

## Eroticizing Inequality in the United States: The Consequences and Determinants of Traditional Gender Role Adherence in Intimate Relationships

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*This article reviews the research on traditional gender-role adherence and sexuality for heterosexual men and women. Specifically, the consequences and predictors of following traditional gender roles of female submissiveness and male dominance in sexual relationships is examined. Despite evidence that men and women's sexual roles are becoming more egalitarian over time, empirical evidence suggests that the traditional sexual roles continue to dominate heterosexual relations. This article explores whether the sexual context is one in which both men and women feel particularly compelled to engage in gender stereotypic behavior, and why. In addition, this article reports on research that finds that men and women have automatic associations between sexuality and power that reinforce their gender stereotypic behavior in sexual contexts. The negative effects of traditional gender-role adherence for women's sexual problems and satisfaction is demonstrated. This article concludes that traditional sexual scripts are harmful for both women's and men's ability to engage in authentic, rewarding sexual expression, although the female submissive role may be particularly debilitating. Future directions of research are suggested, including interventions to reduce women's adherence to the sexually submissive female script.*

I do not want to be the leader. I refuse to be the leader. I want to live darkly and richly in my femaleness. I want a man lying over me, always over me. His will, his pleasure, his desire, his life, his work, his sexuality the touchstone, the command, my pivot. (Nin, 1992, p. 57)

In this quote, Anais Nin eloquently describes the eroticization of male dominance and female submission that has primarily served as the traditional sexual script for men and women's sexual relationships in the United States. Traditional gender roles may influence sexual behavior at an early age during initial stages of sexual exploration. For example, there is evidence of male dominance and female submission in first-time sexual encounters (Bogle, 2008; Martin, 1996). Martin (1996) interviewed adolescent girls and boys in the United States and found that the majority of adolescent girls described their first-time sexual experiences as something that just "happened to them." Boys' accounts of their first-time sexual experiences did not echo this lack of agency. Instead, boys frequently discussed the myriad of strategies that they employed to obtain sex, describing themselves as the proactive agents in their sexual experiences. More recent studies, however, suggest that

women are engaging in higher levels of sexual initiation that challenge the traditional female submissive script (e.g., Kamen, 2003; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2011). Yet, most research on sexual behavior continues to show a power imbalance wherein American men initiate and lead sexual activities more so than women (Bowleg, Lucas, & Tschann, 2004; Clark, Shaver, & Abrahams, 1999; Laner & Ventrone, 1998; Morgan & Zurbriggen, 2007; Ortiz-Torres, Williams, & Ehrhardt, 2003; Rose & Frieze, 1993; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2011; Wiederman, 2005; Wingood & DiClemente, 2000).

The purpose of this article is to provide a review of the literature on traditional sexual roles of male dominance and female submission in heterosexual intimate relationships, with a special emphasis on the consequences of imbalanced power roles for sexual satisfaction and sexual problems. This review takes a social psychological perspective and primarily focuses on research conducted in the United States concerning traditional gender roles, power, and sexuality, highlighting recent findings in the sexual cognition literature. In this article, we explore whether and why the sexual context is one in which both men and women feel particularly compelled to engage in gender stereotypic behavior, as well as provide some recommendations for future avenues of research that can identify the psychosocial mechanisms responsible for the reproduction of traditional sexual scripts.

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### Sexual Script Theory

Sexual script theory provides a useful framework for understanding the sexual roles that men and women, and boys and girls, occupy in the sexual relationship (Gagnon, 1990; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Simon & Gagnon, 1986, 1987). Sexual script theory suggests that the majority of sexual behaviors in heterosexual relationships tend to follow a prescribed social script that reflects the cultural norm. In general, the dominant *cultural script* involves men performing a more agentic role than women, acting more as the initiators and directors of sexual activities who determine the pace of sexual interactions and what activities occur (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Byers, 1996; Lawrance, Taylor, & Byers, 1996; Lips, 1981; Rutter & Schwartz, 2000; Sprecher & McKinney, 1993). In contrast, heterosexual women are expected to take on the “complementary” submissive role during sexual activity, which entails submitting to their partner’s desires and waiting for their partner to initiate and direct (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Rutter & Schwartz, 2000; Tevlin & Leiblum, 1983). This cultural script provides the guide for men’s and women’s sexual behaviors with each other at the *interpersonal* level and the lens through which men and women may perceive and emotionally respond to sexual behaviors at the *intrapyschic* level (Gagnon, 1990; for a review, see also Wiederman, 2005). Therefore, the traditional cultural script informs various stages of the sexual encounter from expectations about a sexual encounter (e.g., LaPlante, McCormick, & Brannigan, 1980) and styles of attracting a sexual partner (e.g., Perper & Weis, 1987) to sexual initiations (for a review, see Impett & Peplau, 2003) and the negotiations of safe-sex behaviors (Amaro, 1995; Wingood & DiClemente, 1998). Moreover, the traditional sexual script may have stronger effects at different stages of relationships. For example, cultural scripts may be a more prominent script for interpersonal encounters during attraction and early stages of the relationship, whereas relationship contexts (e.g., knowledge about partner’s desires) may drive behavior at later stages of the relationship.

For the purposes of this review of gender roles and sexuality, we consider the traditional gender-role script to be the prominent cultural landscape for sexual behavior that sets the stage for early sexual encounters between men and women. Moreover, we highlight how the traditional sexual script typically affords men greater power and control during sexual interactions (e.g., to communicate their desires and initiate sexual activities) than women, as well as encourages men (more than women) to embrace and explore their sexuality (Wiederman, 2005).

### Prevailing Traditional Scripts

Women and girls in the United States commonly report passively engaging in sexual activity, including

unwanted sexual activity (Impett & Peplau, 2003; Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007b; O’Sullivan & Allgeier, 1994). We define unwanted sexual activity as willingly engaging in sexual activities of any sort (kissing to intercourse) that are contrary to one’s true desires. Gender differences in self-reports of submissive behavior are typically large (Cohen’s  $d > .90$ ; Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007b) even among couples (Cohen’s  $d = .90$ ; Sanchez, Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Good, in press). However, it is unclear whether these self-reports accurately reflect behavior or, instead, reflect perceptions that are sometimes inaccurate. For example, women may see themselves as taking on the traditional sexual script and self-describe their sexual role as submissive even when an objective account of their behavior would actually indicate at least some dominant behaviors. Indeed, some evidence suggests that even when women and men shift away from gendered sexual roles, they may still see themselves as enacting the traditional script (e.g., McCabe, Tanner, & Heiman, 2010). Nonetheless, the results of research using retrospective self-reports suggest that women see themselves as taking on the less powerful role in sexual relationships, whereas men see themselves as taking on the more powerful role.

