter into a committed relationship very quickly.

The sexually explicit script

The sexually explicit courtship script embraces the philosophy, "Good girls go to heaven, bad girls go everywhere;" it celebrates the active pursuit of sexual pleasure (e.g., Bright, 1989; 1990). The sexual experience itself plays a predominant role in the script; love, affection, and commitment also may be present in a sexual encounter, but are not regarded as necessary to justify it.

Probably the most common fictionalized sexually explicit script is the "lust at first sight" or "casual sex" version. The two women meet, feel a strong physical response to each other, and have a sexual adventure. Initiation is direct and goal-oriented. The bulk of the script is made up of considerable detail about specific sexual behaviors, arousal, and satisfaction. A concern about safe sex practices and AIDS prevention is usually an overt part of the script. The decision to see each other again typically depends on the erotic and emotional qualities of the interaction. If the relationship is continued, emotional intimacy eventually may develop between the couple.

Butch-femme roles sometimes occupy a prominent place in the sexually explicit script. These roles have been defined as representing a lesbian sexual signaling system (Nestle, 1987; Loulan, 1991). The "archetypes" of butch and femme are ways of presenting the self in order to attract another woman. The most frequent combination is butch-femme, but butch-but and femme-femme pairings also occur occasionally (e.g., Califia, 1988; Nestle, 1987). The erotic appeal of butch-femme archetypes is highlighted in the sexually explicit script. The butch lesbian's lean, muscular body, unruly hair, confident manner, and sexual expertise are celebrated, as are the femme lesbian's beauty, sensuality, and sexual appetite.

Although the sexually explicit script often is downplayed as being inferior to friendship and romance in the courtship script hierarchy, it is nevertheless given its due in contemporary fiction and nonfiction. For example, in *The Lesbian Love Advisor*, Celeste West (1989) acknowledges

that "the morning after" the first time in bed could be either the beginning of a continued liaison or the last time the couple will be together. Appropriate manners in the situation depend on whether a repeat performance is desired. If not:

Offer her coffee and a croissant, telling her you have to be out and about. Bustle unromantically, but not rudely. You may mention that you have so much work to do you'll be busy the next six months, but never be churlish. You always owe true politeness to any woman whose affections you have encouraged and won. Naturally you have combined integrity with your romantic glamour, so you have nothing to confess to her, like your special lover of three years is due home imminently. (p. 45)

The sexually explicit script also has had a strong, if unacknowledged, impact on the lesbian romance script. In recent novels, the romance script frequently is pitted against the sexually explicit one (e.g., *Just Say Yes*, McDaniel, 1990). The romance script usually prevails, but not before the author has gotten to describe some juicy casual sex scenes between two women superficially attracted to each other. Of course, those interactions are not as deeply satisfying as ones experienced later between the women once they have fallen in love. Thus, the reader may vicariously enjoy the sexually explicit script without endorsing it. In addition, the romantic scenes must become more explicit in order to compete with the pure eroticism of the sexually explicit script. In effect, the sexually explicit script has sexualized the romance script.

The extent to which lesbians use a sexually explicit script has not been investigated. However, research on lesbian dating indicates that some lesbians consider having, or do have, sex on a first date. Two of Cini and Malafi's (1991) 23 participants reported a willingness to have sex on a first date under the "right" circumstances. In addition, 4 of 20 lesbians, aged 17 to 55, in Dean Klinkenberg and Suzanna Rose's (in press) investigation of dating described making love on their most recent first date with another woman. These sexual contacts all took place within a traditionally romantic setting. For example, in two cases, the couple had arranged to spend the weekend together and went sightseeing, out to dinner, and talked about how they felt about each other. These findings suggest that lesbians quickly tend to establish a context for sexual encounters which includes romance and friendship.

In summary, the sexually explicit script is characterized by an emphasis on sexual attraction over emotional intimacy, direct and purpose-

ful initiation of the encounter by one or both women, and a possible — but not required — continuation of the relationship.

