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The Heterosexual Script on Tween, Teen, and Young-Adult Television Programs: A Content Analytic Update and Extension

Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, Kun Yan, Larissa Terán, and Lindsay Roberts

Department of Communication, University of Arizona

ABSTRACT

In a well-cited 2007 paper in *Journal of Sex Research*, Kim and colleagues proposed and documented a heterosexual script on primetime television. In the present study, we provide a 15-year update on the portrayal of the heterosexual script, and we further examine how it relates to three contextual variables: target age of the audience, age of the characters, and relational context of the script. Drawing from a 2016 sample of television programs that featured tween, teen, or young-adult characters, we documented three complementary sexual scripts: the sexual double standard (sexuality is equated with masculinity, women's virtue is tied to their sexuality), commitment (men avoid commitment, women seek it), and homophobia (men must avoid homosexuality, female homosexuality is voyeuristically appealing to men). Like the Kim et al. study, the dominant heterosexual script was sex as masculinity; this script was equally represented in tween, teen, and young-adult shows. The second most common script was that men prioritize sex over commitment, followed by the notion that women's virtue is tied to their sexuality. The commitment scripts were most often invoked by young-adult and adult characters, while the sexual double standard scripts were more pronounced in hookups than in committed relationships.

In adolescence, a new recognition of sexual feelings makes television and other media appealing sources of sexual information (Sutton, Brown, Wilson, & Klein, 2002). Seventy percent of 13- to 24-year-olds cited television as a central source of information on sexual topics (Boyar, Levine, & Zensius, 2011). Compared to online sources, fictional television programs provide a compelling type of sexual information. Teens and young adults want to know what is expected of them and others in sexual and romantic encounters (Coyne, Padilla-Walker, & Howard, 2013; Finnerty-Myers, 2011; Nabi & Clark, 2008), and scripted television programs can provide this information through narratives of sexual relationships and interactions.

According to sexual scripts theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), cultural sexual scripts, such as those in fictional television programs, define what counts as sex, and they provide guidance on how to recognize sexual situations and what to do in romantic and sexual encounters. In a content analysis on top-rated television programs from the 2001–2002 season, Kim et al. (2007) conceptualized a dominant “heterosexual script” that consisted of complementary scripts for women and men to follow in their romantic and sexual interactions. In the heterosexual script, also referred to as the traditional sexual script, men are expected to be the sexual aggressors and to prioritize sex over relationships; conversely, women are expected to be sexually passive, to serve as gatekeepers, and to prioritize relationships over sex.

In the present study, our first goal was to compare the heterosexual script from Kim et al.'s (2007) 2001–2002 sample of television programs to a sample of television programs

collected in 2016, tracking an approximate 15-year difference in the portrayal of sexual scripts. The second main goal was to extend Kim et al. by examining how the portrayal of the heterosexual script coincides with three contextual features of the portrayals of sexuality: target age of audience, age of characters, and relational status of the sexual reference.

Why Reexamine the Heterosexual Script in U.S. Television?

A comparison of the televised depiction of the heterosexual script in 2001–2002 versus 2016 was motivated by four main arguments. First, the television landscape has shifted dramatically in the last 15 years. In 2001–2002, it was appropriate to examine the messages of a quite consolidated group of prime-time programs on broadcast networks; in 2016, television viewers accessed programming from diverse and increasingly specialized sources such as streaming platforms (e.g., Netflix and Hulu) and niche-targeted cable networks (e.g., Freeform; Jaffray, 2018). On platforms that are not supported by advertisers (such as Netflix and HBO), programmers can create stories without the pressure to avoid offending sponsors. Thus, it is useful to examine whether current television targeting young people reifies the sexual “status quo,” which is arguably the heterosexual script, or if it challenges the script.

Second, changes in adolescent sexual behavior make another look at the heterosexual script on television worthwhile. According

to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, between 1991 and 2017 a significant decrease (54.1%–39.5%) has occurred in the prevalence of teens having ever had sexual intercourse (Kann et al., 2018), and young adults in the Millennial generation are more sexually *inactive* than recent generations (Twenge, Sherman, & Wells, 2017). Yet, longitudinal studies have shown that sexual television exposure hastens the initiation of sexual intercourse among adolescents (Brown et al., 2006; Collins et al., 2004), and a moral panic about a rampant hookup culture pervades national discourse (e.g., Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012). Thus, the extent to which television reinforces a hookup culture, despite behavioral data contradicting it, is worthy of investigation.

Third, despite declines in rates of adolescent sexual activity, a sexual double standard in adolescent sexual behavior persists (Tolman, Davis, & Bowman, 2016). For boys and men, the media promote a “Casanova Complex,” wherein men and boys are expected to want promiscuous sex, not relationships, and they will justify any “rude, crude, risky, or destructive” behavior if it means securing sex (Smiler, 2013, p. 17). Here again, the actual behavioral data do not support this script; true “Casanovas” who have had multiple sexual partners and have cheated on their partners, only describes a small minority of adolescent boys and young men. Yet cultural sexual scripts normalize this view of young male sexuality, which has negative consequences for both men (sexism, less interest in academics, and risk-taking behaviors) (Smiler, 2006) as well as for women. As Tolman (2016) argued, if we view male sexuality as uncontrollable, then girls must learn that it is their responsibility to manage male sexuality. “Good” girls do not have their own sexual desire; they recognize that their role is to resist male sexual advances.