Diary data has also shown gender differences in engagement in unwanted sexual activity. This method tracks daily reports of behavior and, thus, should be less susceptible to retrospective bias. In a diary study of adult heterosexual women and men involved in romantic relationships implemented across a two-week period, a striking 50% of women indicated having engaged in unwanted sexual behavior, compared to 26% of men (O’Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). Consistent with traditional sexual scripts, there is a greater prevalence of sexually compliant behavior among women (especially those in short-term relationships), suggesting, in part, that women may be more likely to comply to their partner’s wishes. Moreover, men and women may engage in unwanted sexual activity for different reasons (see Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988). For example, the majority of evidence suggests that American women engage in compliant sexual behavior to preserve their relationships (Impett & Peplau, 2003; Kaestle, 2009; Katz & Tirone, 2009; O’Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Sprecher, Hatfield, Cortese, Potapova, & Levitskaya, 1994). Men, on the other hand, report unwanted sexual activity that is related to gaining or keeping social status, potentially to prove their masculinity (Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988). Men in committed relationships are also more likely than women to report being the initiators of their own self-reported unwanted sexual activity, suggesting that even unwanted sexual behavior conforms to a male initiator script (Vannier & O’Sullivan, 2009).

Notably, prior work on sexual compliance has yet to carefully distinguish between unwanted sexual behavior that is contrary to one’s desires and engaging in sexual behavior before one has experienced sexual desire or

arousal. In fact, women may not always experience sexual desire before engaging in sexual activity but, instead, may be neutral about sexual activities until foreplay has begun (see Basson, 2000, 2001; Basson et al., 2004). In addition, women may desire sexual activities for closeness, not necessarily from initial sexual arousal or interest in sexual release *per se* (see Basson, 2000, 2001; Basson et al., 2004). Thus, future research examining gender differences in sexual compliance should carefully distinguish between delayed desire for sex and engaging in sex when it is contrary to sexual desires.

Women's sexually compliant behavior is perhaps surprising because some theories suggest that women are socialized to be the sexual gatekeepers or restrictors of sexual activities. Men are socialized to initiate and pursue sex, whereas women can be more selective and have a greater freedom to refuse sexual advances than men (Clark & Hatfield, 1989; Grauerholz & Serpe, 1985; Hatfield, 1982; McCormick, 1979; McCormick, Brannigan, & LaPlante, 1984; Peplau, 1983). Research has called the female-restrictor role into question, suggesting that, although men initiate sex more than women, women do not restrict sexual activity more so than men (O'Sullivan & Byers, 1992). Interviews with college-age men and women in the United States suggested that men still believe that women have greater control over whether sex will occur (Bogle, 2008), yet women's descriptions of their sexual experiences suggest that they often experience difficulty refusing unwanted sexual advances and activities (Kaestle, 2009; Katz & Tirone, 2009; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Sprecher et al., 1994). Women also experience difficulty when negotiating for safe-sex behavior with partners (see Impett & Peplau, 2003; Miller, Bettencourt, DeBro & Hoffman, 1993). In one study of young American women age 14 to 24 ( $N=904$ ), nearly 20% of the women indicated that they *never* believed that they had the right to make decisions about their contraception (Rickert, Sanghvi, & Wiemann, 2002). Some have made the argument that men perceive women as the sexual gatekeepers simply because men approach women more often for sex (Conley, Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, & Valentine, 2011).

The prevailing theme in the literature appears to be that women perceive themselves as having less power in the sexual relationship. The traditional sexual script of male dominance may simultaneously increase men's sexual risk by encouraging them to engage in sex with multiple female partners to prove masculinity, ultimately creating a sexual situation that may create sexual pressure (e.g., pressure to obtain sex or pressure to acquiesce to sexual advances) that disserves both men and women (e.g., Santana, Raj, Decker, La Marche, & Silverman, 2006). This is not to say that men and women never step out of the cultural script of female submissiveness and male dominance.

While traditional sexual roles tend to provide the backdrop for heterosexual intimate relationships (especially in early sexual encounters), there is some evidence that sexual behavior is becoming more egalitarian over time. Across the past two decades, researchers have documented increases in women's sexually dominant behavior. For example, women initiate sex more frequently, especially in long-term romantic relationships, than in the past (Kamen, 2003; O'Sullivan & Byers, 1992; Segal, 1995, 1997; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2011). Some research suggests that researchers may underestimate women's levels of initiation because women have different styles of initiation and express their sexual and romantic interest in less direct ways than men (e.g., through nonverbal behavior; Clark et al., 1999; Perper & Weis, 1987). For example, Vannier and O'Sullivan (2011) examined direct, indirect, verbal, and nonverbal initiations among men and women involved in committed relationships. They found that women were more likely than men to engage in direct nonverbal strategies (e.g., actions intended to initiate sexual activity, such as removing clothing), whereas men were more likely than women to engage in indirect nonverbal strategies (ambiguous actions, such as smiling at one's partner or being physically affectionate). Yet, findings also revealed that men more frequently initiated sexual activity (collapsing across strategies of initiation) compared to women. These findings suggest that, although the male-initiator script is still employed, women are comfortable initiating sex in committed relationships.

Regardless of specific behavioral styles of initiation, women may see themselves as more sexually assertive over time. In a one-year longitudinal study of women's sexual behavior, women in both an intervention aimed at increasing assertiveness, as well as the control condition, showed evidence of increasing their sexual assertiveness and moving away from male-dominated sexual interactions over the year (Dworkin, Beckford, & Ehrhardt, 2007). Moreover, men report desires that are increasingly consistent with more egalitarian sexual roles wherein they indicate wanting women to share in the initiation of sexual activities and have an equal part in sexual decision-making (Dworkin & O'Sullivan, 2005). Some men and women even reverse the traditional scripts. For example, some women pressure their partners into sex (e.g., O'Sullivan & Byers, 1993), and some men report engaging in unwanted sexual intercourse at high levels (Muehlenhard & Cook, 1988; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2009), although such role reversals more often occur in long-term relationships. For example, men report relatively high levels of sexual compliance in long-term relationships, where both men and women are motivated to be sexually compliant for reciprocity reasons and relationship maintenance (Basile, 1999; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2009).