Influences on scripts

To some extent, the distinctions made among the three scripts defined above are conceptual rather than practical. In everyday life, it is likely that different experiences or circumstances favor the use of one script over another or that the scripts may be blended, as in the “sex on the first date” scenario described above. The choice of script appears to be affected by individual differences, community values, and social conditions. One individual characteristic that might affect a lesbian’s knowledge of what scripts are available is the amount of lesbian experience she has had. As noted earlier, it is a common pattern for lesbians to become aware of their love for a woman within the context of a friendship. At this stage, many do not identify themselves as lesbians and the friendship often has no sexual component (Vetere, 1982, p. 57). In later relationships where lesbians identify themselves as such, most report that sexual attraction is an element of their love relationships, and that they begin to make a distinction between friendship and romantic relationships. Thus, the singular reliance on a friendship script is probably less likely to occur among lesbians who have been “out” longer and have more developed courtship repertoires.

Another individual characteristic that may influence script preference is the person’s attitude about sexuality. A lesbian may regard the sexually explicit script as politically incorrect, for instance, and consider sex acceptable only within the context of a committed loving relationship. Or, if she regards sex as a low priority in a relationship, she might prefer developing a friendship rather than an intimate physical relationship.

In addition, community values often operate to promote one script over another. In the 1970s, nonmonogamy was a widely accepted practice in most urban lesbian communities, and casual sex was not necessarily expected to lead to commitment. Current norms seem to favor the “instant merger” outcome for romantic relationships; there appear to be external pressures on a pair who have become sexual to establish an exclusive relationship. As Sausser (1990) aptly put it:

In our little culture, a lot of women are stand-offish. This is because they marry anyone they date. If you sleep with someone and then move in, date them and then marry them, kiss them and immediately form a permanent relationship . . . you’d better be darn careful whom you talk to! (pp. 20–21)

The expectation that any date should result in commitment might lead a lesbian to reject the romance script in favor of the friendship one, which would at least slow down the merger process.

Social conditions may also affect courtship scripts. For instance, butch-femme roles are adopted more often among working class and ethnic minority lesbians (e.g., Castillo, 1991, p. 37). Ana Castillo (1991) has pointed out that cross-dressing and cross-gender behavior are prevalent among Chicana lesbians, although dominance in the relationship does not accompany the butch or macha role. How these roles are incorporated into courtship scripts for different class and race groups remains to be determined. However, the relative absence of butch-femme roles in the friendship script raises the issue of whether this script is predominantly a white, middle-class lesbian courtship pattern. If so, it would be important for future research to identify alternative scripts that are used by working class, African-American, Chicana, Asian, and Native American lesbians.

Finally, other social conditions such as the advent of AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) has affected how lesbians approach relationships. One of the major changes lesbians have made in their response to AIDS has been to reduce the number of casual sexual contacts they have (Rose, 1991). As one 35-year-old lesbian, responding to Suzanna Rose’s survey, wrote:

The spontaneous fun of a one-night stand is gone; now it’s something to worry about or not engage in. . . . I’m into nice, conservative women now. I run away from women who are outgoing and sexually promiscuous. Even though sex is not as much of an exciting adventure as it used to be, I feel safe and secure with the woman I am with. Sexual variety and variation sure has suffered!

Other responses included: “I’m much less interested in exploring extra-relationship relationships.” “I’m just glad I’ve been celibate.” “No more one-night stands.” “No more ‘free love’ philosophy that I embraced in the early ’70s when sex was just fun and free of adverse effects.” “Fear of AIDS has decreased my sexual desire.”

Suzanna Rose (1991) also found that the second major AIDS prevention strategy adopted by the participants in her study was to get to know a partner’s sexual history before getting involved. Specific safe sex practices, such as using dental dams when engaging in oral sex, were used by very few lesbians. In sum, the AIDS epidemic appears to have encouraged lesbians to begin with a friendship script rather than a sexually

explicit one, in the belief that knowing a potential partner and her sexual history well will reduce the AIDS risk.

Courtship scripts and the Boston marriage

The Boston marriage as described by Esther Rothblum and Kathleen Brehony (1991) can be seen as an amalgam of the friendship and romance scripts. Whether the blend constitutes a romantic friendship or a friendly romance depends on how the relationship is viewed. During the initiation phase of the Boston marriage, the relationship more closely parallels the romance script. There is an emotional intensity and physical attraction between the two women that catalyzes their relationship. Rather than a gradual getting to know one another, the women get close very quickly, either emotionally or sexually or both, move in together, and merge their lives. Thus, as in the romance script, the women are magnetically drawn to each other, initiation is direct in that one or both pursues the other, and the pair moves quickly toward commitment. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that the lack of explicit sexual contact in some Boston marriages makes the friendship script a more exact model. The Boston marriage can be seen as fitting the coming-out version of the friendship script, because it is through a friendship that the women first realize their lesbianism.