Fourth, there have been changes in U.S. sexual attitudes from 2001 to 2016. The most notable are attitudes about same-sex behavior and marriage. In 2001, 40% of Americans said same-sex behavior was morally acceptable, compared to 60% in 2016 (Gallup, n.d.). In 2001, 35% of Americans favored same-sex marriage, compared to 55% in 2016 (Pew Research Center, 2019). Moreover, Americans say having a baby outside of marriage is more morally acceptable (45% in 2001 versus 62% in 2016), and more find unmarried sex morally acceptable (53% in 2001 versus 67% in 2016) (Gallup, n.d.). These trends reflect changes toward more liberal sexual attitudes in a fairly short period of time. Thus, it is useful to understand whether the sexual scripts on television have evolved in light of public opinion.

Sexuality and Sexual Scripts on Television

Although ample content analytic work has examined the *amount* of sexual content on television (Fisher, Hill, Grube, & Gruber, 2004; Kunkel, Biely, Eyal, Cope-Farrar, & Donnerstein, 2003; Kunkel, Eyal, Finnerty, Biely, & Donnerstein, 2005; Signorielli & Bievenour, 2015), fewer studies have examined the *context* of sexual messages. In television programs that are popular with adolescents and young adults, sex is portrayed as casual, risk free, and recreational (for a review, see Wright, 2009). Content analytic evidence also points to gender differences in line with the sexual double standard. Male characters are more likely to initiate sexual behaviors than female characters (Aubrey, 2004; Kunkel et al.,

2003), and female characters are more likely to experience negative sexual consequences than male characters (Aubrey, Miller, & Bond, 2017), especially when they initiate sexual activities (Aubrey, 2004).

According to sexual scripts theory, mediated portrayals of sexuality provide scripts at the cultural level, suggesting what events are to happen in certain contexts, how the person should behave in response to these events, and what outcomes of those behaviors would be (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). People rely on cultural sexual scripts to understand the normative “rules” of human sexuality. Kim et al. (2007) introduced the dominant heterosexual script to characterize television’s gendered sexual messages. The heterosexual script was conceptualized as a set of complementary scripts that assume that men and women participate in heterosexual encounters in gender-prescribed ways, and together male and female characters sustain gender-based power inequalities (Kim et al., 2007).

Specifically, Kim et al. posited four complementary sexual scripts. First, the sexual double standard refers to the idea that men always think about sex and that having sex is a defining aspect of masculinity (the “sex as masculinity” script), whereas women’s virtue is based on their sexual decisions (the “good girls” script). The second set of sexual scripts concerns men’s and women’s differing approaches to commitment. While men avoid commitment (the “masculine commitment” script), women prioritize romantic relationships over sex and make sacrifices for their partners in order to maintain these relationships (the “feminine commitment” script). The third set of scripts addressed non-heterosexual relationships. While men avoid doing anything that could be construed as “gay” or feminine (the “male homophobia” script), women’s same-sex desire is eroticized and seen by men as “hot” (the “appropriation of female homosexuality” script). The last set of scripts concerned courtship strategies. Men use powerful and active strategies to attract female partners (the “masculine courtship” script), while women use passive and indirect strategies to garner men’s sexual interest (the “feminine courtship” script). Based on this foundational work, Seabrook et al. (2016) created a survey measure of endorsement of the heterosexual script, which combined the sexual double standard, courtship, and commitment scripts.

Of the eight components of the heterosexual script, Kim et al. (2007) found that the most frequently depicted heterosexual script was sex as masculinity, occurring in just over 45% of the heterosexual script references. Although the prevalence of this script dwarfed all other components of the heterosexual script, the next most depicted script was feminine courtship strategies, representing 13% of the sexual references, followed by the good girls script (11.5%), masculine courtship strategies (8.8%), the masculine commitment script (8.4%), and the feminine commitment scripts (8.0%). The last two scripts, male-oriented homophobia and appropriation of female homosexuality, both occurred less than 5% of the time. Considering that the primetime television programs Kim et al. examined were aired in 2001 and 2002, an update of the heterosexual script in today’s television landscape is needed.

RQ1a: How often do sexual references in tween, teen, and young-adult television programming contain elements of the heterosexual script?

RQ1b: How does the prevalence of the heterosexual script compare to the findings in Kim et al.'s (2007) content analysis?

Age and the Heterosexual Script

As guides for how men and women “should” act in sexual encounters, sexual scripts are salient during adolescence as this developmental period is fraught with sexual uncertainty on the one hand and sexual interest on the other (Fortenberry, 2013). Here, we examined how the heterosexual script corresponded to the developmental trajectories of the audience. In line with the sexual double standard that persists in adolescent sexuality (Tolman et al., 2016), it is possible that the heterosexual script will be most prevalent in television made for adolescents and by television characters who are teens. In the present study, we examined shows that featured predominantly tween, teen, or young-adult characters as a proxy for what age group to which the show was targeted. Although a recent content analysis suggested that the amount of sexual talk and behaviors did not differ between adult and adolescent shows (Malacane & Martins, 2017), that study did not examine gendered sexual scripts. Another recent study found that shows targeting tween audiences (ages 8–11) had very few depictions of sexuality, but in shows targeting adolescent audiences (ages 12–15), sex was over-represented in comparison to U.S. teens’ actual engagement in sexual behaviors (Signorielli & Bievenour, 2015).

In addition, children and adolescents tend to look to models who are similar to them as sources of vicarious learning (Bandura, 2001). In a sample of general-audience television programs from 2004–2005, most instances of sexual intercourse (83%) occurred between adult characters. Only 11% occurred between young-adult characters, and 5% occurred between teen characters (Eyal & Finnerty, 2009). A more recent content analysis also reported that casual sex is predominantly the domain of adult and young-adult (ages 18–25) characters (Timmermans & Van den Bulck, 2018). However, given the sexual double standard that is particularly apt when describing adolescent sexuality (Tolman et al., 2016), it again seems likely that the heterosexual script will be invoked when teen characters are involved in the sexual reference.