Despite movement toward more egalitarian scripts and role reversals, most men and women in heterosexual relationships continue to rely on the traditional sexual script (Bowleg et al., 2004; Byers & Heinlein, 1989; Clark et al., 1999; Dworkin & O'Sullivan, 2005; Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007b; Laner & Ventrone, 1998; Morgan & Zurbriggen, 2007; Ortiz-Torres et al., 2003; Rose & Frieze, 1993; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2011; Wiederman, 2005; Wingood & DiClemente, 2000). Given the glamorization of traditional gender roles and scripts in popular culture and their normalization via gendered sexual socialization (e.g., Baker, 2005; Kim et al., 2007; Wiederman, 2005), the continued prevalence of the traditional script is not surprising.

Sexuality is not the only domain in which people feel pressured to conform to gendered scripts. In general, women are less likely to express characteristics associated with agency, such as dominance, assertiveness, aggression, and self-promotion (e.g., Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001; Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010), and more likely to show characteristics associated with passivity, such as obedience, compliance, and nurturance, compared to men (e.g., Carli, 1989, 1990; Feingold, 1994). Again, this does not mean that women never express agency or aggression. Moreover, women's perceived agency and self-assertiveness has increased over time (Twenge, 2001). As with traditional sexual scripts, however, men and women alike continue to believe it is more desirable when men possess dominance traits associated with masculinity and women possess more passive traits associated with femininity (Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012). When people deviate from gender-role scripts, they are often met with disapproval, which, in turn, makes them more likely to hide their gender deviance and conform to gender norms in the future (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; for a review, see Rudman & Phelan, 2008). This leads to a vicious cycle wherein people are punished for nonconformity, which pressures them to adhere to gender stereotypes, which then reinforces the stereotypes. In other words, men and women toe the gender line to avoid disapproval, which then upholds traditional stereotypes.

As reviewed later, evidence suggests that adherence to gendered scripts may be especially likely when gender stereotypes are salient or the interpersonal costs are particularly high, such as in the case of romantic or intimate sexual encounters. When romantic relationships are at stake, men and women alike may fear that failure to conform may result in an especially painful form of rejection. Thus, fears about relationship loss and loneliness may work to keep men and women acting in line with their gender stereotypes even when these fears may not, in reality, be warranted (e.g., men might respond favorably to women's sexual initiation or women might respond favorably to a man who waited for her to make the first move).

### **Does Romance Lead to Traditional Gender-Role Conformity?**

Both men and women present themselves as having more traditional gender-role beliefs in order to conform to the preferences of a desirable interaction partner of the opposite sex (Morier & Seroy, 1994; Zanna & Pack, 1975). In Zanna and Pack's (1975) classic study on self-fulfilling prophecies, they showed that women became more gender stereotypical when they learned that a male interaction partner had traditional gender-role beliefs, but only when the man was attractive (rather than unattractive). In a replication and extension, Morier and Seroy (1994) found the same pattern for men expecting to interact with traditional, desirable female partners. These studies demonstrate that when the stakes involve romance, men and women alike are more inclined to conform to traditional gender norms when they believe doing so will make them more desirable to a prospective partner. However, as with Zanna and Pack's (1975) findings, Morier and Seroy's results depended on whether the prospective partner preferred gender conformity. Similar work shows that people tend to conform to gender stereotypes as a method of creating a shared reality that increases affiliation with others (Sinclair, Hardin, & Lowery, 2006; Sinclair, Huntsinger, Skorinko, & Hardin, 2005; Sinclair & Lun, 2006). For example, when women learned that their interaction partner had stereotypic views of women and they had strong affiliation motives (e.g., when they learned that their interaction partner had the same birthday and similar interests), they conformed their self-views and behaviors to traditional gender roles (Sinclair et al., 2005).

More recent work found that women who perceived a conflict between being romantically desirable and showing intelligence in masculine domains subsequently underperformed on a math test (Park, Troisi, Young, & Eastwick, 2011). Moreover, when romantic goals were prominent, women tended to show less interest in engaging in intellectual tasks in masculine domains such as science, engineering, and math (Park, Young, Troisi, & Pinkus, 2011). These findings echo those of Zanna and Pack (1975), who found that women performed more poorly on an intelligence test when they believed that an attractive, as opposed to an unattractive, man would see their responses. The underlying belief system—that intelligent, ambitious women are not sexually desirable—points to a conflict between needs for love and respect that plausibly inhibits women's progress. Consistent with this view, women who automatically associated their romantic partners with chivalry and heroes (e.g., Prince Charming, White Knight, or protector) were less interested in pursuing higher education and high-status occupations, compared with women who did not possess implicit romantic fantasies (Rudman & Heppen, 2003). Thus, it appears that for

women, romantic scripts depicting men as their protectors and providers may hobble their ability to seek economic power for themselves. As a corollary, men more so than women believe that when women pursue financial independence it can cause relationship problems including conflict in the bedroom (Rudman & Fairchild, 2007).

### Does Sex Prime Traditional Gender-Role Conformity?

Based on our literature review, it is clear that romance motivates gender-role conformity, but why? Based on laboratory research on gender roles and sexuality (e.g., Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007a, 2007b; Kiefer, Sanchez, Kalinka, & Ybarra, 2006; Rudman & Borgida, 1995; Sanchez, Kiefer, & Ybarra, 2006), we propose that thinking about sex primes gender conformity (i.e., thinking about the self in gendered terms) at least as much, if not more so, than romance. For example, Rudman and Borgida (1995) exposed men to television ads that either depicted women as sexualized, or no women were shown. They found that men primed with sex were more likely to behave toward a female job applicant in a dominant, sexualized manner, compared with unprimed men. Because these effects were not moderated by men's proclivities for sexual dominance, the manipulation appeared to have a generalized effect on their behavior, one interpretation of which is that men conformed to an aggressive masculine role when primed with sex.