The Boston marriage illustrates the difficulty that often occurs in distinguishing between friendship and romance better than any other type of relationship. Friendships exist in which two women are clearly "just friends" and perceive there to be little or no physical attraction between them; in other friendships, the role of sexual attraction may be unclear; and in still others, it may be very obvious. Regardless of whether sexuality is present, the friendship may be very "romantic" nonetheless, with longing and passion for the friend being expressed. Also, there are romances that are physically passionate for a while but rapidly fade into a nonsexual friendship.

The analysis of courtship scripts presented here helps to clarify these distinctions by suggesting that the presence or absence of sexual behavior should not be regarded as the sole criterion for defining whether the relationship is friendship or romance. We identified four characteristics that distinguished each script, including emotional intimacy, sexuality, and relationship initiation and progression. One might hypothesize that the extent to which the pair identifies as a couple is an

important criterion in differentiating between long-term romantic relationships and friendships. These considerations are beyond the scope of the present chapter, which only addresses courtship. However, they point to the need to examine what long-term relationship patterns occur among lesbian couples.

Script theory provides another way to view the Boston marriage. Script theory posits that scripts exist at three distinct levels: cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic (Simon & Gagnon, 1986, p. 98). Cultural scripts describe social norms regarding the enactment of specific roles. Interpersonal scripts represent the blueprints people develop as they apply the cultural scripts to specific situations. Intrapsychic scripts are those that embody the individual's private wishes and desires.

Examined in light of script theory, the Boston marriage may be viewed as follows: There is no widely available cultural script that describes how two women mate; however, a cultural script for how to enact a friendship does exist. Therefore, in a Boston marriage, each woman's private desires (i.e., intrapsychic scripts) are likely to be enacted within the context of a friendship script (i.e., cultural script), with strong cultural prohibitions against sexual intimacy between two women being incorporated into the couple's interactions (i.e., interpersonal scripts). Exposure to alternate cultural scripts will change the interaction among the three script levels. Awareness of lesbian cultural scripts that define sexuality as part of a love relationship are likely to have an impact on interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts. As in the case described by Rothblum and Brehony (1991), one woman's intimate involvement with a lesbian jazz group—and her concomitant more personal exposure to lesbian norms—caused her to redefine her 15-year-old relationship as "not a relationship" because it was not sexual. Her interpersonal script changed in response to a new cultural script. Presumably, her intrapsychic script also changed; she then desired to have a sexual relationship.

Lastly, the impact of recent and emerging cultural scripts on the Boston marriage also must be considered. Of the three scripts presented here, the sexually explicit script is the most recent and, as noted above, may have served to sexualize the romance script. The more overt emphasis on sexuality in two of the major lesbian cultural courtship scripts might make it increasingly difficult for couples in Boston marriages who have much contact with the community to sustain a nonsexual relationship. However, operating against the predominance of either a sexually

explicit or a sexualized romance script is the emerging "friendship first" script that has developed in response to AIDS. It is also possible that AIDS has resulted in an increase in celibacy among lesbians, even those in couples. If so, Boston marriages may become even more common and widely accepted in the future.

Conclusion

The intent in the present chapter was to identify lesbian courtship patterns as a way of illuminating the processes involved in the Boston marriage. The friendship, romance, and sexually explicit scripts described here represent cultural scripts within the lesbian subculture that differ in terms of emotional intimacy, sexuality, and initiation and progression of the relationship. Differing norms within the community are likely to modify the scripts, as are individual proclivities and experiences. Within this context, the Boston marriage can be regarded as a common variant script that has been affected by lack of exposure to alternative lesbian courtship scripts during its initiation phase. However, because it shares aspects of both the friendship and romance scripts, it definitely must be regarded as a lesbian courtship pattern. This analysis suggests that examining the interplay of cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic scripts occurring in the Boston marriage would yield important insights about how lesbians develop and use courtship scripts.

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