RQ2a: Does the portrayal of the heterosexual script differ according to the target age of the audience (tween, teen, and young adult)?

RQ2b: Does the portrayal of the heterosexual script differ according to characters’ age?

Relationship Status and the Heterosexual Script

The relationship status of individuals who engage in sexual behaviors on television can have several implications, such as socialization lessons for a younger audience and endorsement of the relational context portrayed (Kunkel, Cope, & Biely, 1999). Emerging adults (between the ages of 18–25) believe that casual sex is something that they are supposed to have (England, Shafer, & Fogerty, 2008), and some have argued

that the sexual scripts on television can influence their perceptions of casual sex scripts (e.g., Garcia et al., 2012; Heldman & Wade, 2010). Indeed, sex on television is recreational more than it is relational (Ward, 1995), and sexual behaviors that are associated with an expression of love or relational commitment characterize a minority of scenes in television popular with emerging adults (37%; Dillman Carpentier, Stevens, Wu, & Seely, 2017).

Defining hookups and other casual sex relationships is thorny as varying definitions exist in the literature. Hookups are generally defined as spontaneous and brief sexual encounters among individuals who are not romantic partners (Garcia et al., 2012; Wentland & Reissing, 2011). The defining feature of a hookup is a one-time sexual encounter with a lack of future commitment (Garcia et al., 2012). Although some definitions of hookups include casual sex relationships (e.g., Wentland & Reissing, 2011), in the present study, we differentiate between the two. We define a casual sex relationship as one in which sexual activities are ongoing or occur more than once, but again there is no expectation of a future romantic commitment (Timmermans & Van den Bulck, 2018). Examples of casual sex relationships would be booty calls (one partner calls the other for impromptu sex), “fuck” buddies (one’s relationship is exclusively based on sex), and friends with benefits (partners share a friendship but also engage in uncommitted sexual acts) (Wentland & Reissing, 2011).

Content analyses have shown that most sexual activity in teen shows occurs between unmarried characters; nonetheless, most of these characters are in established romantic relationships (Fisher et al., 2004; Kunkel et al., 2005). A recent content analysis of nine U.S. television shows similarly indicated that about one-half of sexual behaviors occurred in non-committed sexual relationships (Timmermans & Van den Bulck, 2018). Of those, 31% of sexual behaviors occurred in a hookup, and an additional 18% of sexual behaviors occurred in a casual sex relationship. Additionally, when characters in a committed relationship engaged in sexual activity, it was often limited to kissing, whereas characters in a casual sex relationship or hookup were more often shown having sexual intercourse. Of interest in the present study is how television shows portray sexual scripts in relation to the type of romantic relationship portrayed.

RQ3: How does the portrayal of the heterosexual script vary according to the relational context of the sexual reference?

Methods

Sample

To construct the sampling frame, we used a three-stage process. First, we systematically examined the programming offerings in 2016 for broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, and the CW), premium cable networks (HBO and Showtime), basic cable networks (A&E, MTV, Freeform, Comedy Channel, FX, TV Land, Disney Channel, Disney XD, and Nickelodeon), and streaming platforms (Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime). Second, we chose every scripted program (excluding sports, reality, or news) from these networks/platforms that fit our sampling criteria: programs that featured in the principal cast more than one tween character (ages 8–12), teen character (ages 13–19), or young-adult character

(ages 20–29). To determine the age of the characters in the cast, we triangulated among three sources for each television show: the IMDb page, the Wikipedia page, and the show's official website. We identified 70 television shows that were aired in 2016 that matched these criteria; 14 were tween, 23 were teen, and 33 were young adult. See Supplementary Table 1 for a listing of each show by target audience.

Third, after selecting the program, we randomly selected three 2016 episodes. Three episodes were chosen because that is the minimum number necessary to provide a representative assessment of sexual content for behavior-level variables (Manganello, Franzini, & Jordan, 2008). A total of 210 episodes were coded. However, 28 episodes were not represented in the final sample because they did not contain any sexual references. Of these 28 episodes, the majority were from tween shows (64.3%, $n = 18$), six were teen episodes, and four were young-adult episodes. The final sample reflects 86.7% ($n = 182$) of the episodes from the initial sample.

Units of Analysis

Each episode was coded on the sexual reference level. The episode's recap segments, opening and ending credits, and commercials were not coded. A sexual reference was a discrete instance of sexual behavior or talk. Sexual behaviors are actions that titillate or arouse sexual interest from one or both partners (Kunkel et al., 2005). Sexual talk was defined as first-hand conversations or discussions of sexual interests, or secondhand conversations about prior, anticipated, or desired sexual topics or issues. Each instance was coded as a separate unit. However, if a sexual behavior and sexual talk occurred simultaneously, only the behavior was coded to avoid double-coding. In total, 1,237 sexual references were coded.

Measurement

We utilized two teams of coders. The first team of undergraduate coders unitized the episodes into sexual references and coded the age of characters and the relational status of the characters involved in the sexual reference. The second team of graduate students coded the already unitized episodes for the heterosexual script.

Age of Characters

Because sexual references usually occur between more than one character, coders identified the age of the source of the sexual reference. A source was defined as the person who initiated the sexual behavior or talk. Coders determined the approximate age of the characters by considering all available cues, including physical appearance, vocal characteristics, and behavioral patterns (e.g., school attendance, employment). Characters were coded into one of five age groups: child (between infancy and 12 years of age), teen (ages 13–19), young adult (ages 20–29), adult (ages 30–64), or elderly (65 years old or older).