Hundhammer's (2007) research in Germany suggests that making sex salient (via exposure to sexual-related words or sexual images) causes both men and women to more strongly identify with their gender and display more gender stereotypic behaviors. In other words, sexual cognition may prime gender and self-stereotyping. For example, she found that women primed with sex demonstrated more passive behavior than unprimed women. Specifically, they waited an average of six minutes before interrupting an experimenter who was talking on the phone, whereas women who were not primed with sex waited only four minutes. In another study, Hundhammer (2007) compared men and women's signature sizes following sex primes. As an indirect measure of self-confidence and status (Zweigenhaft & Marlowe, 1973), signature sizes were used in this research to subtly assess dominance/submissiveness. Hundhammer found that sex priming caused men's signatures to increase and women's signatures to decrease in size, relative to baseline. Taken together, her work suggests that sexual contexts may be one in which men and women feel particularly inclined to fulfill gendered scripts of male dominance and female submissiveness. While Hundhammer's work persuasively demonstrates the link between sex and gendered behaviors, the question of why this link exists remains. In the Discussion section, we further

explore the possible mechanisms that account for sex-gender links, including the possibility that sex engages the activation of goals to appear desirable and attractive to the opposite sex through traditional gender scripts.

### Consequences of Female Submission and Male Dominance

What has been eroticized by male dominant systems of all kinds is dominance and passivity. We need to eroticize equality. I always say to audiences of men: "Cooperation beats submission. Trust me." (Gloria Steinem, 2011)

Does it matter if sex primes gender-role conformity? In response to Steinem's suggestion that we ought to eroticize equality, perhaps we should first examine the consequences of eroticizing *inequality*—that is, the stereotypic scripts of female submission and male dominance. Gender roles, in general, restrict men and women to half the human experience. To some extent, rigid adherence to any script may be psychologically burdensome depending on how far the standard (i.e., the script) contradicts personal desires. In the case of the traditional script in the United States, evidence suggests that the submissive role thwarts women's freedom to express themselves sexually (Sanchez, Crocker, & Boike, 2005). Perhaps more surprisingly, endorsement of gender norms can hamper sexual experiences also for men because, just as for women, "performing" gender in the bedroom robs them of the spontaneity needed for sexual satisfaction (Sanchez et al., 2005). Nonetheless, adherence to the submissive role may be particularly damaging for women as the role itself dictates relinquishing control and agency. In fact, many women internalize their role to the point where they show automatic links between sex and submission (Kiefer et al., 2006; Sanchez et al., 2006). In a lexical decision task where women were asked to sort words from nonwords, women responded faster to submissive-related words (e.g., *comply*, *submit*, and *slave*) following sex primes (e.g., *sex*, *naked*, and *bed*) relative to neutral primes (e.g., *clock* and *gate*). Moreover, the extent to which women showed facilitation to submissive words following sex primes predicted greater sexual problems, including difficulties becoming aroused and achieving orgasm during sexual activities (Kiefer et al., 2006). Not surprisingly, women who show automatic links between sex and submission also report engaging in submissive sexual behavior—that is, they perceive themselves as the more submissive sexual partner (Kiefer et al., 2006; Sanchez et al., 2006). Moreover, women's submissive sexual behavior predicts lower sexual autonomy and, ultimately, sexual dissatisfaction that, in turn, predicts lowered satisfaction among their sexual partners (Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007b;

Sanchez et al., 2006; Sanchez et al., in press). The negative effects of women's submissive behavior for both themselves and their partners have been found even when controlling for both partners' level of sexual arousability, sexual desire/interest, and relationship satisfaction (Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007b; Sanchez et al., in press). These findings suggest that, although some submissive behavior is likely related to lack of desire (Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007b; Sanchez et al., in press), the negative effects of women's submissive behavior are not entirely driven by low sexual desire or low interest in their partner.

Sexual autonomy refers to the extent to which an individual perceives that they are in control and can exercise choice in their sexual encounter. Sexual autonomy has long been proposed as a key predictor of sexual satisfaction and sex-related communication (Sprecher & Regan, 2000; Tevlin & Leiblum, 1983; Weinberg, Swenson, & Hammersmith, 1983). In general, perceived control and self-efficacy in sexual situations (crucial components of autonomy) are necessary for sexual assertiveness, sexual functioning, and safe-sex behavior. For example, greater self-efficacy predicts higher sexual assertiveness (Morokoff et al., 1997), whereas lower self-efficacy impedes sexual performance (Bach, Brown, & Barlow, 1999). Further, perceived control over the sexual relationship and sexual self-efficacy predict more intentions to use, and actual use of, condoms during sexual encounters for men and women (Baele, Dusseldorp, & Maes, 2001; Wingood & Diclemente, 1998).

Although both men and women benefit from having sexual autonomy (Smith, 2007), the prescribed feminine role of submissiveness impairs sexual agency by socializing women and girls to take a less proactive approach to their own sexuality in early adolescence and a more responsive rather than initiative role in sexual encounters (e.g., Wiederman, 2005). Indeed, many women who engage in submissive behavior feel a lack of sexual autonomy that then predicts greater sexual problems and lower sexual satisfaction (Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007b). Therefore, it is possible that women's prescribed submissive role may account for their lower levels of sexual satisfaction and higher frequencies of sexual problems and sexual inhibition, relative to men (Armstrong, England, & Fogarty, 2009; Laumann, Paik, & Rosen, 1999; Milhausen, Graham, Sanders, Yarber, & Maitland, 2010; Pedersen & Blekesaune, 2003; Petersen & Hyde, 2010; Sanchez et al., in press; Simons & Carey, 2001; Waite & Joyner, 2001). While both genders, on average, report relatively high levels of sexual satisfaction and low levels of sexual problems and inhibition, women typically report greater sexual inhibition (Cohen's  $d = .84$ ; Carpenter, Janssen, Graham, Vorst, & Wicherts, 2008), less ease of sexual arousal (Cohen's  $d = .60$ ; Milhausen et al., 2010), and lower sexual satisfaction (Cohen's  $d = .20$ ; Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007b; Sanchez et al., in press), compared to men.

Gender differences in sexual satisfaction are typically small but reliable (Cohen's  $d = .17$ ; for a recent meta-analytic review, see Petersen & Hyde, 2010), and may vary depending on how the question is worded (Hyde, 2005; Pedersen & Blekesaune, 2003). Moreover, gender disparities in sexual functioning (e.g., arousal disorders and orgasm frequency) may reverse with age (Rosen, 2000) and are diminished when gender comparisons are made within couples (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2009; MacNeil & Byers, 2005, 2009; for a review, see Conley, Moors, et al., 2011). Notably, the contexts in which women are more likely to adopt traditional sexual scripts (e.g., during early sexual encounters in the life course or short-term relationships) coincide with the contexts in which women are most likely to experience disturbances to sexual satisfaction, arousal, and orgasm—providing support for the likelihood that gender disparities in sexuality during young adulthood are mediated by traditional sexual script adherence.

While men's prescribed dominant role affords them more agency, following restrictive gender roles may also sexually inhibit men. For example, research suggests that men (and women) who highly invest in gender norms experience impaired sexual autonomy because they are preoccupied with upholding traditional ideals to gain their partner's approval to the detriment of their own sexual satisfaction (Sanchez et al., 2005). In addition, men who are highly invested in gender norms are particularly likely to automatically associate sex with dominance (Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007a). Automatic sex–dominance associations may be problematic if dominance translates into coercive sexual behavior. In Mussweiler and Forster's (2000) research, they found that priming men with sex led to more aggressive behavior, whereas priming women with sex led to their perceiving men as more aggressive. Thus, both genders associate sex with male dominance. In our laboratory research, we find that men who believe sexual assertiveness is necessary (e.g., to convince their partners to have sex with them) are more likely to show facilitation for dominance after sex priming (Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007a). Taken together, the evidence suggests that adherence to the gendered scripts of male dominance and female submissiveness has negative consequences for sexual functioning and close relationships.

Beyond sexual consequences, the dominant sexual script for men is problematic for society because it plays a role in socializing men into a culture of violence (Byers, 1996). Violence and masculinity are so closely linked that men use displays of physical aggression as a means of demonstrating their manhood. Research on the theory of precarious manhood posits that manhood is an elusive and tenuous state that must be initially earned and continuously proven through men's actions (Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008). In a series of studies, Vandello et al.

found that men who experience a threat to their status as men (e.g., by being made to publicly complete a feminine task) are more likely to behave aggressively than men who do not experience a masculinity threat (Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford, Weaver, & Wasti, 2009; Vandello et al., 2008). In addition, masculinity threats prime aggressive thoughts in men and increase their support for intimate partner violence (Vandello et al., 2008). Specifically, men who experienced a threat to their masculinity were more likely than non-threatened men to endorse physical violence involving a husband slapping his wife. Thus, men may be especially prone to use aggression, and possibly violence against a partner, when they are pressured to prove their status as men.

Endorsing traditional sexual scripts and gender roles exacerbates the link between masculinity and aggression within heterosexual relationships. In a meta-analysis of sexual aggression and masculine ideology, Murnen, Wright, and Kaluzny (2002) found that men who strongly associated sex with dominance and power (e.g., who endorsed items such as “I enjoy the conquest”) also reported a history of sexually coercive behaviors and a greater willingness to rape. Further research shows that men who endorse traditional male gender roles are more accepting of rape supportive beliefs (e.g., “Being roughed up is sexually exciting for women”; Truman, Tokar, & Fischer, 1996) and more likely to blame the victims of rape, compared to men who do not adhere as strictly to traditional roles (Simonson & Subich, 1999). Furthermore, men who strongly endorse traditional male gender roles are more accepting of intimate partner violence and report a greater frequency of both psychological and physical abuse in their relationships (Fitzpatrick, Salgado, Suvak, King, & King, 2004). Thus, men’s sex-dominance beliefs and gender-role conformity may perpetuate sexual aggression against women and thus, further promote women’s lack of sexual agency.

### Why Do People Conform to Gendered Scripts?

When gender-role scripts are so restrictive that they negatively impact our sexual relationships, why are people seduced into following them? Being inundated with media messages pairing men with dominance and women with passivity may be one culprit in the automatic sex–power associations both genders develop (Mussweiler & Forster, 2000). Magazines, television shows, and movies commonly depict female submission and male sexual dominance over women (Dworkin, 1987; Jeffreys, 1990; Kitzinger, 1984; MacKinnon, 1987). Media analysts also recognize the frequent association of female submission and sex (Jhally, 1995; Kilbourne, 2000a, 2000b). Even the *APA Monitor* (a prominent magazine in psychology published by the

American Psychology Association) used imagery that evoked the submissive female and dominant male stereotypes when they published an issue on the scientific study of sexual arousal (see Figure 1; *APA Monitor*, 2003, Volume 34, No. 4). Mainstream magazines targeted to adolescent girls promote sexual submissiveness and passivity as a way to appear desirable to boys and get their attention (Baker, 2005; Kilbourne 2000a, 2000b). Moreover, the narratives of teen magazines tend to focus on how to please and attract boys, rather than conveying girls as sexual agents that communicate and satisfy their own sexual interests and desires (Garner, Sterk, & Adams, 1998). As noted, women tend to spontaneously associate sex with submission, likely because sexual stereotypes are pervasive and eroticized to such a degree that they become internalized (Kiefer et al., 2006). Nonetheless, it is hard to fathom why people would follow scripts in sexual relationships that impede their sexual satisfaction.

One decade of literature on backlash effects offers what is likely an important part of the reason (Rudman & Glick, 2008). Backlash is defined as penalties for counterstereotypical behavior (Phelan & Rudman, 2010; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). During childhood, boys and girls receive a great deal of pressure from parents, peers, and other role models to adhere to gender norms (e.g., Egan & Perry, 2001). As adults, men and



**Figure 1.** April 2003 American Psychological Association *Monitor on Psychology* cover (color figure available online).

women often continue to conform to gender norms to avoid the disapproval they may encounter if they do not follow these scripts. In the workplace, women who are agentic or self-promoting are seen as unlikeable and, therefore, less hireable (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001; Rudman et al., 2012). Men who fail to be assertive by being modest are also disliked relative to modest women (Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Rudman, 2010). When given the opportunity, people undermine men and women who are gender deviant. Rudman and Fairchild (2004) showed that perceivers who lost a competition to a gender deviant confederate subsequently sabotaged the deviant's ability to succeed in an upcoming task. Thus, men and women alike suffer penalties for gender deviance. Moreover, people are aware of the penalties and are motivated to avoid them (e.g., Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). Women and men who were led to believe they performed well on a gender-role inconsistent task feared being made fun of or ridiculed (i.e., backlash) and, as a result, chose to hide their gender deviance. They also hyper-conformed to gender norms. As a result of fear of backlash, men and women alike avoid violating gender roles and instead, strive for gender-role conformity, and, thus, perpetuate the cycle of gender stereotyping.