Relational Status

The coders used the context of the episode to judge the relational status of the characters engaged in sexual references.

For behaviors, we coded for three relationship types: hookups, casual sex relationships, or committed relationships (Timmermans & Van den Bulck, 2018). We used an existing definition of hookups: "a spontaneous sexual interaction in which (1) the individuals are explicitly *not* in a traditional romantic relationship with each other (i.e., not dating, not boyfriend/girlfriend), (2) there are no *a priori* agreements regarding what behaviors will occur, and (3) there is explicitly *no* promise of any subsequent intimate relations or relationships" (Garcia & Reiber, 2008, p. 193, italics in original definition). Based on Timmermans and Van den Bulck (2018), the next category was casual sex relationships, wherein the characters were not in a traditional, romantically committed relationship with each other, but they do have some existing relationship with each other (e.g., coworkers, friends). The last category was committed relationships, defined as characters who have an ongoing, established, and committed relationship to each other (e.g., marriage, living together, steady boyfriend/girlfriend; Kunkel et al., 2005). For sexual talk, relational status could be non-romantic/non-sexual, such as when coworkers discuss a sexual experience. Coders were able to choose an "other" option if the relational status did not fit into the preceding categories, and if the coders could not use the context of the episode to categorize the relationship, they selected a "can't tell/unsure" option.

The Heterosexual Script

To measure the heterosexual script, we utilized the codebook created by Kim et al. (2007). The original codebook contained four sets of two complementary codes to represent the heterosexual script. We replicated three of these sets of codes, but for the last set on courtship strategies, we were not able to achieve intercoder reliability. This was likely because courtship strategies occurred rarely in the context of a sexual reference. When a category of a variable rarely occurs, it is difficult to obtain intercoder reliability (Neuendorf, 2017). It was necessary for us to drop this set of codes.

Sexual Double Standard. The first set of codes reflected the sexual double standard. Sex as masculinity is the notion that sex is the defining component of masculinity. This script encompassed four major themes: (1) men are the initiators of sex, as would be coded when male characters clearly initiate and advance sexual behaviors; (2) men are obsessed with sex, such as when male characters are easily distracted or preoccupied with sex, or when they simply cannot resist sex; (3) men are evaluated positively for their sexual experiences, such as when they brag about their sexual experiences; and (4) men are expected to be good sexual performers, as would be coded when male characters worry about their sexual performance or brag about their sexual prowess. The complementary good girls script addressed women's roles as sexual delimiters. This script encompassed four themes: (1) women are sexual gatekeepers, as would be coded when female characters express their desire to stop or delay sexual activities as they are happening; (2) women do not prioritize their own sexual pleasure over that of men's, such as when women "go along" with men's sexual desires; (3) women are evaluated negatively for their sexual experiences, a script that would be

coded whenever women are labeled as sluts or similarly derogatory terms; and (4) women are not expected to be good sexual performers, coded whenever women are naïve about sexual acts.

Commitment. The second set of codes reflected attitudes toward commitment in sexual relationships. Masculine commitment was defined as the idea that men avoid commitment in sexual relationships. This sexual script included four main themes: (1) men attempt to secure sexual opportunities without commitment, such as male characters avoiding discussion or behaviors that reflect romantic commitment in the context of sex; (2) men often cheat on long-term partners if tempted by new sexual opportunities; and (3) men show little enthusiasm for relationship maintenance, which would happen when a male character's idea of quality time as a couple is sex; and (4) men are often mocked when they do express commitment to a relational partner, such as when men are taunted for being "pussy whipped." Feminine commitment encompassed the idea that women, in contrast to men, do prioritize relational commitment. For this script, four themes were coded: (1) a main purpose of sex is to establish or maintain a committed relationship, such as when female characters negotiate sex for future romantic commitment; (2) women ask for more intense commitment from men to serve relational goals, which might occur when a female character seeks more than sex from her partner; (3) women will often make sacrifices in other areas of their life in order to please a man, such as when a female character goes against her family's wishes in order to be intimate with her partner; (4) women are mocked for having difficulty securing a committed relationship, such as when the "old maid" stereotype is invoked.

Homophobia. The third set of complementary codes referred to the differing contexts of homophobia as expressed for male characters versus female characters. Male-oriented homophobia reflected the idea that men avoid behaving in a manner that could be construed as gay or associating with characters who are outwardly gay. Male characters who mock, insult, or shun gay male characters would be considered examples of this script. In contrast, the appropriation of the female homosexuality script was the corresponding idea that eroticism between female characters, especially those who are feminine in appearance, is arousing and desirable to men. Male characters leering at lesbians or encouraging otherwise heterosexually identified female characters to kiss or dance would be examples of this script.

Coding and Reliability

The first round of coding focused on unitization and contextual variables. Four undergraduate students (three female and one male) were trained for eight weeks representing approximately 30 hours of training. During training, coders practiced on episodes that were not in the final sample. Once intercoder reliability during pilot coding reached acceptable levels for each variable, coders began to code the sample independently. The majority of the sample was coded in six weeks, with three checks of intercoder

reliability interspersed during the coding period to check for coder progress and to monitor coder drift (Krippendorff, 2014). Twenty episodes (10.5% of the final sample) were coded by all four coders ($n = 153$ references).

The coders unitized the episodes on the reference level, and they reached an agreement of 78.0% on unitization. Intercoder reliability for the contextual variables was assessed using Krippendorff's alpha. The individual coefficients for the first round of coding were satisfactory: age of characters of sexual reference ($\alpha = .69$) and relationship status ($\alpha = .81$).