In the sexual arena, women may fear backlash for sexual agency because they worry about seeming too sexually eager or too sexually experienced (Tolman, 1994). The sexual double standard causes women who express sexual interest or desire to be stigmatized as "sluts," whereas men's sexual dominance and expressions of sexual desire are applauded as evidence of manhood (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1996; Jackson & Cram, 2003; Lees, 1993). According to a Canadian study of sexual attitudes, even when women themselves do not support the sexual double standard, they still believe that society frowns on women if, for example, they have a high number of sexual partners (Milhausen & Herold, 1999). Similar effects have been found for American women indicating that they fear negative evaluations if they accept casual sex offers (Conley, Ziegler, & Moors, 2011; for a review, see Conley, Moors, et al., 2011). Thus, although some studies do not find more negative attitudes toward sexually experienced women compared to male counterparts (e.g., Marks & Fraley, 2005), people still hold the belief that such double standards exist (e.g., Tiegs, Perrin, Kaly, & Heesacker, 2007) and are influenced by them when evaluating both their own and others' behavior (e.g., Marks & Fraley, 2006).

As a result of the sexual double standard, men and women may be motivated to misrepresent their sexual experiences to be consistent with gender roles. Alexander and Fisher (2003) examined this possibility by testing whether college-aged women would report fewer sexual encounters than college-aged men when their responses might be revealed to others, as com-

pared to a condition known to yield more accurate responses. Participants were asked to complete sexuality measures in one of three testing conditions: (a) bogus pipeline (they were attached to a fake lie detector and informed the experimenters could physiologically monitor for honesty), (b) anonymity (ensured that answers were anonymous and left completely alone during survey completion), or (c) possible exposure (they were told that their responses might be viewed by a peer and they were observed by the experimenter during the survey completion). Alexander and Fisher (2003) found that men reported a greater number of past sexual partners compared to women when they were in the exposure condition, whereas this pattern was reduced in the anonymity condition and *reversed* in the bogus pipeline condition. In the bogus pipeline condition, women reported more sexual partners than men. Moreover, women in the possible exposure condition were less likely to report masturbation and exposure to erotic pornography than women in the anonymous and bogus pipeline conditions. Overall, these results support the hypothesis that people fear backlash for their sexual behavior and thus, misreport more gendered sexual behavior when their responses could be revealed to others.

In addition to interpersonal pressures, people may follow gendered norms for intrapsychic reasons. Specifically, adherence to traditional sexual scripts may depend on how much a person invests in gender ideals and norms. Men and women who invest in traditional gender ideals tend to endorse female submission and male dominance in sexual relationships (Sanchez, 2005). As a result, men who invest in gender ideals tend to report greater sex-dominance links and perceive sexual dominance as a necessary part of sex (Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007a). Women who invest in gender ideals tend to report greater sexual compliance in their romantic relationships, which, over time, leads to lower relationship satisfaction (Katz & Tirone, 2009). Further, people who believe that sexual scripts are prescriptive (i.e., should be followed) also show greater conformity to sexual stereotypes of female submission and male dominance (Kiefer & Sanchez, 2007b).

There are also personal factors that inhibit gender-role conformity in the bedroom. For example, women who hold more egalitarian beliefs or feminist attitudes report less endorsement of traditional sexual scripts, greater sexual arousability, more sexual self-efficacy, and greater sexual satisfaction (Bay-Cheng & Zucker, 2007; Schick, Zucker, & Bay-Cheng, 2008; Yoder, Perry, & Saal, 2007). Having a partner who is feminist may also lead to a loosening of gender-role expectations in one's relationships that improves sexual satisfaction for women and men (Rudman & Phelan, 2007). Moreover, parental influences may play an important role in determining sexual behavior and



beliefs. For example, a recent study suggests that daughters who have a supportive relationship with their fathers show greater sexual assertiveness and less acceptance of male dominance (Katz & van der Kloet, 2010). Taken together, these results suggest that those who endorse traditional sexual roles or gender roles in general tend to follow these scripts to the detriment of their sexual relationships. In contrast, possessing feminist and egalitarian attitudes promotes sexual assertiveness for women, which relates to more positive sexual outcomes for women.

### What Factors Moderate the Consequences of Sexual Scripts?

Is gender-role adherence in sexual interactions always associated with negative experiences? Some people may have a preference for gender-role consistent behavior that stems from their own desire, rather than societal values. For example, people who are invested in gender norms self-regulate their behavior to conform to such norms, and they show positive affect when their behaviors match gender ideals (Wood, Christensen, Hebl, & Rothgerber, 1997). Engaging in behavior that matches personal standards and preferences is known to predict positive outcomes across a wide variety of domains. For example, self-regulation theorists have demonstrated that when behavior matches personal standards, positive affect and higher self-esteem follow (Carver & Scheier, 2000). Thus, engagement in sexually submissive behavior may not be problematic for sexual encounters when sexually submissive behavior is consistent with personal desires, as may be the case for some women and men.

Evidence suggests that sexual fantasies may involve the eroticization of male dominance and female submission. For example, women commonly report sexual fantasies and desires that include female submission and male dominance (Strassberg & Lockerd, 1998; Zurbriggen & Yost, 2004). In fact, women report preferences for male dominance in sexual fantasies more so than men report a preference for male dominance (Hawley & Hensley, 2009; Yost & Zurbriggen, 2006). Conversely, men report a preference for female dominance in fantasies more so than women report a preference for female dominance (Hawley & Hensley, 2009). Certainly, not all fantasies reflect true sexual desires. For example, women reporting rape fantasies are very clear that they have no desire to be raped (Kanin, 1982; Leitenberg & Henning, 1995). Given that female submission and male dominance are part of some men's and women's sexual fantasies, it seems reasonable to assume that some people may prefer enacting traditional sexual scripts. Moreover, some evidence suggests that having submissive fantasies (e.g., deriving pleasure from sexual submissiveness) may be particularly likely among

those individuals who are highly agentic and dominant in other domains of life; as a result, submissive fantasies have been recast as an act of sexual power, rather than low sexual agency (Hawley & Hensley, 2009).

In a recent study (Sanchez et al., in press), desire for submissive behavior was found to moderate the link between women's sexually submissive behavior and sexual dissatisfaction in couples. Data were analyzed for 181 heterosexual, unmarried couples in the United States (ages 18–24), who independently reported their likelihood to engage in submissive behavior, desire for their partner to be dominant, overall sexual desire, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction. Desire for partner dominance was measured with the following items: "I find it arousing when my partner is the aggressive one in bed," "I think it is sexiest when my partner takes control in bed," and "I think it is very exciting when my partner leads our sexual experiences." Results indicated that desire for sexually submissive behavior mitigated the negative effects of women's submissive behavior on both their own level of sexual satisfaction and that of their partners (controlling for sexual desire). These results suggest that women's submissive behavior predicted lower sexual satisfaction in couples (both members of the relationship) only when the behavior was not a reflection of their personal preferences. Notably, engagement in submissive behavior when it was consistent with personal desires did *not* predict high levels of sexual satisfaction. Instead, the behavior and motivation that conferred the greatest benefits to the couple was when the woman in the relationship engaged in very little submissive behavior and had low preference for submissive behavior. In other words, women and men experienced the most sexual satisfaction when women reported engaging in dominant behavior and did not eroticize taking on a submissive role (Sanchez et al., in press). Moreover, results also suggested that one of the strongest negative predictors of women's submissive behavior was their partner's desire for them to be dominant, suggesting that partner's sexual desires may be an important key in moving away from traditional scripts. For men, the strongest predictor of their own submissive behavior was their own level of sexual desire.

This is not to suggest that adherence to gendered scripts typically results in positive outcomes. In general, whenever behavior is motivated by outside pressures, people experience less enjoyment and energy during the activity, and experience lower subsequent motivation to engage in that behavior in the future (e.g., Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; Muraven, 2008; Muraven, Gagne, & Rosman, 2008; Ryan, Mims, & Koestner, 1983). Research reveals that extrinsically driven gender-role behavior and sexual behavior both serve to undermine autonomy (Cooper, Shapiro, & Powers, 1998; Good & Sanchez, 2010). When men and women report engaging in gender-role consistent behavior

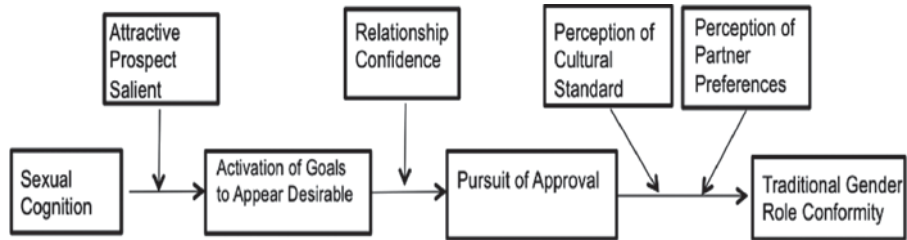


Figure 2. Sexual cognition model of gender-role conformity.

because they feel that they should, they experience lower self-esteem (Good & Sanchez, 2010; Sanchez & Crocker, 2005). Similarly, people who report engaging in sexual behavior to meet other's approval experience lower sexual satisfaction, greater sexual inhibition, and more sexual risk taking, whereas those who engage in sexual behavior for more intrinsic reasons (e.g., for pleasure) report greater sexual satisfaction and less sexual risk-taking behavior (e.g., Cooper et al., 1998; Impett & Peplau, 2003; Impett, Peplau, & Gable, 2005; Sanchez, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Crocker, 2010). Thus, the reason underlying the sexual behavior may play an important role in determining the outcomes associated with that behavior.

#### Future Directions of Gender-Role and Sexuality Research

While the research to date conducted on gender roles and sexuality has revealed how the power dynamics embedded in gender roles have negative consequences for sexual relationships, most of the evidence has come from American college students, which severely limits the generality of the findings. Further, much of the data stem from self-reports, which can be problematic when investigating sensitive topics such as sex (Tanur, 1991). Beyond these limitations, the program of inquiry to date has been somewhat narrow in scope. There is still much more to discover about sexual scripts and their consequences for men and women. In this section, we discuss two areas of research that represent important next steps in the arena of gender roles and sexuality. First, the literature has yet to identify the psychosocial mechanisms that account for the automatic links between sexual cognition and traditional scripts. We propose the sexual cognition model of gender-role conformity to identify possible mechanisms and conditions under which sexual cognition evokes traditional script adherence. Second, we point to the need for interventions, and propose a twofold intervention that focuses on shifting perceptions of cultural standards and partner preference—two key components in the sexual cognition model of gender-role conformity, described below.

#### The Sexual Cognition Model of Gender-Role Conformity

As alluded to earlier, prior work demonstrates that sexual cognition (thoughts about sex) automatically prime gender and gender-role conformity (e.g., Hundhammer, 2007), yet it is unclear from prior research what psychosocial processes may account for these effects. In Figure 2, we propose the sexual cognition model of gender-role conformity as a preliminary model to provide inspiration for future research. The model is designed to identify the contextual factors and moderators at play that may account for the known links between automatic sexual cognition and traditional gender-role conformity.

In the first path of the model, we propose that sexual cognition activates goals to appear desirable and attractive, especially when a romantic prospect is salient (e.g., physically present or cognitively salient). A romantic prospect refers to both potential or current relationship partners. Long-term and potential partners alike may refuse sexual advances; thus, we propose that sexual thoughts about a partner who may or may not accept a sexual offer should similarly activate goals to appear desirable. Sexual thoughts should be more strongly activated in the presence of an attractive (vs. unattractive) sexual stimulus because a desirable stimulus provides an opportunity to act on desires and, thus, provides a more palpable sexual goal.

Supporting the second path, prior research suggests that when men and women have goals to appear desirable to someone of the other sex, they present themselves in ways that will garner approval (Morier & Seroy, 1994; Zanna & Pack, 1975). The pursuit of approval includes presenting the self as having desirable personality traits and adjusting one's physical appearance to garner approval (von Baeyer, Sherk, & Zanna, 1981; Zanna & Pack, 1975). When in a sexual context with a desirable potential partner, people may deliberately or automatically act on the goal to appear attractive and desirable. Appearance concerns are a prominent strategy to appeal to the other sex. For example, women and men who base their self-worth on their romantic relationships are especially concerned about their physical appearance (Sanchez, Good, Kwang, & Saltzman, 2008; Sanchez & Kwang, 2007),

suggesting that physical appearance is perceived to be a key component of attracting romantic prospects. Moreover, single women primed with relationship words (e.g., *romance*, *date*, and *marriage*) reported higher levels of body concerns than unprimed women (Sanchez & Broccoli, 2008), suggesting that thoughts about romantic relationship automatically evoke appearance concerns when women are motivated to attract a partner. Thus, having a prospective desirable partner present may increase the likelihood that sexual cognition primes concerns about one's desirability.