For the second round of coding, three female graduate students (the last three authors) were trained on the sexual scripts codebook, which was obtained from Kim et al. (2007). The training period was much longer than for the first round of coding, as the coding of these variables was more latent in nature. Over six months, the coders underwent approximately 60 hours of training. Coders reached an acceptable level of intercoder reliability after extensive coding of practice episodes (not in the main sample). Then, the coders, plus the first author, coded the reliability sample independently. The first author did not code the episodes in the main sample, only those used for reliability analysis. The coding of the main sample occurred over eight weeks with two checks interspersed to monitor coder drift.

For the heterosexual script variables, we calculated intercoder reliability with Gwet's AC2 statistic, which is a preferable index of intercoder reliability when there is high percent agreement among coders, yet a skewed distribution wherein one category of a variable is over-represented (Neuendorf, 2017). With the heterosexual script variables, the absence of a script was much more common than presence. Coefficients between 0.80 and 1.0 are considered "very good" (Gwet, 2018). The individual coefficients were: sex as masculinity (AC2 = .84), good girls (AC2 = .88), masculine commitment (AC2 = .96), feminine commitment (AC2 = .93), male-oriented homophobia (AC2 = .99), and appropriation of female homosexuality (AC2 = .997).

Results

Descriptive Findings

With 1,237 sexual references in 182 episodes, there were 6.79 sexual references (either talk or behavior) per episode. As reported in previous studies (e.g., Kunkel et al., 2005), sexual talk (59.3%, $n = 733$) occurred more frequently than sexual behaviors (40.7%, $n = 504$), $\chi^2(2, n = 1,237) = 43.39, p < .001$. In sexual talk, characters were most likely (79.1%, $n = 557$) to be in a non-romantic/non-sexual relationship, suggesting that sex is most likely to be a topic of discussion among friends, coworkers, family members, compared to people who are actually in sexual relationships. Of the 320 sexual behaviors for which relationship status could be identified, the most common relationship was committed relationships (65.0%, $n = 208$), followed by hookups (26.3%, $n = 84$), and casual sex relationships (8.8%, $n = 28$). Both sexual behaviors and sexual talk were most likely to be initiated by young-adult characters, followed by teens, and then adults. Sexual behaviors and sexual talk were rare among children and elderly characters. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics.

Frequency of Heterosexual Script in Sexual References

To address RQ1, we analyzed how often sexual references contain elements of the heterosexual script in tween, teen, and young-adult television programming. In total, the heterosexual script was present in 48.9% ($n = 605$) of sexual references. After doubling the heterosexual script for 30-minute shows to allow comparisons to 60-minute shows, we estimated 4.60 ($SD = 4.63$) invocations of the heterosexual script per hour of programming. In tween shows, there was an average of 1.74 ($SD = 2.30$) invocations of the heterosexual script per hour, 3.30 ($SD = 2.80$) invocations in teen shows, and 6.72 ($SD = 5.43$) invocations in young-adult shows, $F(2, 67) = 8.60, p < .001$. On the series level, the frequency of the heterosexual script varied widely, with eight shows having no instances of the heterosexual script (six of the eight were tween shows) and two shows averaging 24 instances of the heterosexual script per hour (*Chewing Gum* and *Lovesick*). Given that some shows target tween audiences while others target twenty-somethings, variance in the heterosexual script was expected. A chart summarizing the frequency of the heterosexual script in each series is included in Supplementary Table 2.

The sex as masculinity script was the most frequently portrayed among sexual references (35.2%, $n = 436$). The second most common heterosexual script was masculine commitment (8.0%, $n = 99$), followed by good girls (6.5%, $n = 80$) and feminine commitment (5.1%, $n = 63$). The remaining scripts – male homophobia (0.6%, $n = 7$) and appropriation of female homosexuality (0.3%, $n = 4$) – were rarely portrayed. Indeed, the homophobia scripts were so rarely occurring that we did not submit them to further analysis in RQ2–3.

We also compared the Kim et al. (2007) results with our current results (RQ1b). First, there was a quite a dramatic difference in how frequently the heterosexual script was portrayed per hour or programming between studies. We uncovered roughly 4.60 invocations of the heterosexual script per hour of programming, whereas Kim et al. (2007) reported 15.53. We also examined the proportion of each of the sexual scripts out of the total number of heterosexual scripts coded in the present study compared to Kim et al.'s study. The results for both studies suggest that the sex as masculinity script is the most common occurring script, but it was the more prevalent in the present study. The sex as masculinity script occurred in 72.1% ($n = 443$) of the 605 heterosexual script references in our study, and Kim et al. (2007) found that of the 662 heterosexual script references they coded, the sex as masculinity script occurred in 45.2% ($n = 299$). Although the frequency of the heterosexual script per hour of programming decreased between the studies, the proportion of the heterosexual script that was characterized as “sex as masculinity” significantly increased ($z = 7.35, p < .001$). See Table 2.

The second most common script in the present study was masculine commitment, while Kim et al. reported that the good girls code was their second most common script. Kim et al. reported that their third most common script was masculine commitment, and ours was good girls. Although the order was transposed for two scripts: masculine commitment and good girls, the proportional occurrence for good girls in Kim et al.'s study was remarkably similar to ours. The occurrence of the homophobia scripts was rare in both studies

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of primary variables.

	Categories	Percent (%)	Frequency (n)
Sexual reference $N = 1237$	Sexual talk	59.3	733
	Sexual behavior	40.7	504
Relational status of sexual talk $N = 704$	Hookup	2.1	15
	Casual sex relationship	2.1	15
	Committed relationship	7.1	50
	Potentially romantic/sexual	5.8	41
	Non-romantic/non-sexual	79.1	557
Relational status of sexual behavior $N = 320$	Mixed relationships	3.7	26
	Hookup	26.3	84
	Casual sex relationship	8.8	28
	Committed relationship	65.0	208
Age of source of sexual talk $N = 730$	Child	1.8	13
	Teen	24.4	178
	Young adult	53.2	388
	Adult	20.1	147
Age of source of sexual behavior $N = 504$	Elderly	0.5	4
	Child	0.4	2
	Teen	30.2	152
	Young adult	52.7	265
	Adult	16.7	84
	Elderly	0.2	1
Heterosexual script $N = 1,237$	Presence	48.9	605
	Absence	51.1	632
Sex as masculinity script $N = 1,237$	Presence	35.2	436
	Absence	67.8	801
Good girls script $N = 1,237$	Presence	6.5	80
	Absence	93.5	1,157
Masculine commitment script $N = 1,237$	Presence	8.0	99
	Absence	92.0	1,138
Feminine commitment script $N = 1,237$	Presence	5.1	63
	Absence	94.9	1,174
Male homophobia script $N = 1,237$	Presence	0.6	7
	Absence	99.4	1,230
Appropriation of female homosexuality script $N = 1,237$	Presence	0.3	4
	Absence	99.7	1,233

The total N for each variable was calculated after the removal of “cannot tell” codes. Percentages are estimates and might not round to 100.

Table 2. Frequencies and proportion of sexual references featuring heterosexual script.

	Present Study (N = 605)		Kim et al.'s Study (N = 662)		Z statistic
	%	n	%	n	
Sex as masculinity	72.1	436	45.2	299	7.35***
Masculine commitment	16.4	99	8.4	56	1.40
Good girls	13.2	80	11.5	76	0.32
Feminine commitment	3.8	25	8.0	53	-0.69
Male-oriented homophobia	1.2	7	3.2	21	-0.28
Appropriation of female homosexuality	0.7	4	1.4	9	-0.11
Masculine courtship	—	—	8.8	59	—
Feminine courtship	—	—	13.4	89	—

In total, 1,237 sexual references were coded. In the Kim et al. study, 662 refers to the number of times that the heterosexual script was invoked. To make the comparisons between studies consonant, the percentages reported here for the present study are based on the number of times the heterosexual script was invoked ($n = 605$). Because more than one type of heterosexual script could be invoked within the same sexual reference, the percentages do not equal 100. *** $p < .001$.

but especially rare in our's. Additionally, examining the proportions across the two samples, none of these scripts (excepting sex as masculinity) were significantly different in their frequency in one sample over the other.

Sexual Scripts and Age

For RQ2a we analyzed how the portrayal of the heterosexual script varies according to the target audience. First, collapsing across all script types, we examined the relationship between the target audience and the portrayal of any of the types of the heterosexual script. The relationship was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(2, n = 1,237) = 5.38, p = .068$. In tween shows, 37.3% ($n = 25$) of the sexual references invoked the heterosexual script, compared to 46.9% ($n = 172$) in teen shows and 50.8% ($n = 408$) in young-adult shows.

Second, we examined whether the types of heterosexual scripts were portrayed differently in tween, teen, and young-adult programs. This occurred for the masculine commitment

($\chi^2(2, n = 1,237) = 8.55, p = .017$, Cramer's $V = .08$) and the good girls ($\chi^2(2, n = 1,237) = 8.03, p = .018$, Cramer's $V = .08$) scripts. First, the masculine commitment script was more common in young-adult shows than in tween shows, which had no instances. No significant differences in masculine commitment were found between teen programs and the other two groups. Second, the good girls script was significantly more likely to appear in teen programs than in tween programs. However, the portrayal of the good girls script in young-adult programs did not differ from teen or tween programs. See Table 3.

We did not find that the portrayal of the sex as masculinity, $\chi^2(2, n = 1,237) = 2.83, p = .243$, nor the feminine commitment script, $\chi^2(2, n = 1,237) = 2.25, p = .325$, varied according to target audience. The proportional prevalence of the sex as masculinity and feminine commitment scripts was consistent across tween, teen, and young-adult shows.

For RQ2b, we dropped the sexual references that were initiated by child or elderly characters, given their low occurrence in the sample ($n = 15, n = 4$ respectively). Collapsing across all script types, the relationship between character age and the portrayal of any of heterosexual scripts was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(2, n = 1,218) = 1.25, p = .535$. The invocation of any type of the heterosexual script was proportionally comparable among teen (46.1%, $n = 152$), young-adult (49.6%, $n = 324$), and adult characters (49.8%, $n = 117$). Additionally, just as with target audience, the occurrence of the sex as masculinity script occurred just as frequently whether the sexual reference involved a teen, young-adult, or adult character, $\chi^2(2, n = 1,218) = 0.91, p = .636$. See Table 4.

For the other three scripts, significant relationships between character age and the occurrence of the script emerged. First, for the good girls script, the chi square was statistically significant, $\chi^2(2, n = 1,218) = 6.70, p = .035$, Cramer's $V = .074$, even though the pairwise differences between age categories were not. Second, the masculine commitment script varied by character age, $\chi^2(2, n = 1,218) = 6.67, p = .036$, Cramer's $V = .074$. The masculine commitment script was more frequently

Table 3. Sexual scripts and the target audience of the programs.