However, the model posits that the link between motives to appear attractive and approval strategies should be moderated by confidence in the relationship. For example, women who are in long-term relationships tend to show relatively high levels of sexual initiation (e.g., Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2011). In contrast, Impett and Peplau (2002) found that women who were anxiously attached tended to engage in submissive behavior (e.g., agreeing to have unwanted sex) because they were concerned about losing their relationship. Therefore, people may feel freer to deviate from traditional gender-role scripts when they are confident that they have their partner's love and approval (i.e., they are high in relationship confidence). Conversely, insecurity in relationships should breed greater approval-seeking.

The final link in the model proposes that pursuit of approval leads to conforming to traditional sex roles, provided (a) the individual perceives that male dominance and female submission are culturally prescribed, and (b) the individual perceives that the desirable partner (whether long term or short term) possesses conventional beliefs. The assumptions and beliefs that people hold regarding desirable others' preferences are an important standard people will use to adjust their behavior (e.g., Sinclair et al., 2005; Zanna & Pack, 1975). For example, if it is known that a romantic prospect or partner prefers unconventional sex partners, then people will likely show less traditional sex-role behavior to gain his or her approval (e.g., Morier & Seroy, 1994). However, in the absence of such information about potential sexual partners, people's beliefs about the cultural standard would likely guide their behavior. Given people's tendencies to show gendered behaviors when primed with sex (e.g., Hundhammer, 2007) and to possess automatic associations between sex and gender roles (e.g., Sanchez et al., 2006), sexual behaviors are likely to be traditional unless the partner intervenes. In summary, we provide a preliminary sexual cognition model of gender-role conformity to generate future research. Because the model is not fully tested, it is necessarily speculative. Nonetheless, it presents a starting point for describing the processes by which sexual cognition can lead to traditional gender-role behaviors in the bedroom.

### **Interventions Aimed at Decreasing Traditional Sexual Script Adherence**

To our knowledge, few, if any, strategies have been proposed as interventions designed to decrease gendered sexual behavior. We propose a twofold intervention to combat women's lack of sexual agency that stems from the last two moderators in the model (i.e., cultural standards and partner preferences; see Figure 2). To shift perceptions of cultural standards, which include sexual stereotypes, we propose a counterstereotype induction because such inductions have successfully reduced implicit stereotypes in other domains. For example, imagining a strong woman can reduce women's implicit beliefs that men are stronger than women (Blair, Ma, & Lenton, 2001; see also Coats & Smith, 1999; Hugenberg, Blusiewicz, & Sacco, 2010). In addition, frequent exposure to women in leadership positions can reduce women's implicit stereotyping of the leadership domain (Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004). Exposure to counterstereotypical but well-liked exemplars has also been shown to reduce automatic racial biases (Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001; Rudman, Ashmore, & Gary, 2001). Therefore, exposing women to admired, sexually agentic women may diminish their tendency to believe that submissiveness is the preferred cultural standard for their own behavior.

As reviewed in this article, women who automatically associate sex with submission also tend to adopt submissive roles in the bedroom (Sanchez et al., 2006). Thus, if exposure to agentic and powerful women undermines women's implicit links between sex and submission, counterstereotypical exemplars may have positive effects on their sexual behavior. Generally speaking, counterstereotype induction works by reducing the tendency for social category activation (e.g., woman) to elicit gender-role consistent semantic knowledge (e.g., submissive). Such interventions can entail the use of mental imagery or exposure to well-liked exemplars but, in either case, interventions need to be carefully tied to the content of the stereotype that researchers want to change (see Hugenberg et al., 2010). In the case of women, sexually objectified imagery may backfire by simultaneously inducing body image concerns (Roberts & Gettman, 2004); thus, the counterstereotype stimulus should focus less on appearance and more on the agentic behavioral component of the sexual stereotype. Although we know of no research that has attempted this strategy, it may be particularly effective for contemporary women. If men and women are undergoing a transition toward more egalitarian sexual relationships (Dworkin et al., 2007; Dworkin & O'Sullivan, 2005), counterstereotype-induced attitude change may be more likely because gender-role beliefs may be less certain and, therefore, malleable (e.g., Babad, Ariav, Rosen, & Salomon, 1987; Bassili, 1996; Krosnick & Abelson, 1992; Wu & Shaffer, 1987).

Next, we turn to an intervention that involves perceptions about the other gender's desires (i.e., a romantic prospect or long-term romantic partner; see Figure 2). If heterosexual women were exposed to desirable men who preferred sexually agentic partners, they may be inclined to forgo the traditional script. Indeed, research shows that heterosexual men often desire and fantasize about women taking on assertive sexual roles (Hawley & Hensley, 2009). Moreover, men express frustration in relationships that chronically follow the male-initiator script (Dworkin & O'Sullivan, 2005). Thus, interventions should aim to shift women's perception of their partner's desires, because many male partners want their sexual relationship to be more egalitarian, despite women's beliefs to the contrary. As a result, a twofold intervention that undermines the traditional sexual script (e.g., via counterstereotypical exemplars) while simultaneously addressing perceptions about men's desires may be particularly effective.

### Conclusion

Returning to Steinem's (2011) quote, our literature review suggests that men and women alike tend to eroticize gender stereotypes that promote inequality in the sexual experience. Although sexual scripts and desires may be more egalitarian than in the past, evidence of sexual inequalities still exists, with women less likely to initiate sex than men and the sexual double standard, although waning, still in force. Further, women's level of satisfaction in their sexual relationships has not yet met men's sexual satisfaction (for a review, see Petersen & Hyde, 2010). We contend that the sexual scripts in our culture that promote male dominance and female submissiveness may be largely responsible for the gender gaps in sexual experiences, especially during young adulthood. Moreover, relationships that reject the traditional sexual script tend to have greater sexual satisfaction and better relationship outcomes, lending credence to Steinem's assertion that "cooperation beats submission" (e.g., Sanchez et al., in press). Although some strides have been made toward sexual equality, we still have farther to go to reach that goal. Thus, we hope that this review provides inspiration for future research and intervention development that will increase egalitarian sexual experiences that promote female sexual agency and, thus, gender equality in the bedroom.

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