	Tween programs	Teen programs	Young-adult programs	Total
Sex as masculinity				
Present	26.9% ($n = 18$)	34.1% ($n = 125$)	36.5% ($n = 293$)	35.2% ($n = 436$)
Absent	73.1% ($n = 49$)	65.9% ($n = 242$)	63.5% ($n = 510$)	64.8% ($n = 801$)
Total	100% ($n = 67$)	100% ($n = 367$)	100% ($n = 803$)	100% ($N = 1,237$)
$\chi^2(2, N = 1,237) = 2.83, p = .243$				
Good girls				
Present	0.0% _a ($n = 0$)	8.7% _{a,b} ($n = 32$)	6.0% _b ($n = 48$)	6.5% ($n = 80$)
Absent	100.0% ($n = 67$)	91.3% ($n = 335$)	94.0% ($n = 755$)	93.5% ($n = 1,157$)
Total	100% ($n = 67$)	100% ($n = 367$)	100% ($n = 803$)	100% ($N = 1,237$)
$\chi^2(2, N = 1,237) = 8.03, p = .018$, Cramer's $V = .081$				
Masculine commitment				
Present	0.0% _a ($n = 0$)	6.8% _{a,b} ($n = 25$)	9.2% _b ($n = 74$)	8.0% ($n = 99$)
Absent	100.0% ($n = 67$)	93.2% ($n = 342$)	90.8% ($n = 729$)	92.0% ($n = 1,138$)
Total	100% ($n = 67$)	100% ($n = 367$)	100% ($n = 803$)	100% ($N = 1,237$)
$\chi^2(2, N = 1,237) = 8.14, p = .017$, Cramer's $V = .081$				
Feminine commitment				
Present	9.0% ($n = 6$)	4.6% ($n = 17$)	5.0% ($n = 40$)	5.1% ($n = 63$)
Absent	91.0% ($n = 61$)	95.4% ($n = 350$)	95.0% ($n = 763$)	94.9% ($n = 1,174$)
Total	100% ($n = 67$)	100% ($n = 367$)	100% ($n = 803$)	100% ($N = 1,237$)
$\chi^2(2, N = 1,237) = 2.25, p = .325$				

Pairwise comparisons within each row were conducted when the χ^2 statistic was significant. These were done by investigation of z tests with Bonferroni correction. Frequencies in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

Table 4. Sexual scripts and age of source character of sexual reference.

	Teens	Young adults	Adults	Total
Sex as masculinity				
Present	37.3% (<i>n</i> = 123)	34.3% (<i>n</i> = 224)	34.5% (<i>n</i> = 81)	35.1% (<i>n</i> = 428)
Absent	62.7% (<i>n</i> = 207)	65.7% (<i>n</i> = 429)	65.5% (<i>n</i> = 154)	64.9% (<i>n</i> = 790)
Total	100% (<i>n</i> = 330)	100% (<i>n</i> = 653)	100% (<i>n</i> = 235)	100% (<i>N</i> = 1,218)
χ^2 (2, <i>N</i> = 1,218) = 0.91, <i>p</i> = .637				
Good girls				
Present	7.9% _a (<i>n</i> = 26)	4.7% _a (<i>n</i> = 31)	8.9% _a (<i>n</i> = 21)	6.4% (<i>n</i> = 78)
Absent	92.1% (<i>n</i> = 304)	95.3% (<i>n</i> = 622)	91.1% (<i>n</i> = 214)	93.5% (<i>n</i> = 1,140)
Total	100% (<i>n</i> = 330)	100% (<i>n</i> = 653)	100% (<i>n</i> = 235)	100% (<i>N</i> = 1,218)
χ^2 (2, <i>N</i> = 1,218) = 6.70, <i>p</i> = .035, Cramer's <i>V</i> = .074				
Masculine commitment				
Present	4.8% _a (<i>n</i> = 16)	8.9% _{a,b} (<i>n</i> = 58)	10.2% _b (<i>n</i> = 24)	8.0% (<i>n</i> = 98)
Absent	95.2% (<i>n</i> = 314)	91.1% (<i>n</i> = 595)	89.8% (<i>n</i> = 211)	92.0% (<i>n</i> = 1,120)
Total	100% (<i>n</i> = 330)	100% (<i>n</i> = 653)	100% (<i>n</i> = 235)	100% (<i>N</i> = 1,218)
χ^2 (2, <i>N</i> = 1,218) = 6.67, <i>p</i> = .036, Cramer's <i>V</i> = .074				
Feminine commitment				
Present	2.4% _a (<i>n</i> = 8)	7.2% _b (<i>n</i> = 47)	2.6% _a (<i>n</i> = 6)	5.0% (<i>n</i> = 61)
Absent	97.6% (<i>n</i> = 322)	92.8% (<i>n</i> = 606)	97.4% (<i>n</i> = 229)	95.0% (<i>n</i> = 1,157)
Total	100% (<i>n</i> = 330)	100% (<i>n</i> = 653)	100% (<i>n</i> = 235)	100% (<i>N</i> = 1,218)
χ^2 (2, <i>N</i> = 1,218) = 14.19, <i>p</i> = .001, Cramer's <i>V</i> = .108				

Due to low occurrence, sexual references sourced by child (*n* = 15) and elderly (*n* = 4) characters were dropped. Pairwise comparisons within each row were conducted when the χ^2 statistic was significant. These were done by investigation of *z* tests with Bonferroni correction. Frequencies in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at *p* < .05.

portrayed in the context of adult characters than teen characters. Third, the feminine commitment script varied by character age, χ^2 (2, *n* = 1,218) = 14.19, *p* = .001, Cramer's *V* = .108. Although rarely portrayed, the feminine commitment script was significantly more common when the character was a young adult compared to a teen or an adult.

Sexual Scripts and Relational Context

For RQ3, we examined whether the heterosexual script varied by the relational context of sexual reference. Collapsing across all types of the heterosexual script, the relational context of the sexual reference was associated with the invocation of the heterosexual script, χ^2 (4, *n* = 1,024) = 21.21, *p* < .001, Cramer's *V* = .144. Proportionally, the heterosexual script was *least* likely to be invoked in the context of committed relationships (38.3%, *n* = 100) compared to hookups (55.6%, *n* = 99) and nonsexual/nonromantic relationships (54.9%, *n* = 557). The heterosexual script (53.3%, *n* = 23) in casual sex relationships did not differ across the other categories.

Because a great deal of sexual talk occurs between characters who are not involved in a sexual or romantic relationship, we also examined the invocation of the heterosexual script by the relational status of sexual behaviors only. They were significantly related, χ^2 (2, *n* = 320) = 12.21, *p* = .002, Cramer's *V* = .195. Of the 320 sexual behaviors for which the coders could identify the relationship status, any reference to the heterosexual script was proportionally more likely to occur in hookups (57.1%, *n* = 48) than in committed sexual relationships (35.1%, *n* = 73). Casual sex relationships did not differ from either of these categories (46.4%, *n* = 13).

Finally, we examined the relationship between relational status of the sexual reference and each type of the heterosexual script. A significant relationship between relational context and three sexual scripts emerged: sex as masculinity, χ^2 (2, *n* = 1,024) = 12.32, *p* = .015, Cramer's *V* = .110; masculine commitment, χ^2 (2, *n* = 1,024) = 22.62, *p* < .001, Cramer's

V = .149; and feminine commitment, χ^2 (2, *n* = 1,024) = 11.97, *p* = .018, Cramer's *V* = .108. See Table 5.

First, the sex as masculinity script was proportionately more likely to occur in hookups and nonsexual/nonromantic relationships than in committed relationships. Second, the masculine commitment script was all but absent in committed relationships, occurring significantly less than in hookups, casual sex relationships, and nonsexual/nonromantic relationships. Third, the feminine commitment script countered this pattern by occurring most often in committed relationships, which was significantly more than in nonsexual/nonromantic relationships.

The occurrence of the good girl script did not vary by the relational status of the sexual reference, χ^2 (4, *n* = 1,024) = 4.90, *p* = .297. This script occurred consistently across hookups, casual sex relationships, committed relationships, and nonsexual/nonromantic relationships.

Discussion

Inspired to extend and update Kim et al.'s (2007) foundational work, we took stock of the heterosexual script in a sample of tween, teen, and young-adult television shows from 2016. The heterosexual script is contained in almost one-half of sexual references (48.9%, *n* = 605) and is driven by male sexuality. The most prevalent invocation of the heterosexual script on television, even across differing age groups, is that sex is equated with masculinity. This is followed in prevalence by the script that men want sex but also want to avoid commitment. These messages fit squarely within the "Casanova complex" (Smiler, 2013), suggesting that television supports the myth that young men are interested in sex without commitment. Feminine versions of the heterosexual script were less frequent. Thus, the heterosexual script seems to be alive and well, but it is most consistently applied to male characters in televised sexual interactions.

Table 5. Sexual scripts and the relational context of sexual references.

	Hookups	Casual sex relationships	Committed relationships	Nonsexual/Nonromantic	Other relationships	Total N = 1,024
Sex as masculinity						
Present	44.4% _a (n = 44)	34.9% _{a,b} (n = 15)	28.7% _b (n = 74)	40.0% _a (n = 223)	35.8% _{a,b} (n = 24)	37.1% (n = 380)
Absent	55.6% (n = 55)	65.1% (n = 28)	71.3% (n = 184)	60.0% (n = 334)	64.2% (n = 43)	62.9% (n = 644)
χ^2 (2, n = 1,024) = 12.32, p = .015, Cramer's V = .110						
Good Girls						
Present	11.1% (n = 11)	4.7% (n = 2)	5.0% (n = 13)	7.7% (n = 43)	6.0% (n = 4)	7.1% (n = 73)
Absent	88.9% (n = 88)	95.3% (n = 41)	95.0% (n = 245)	92.3% (n = 514)	94.0% (n = 63)	92.9% (n = 951)
χ^2 (2, n = 1,024) = 4.90, p = .297						
Masculine commitment						
Present	12.1% _a (n = 12)	14.0% _a (n = 6)	1.6% _b (n = 4)	9.2% _a (n = 51)	13.4% _a (n = 9)	8.0% (n = 82)
Absent	87.9% (n = 87)	86.0% (n = 37)	98.4% (n = 254)	90.8% (n = 506)	86.6% (n = 58)	92.0% (n = 942)
χ^2 (2, n = 1,024) = 22.62, p < .001, Cramer's V = .149						
Feminine commitment						
Present	5.1% _{a,b} (n = 5)	7.0% _{a,b} (n = 3)	9.7% _b (n = 25)	3.8% _a (n = 21)	7.5% _{a,b} (n = 5)	5.8% (n = 59)
Absent	94.9% (n = 94)	93.0% (n = 40)	90.3% (n = 233)	96.2% (n = 536)	92.5% (n = 62)	94.2% (n = 965)
χ^2 (2, n = 1,024) = 11.97, p = .018, Cramer's V = .108						

Sexual references for which a relational status could not be identified (n = 213) were dropped from these analyses. Pairwise comparisons within each row were conducted when the χ^2 statistic was significant. These were done by investigation of z tests with Bonferroni correction. Frequencies in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at p < .05.

The Prevalence of the Heterosexual Script

Overall, there were more similarities than differences between our results from 2016 and Kim et al.'s (2007) results from their 2001–2002 sample. We highlight three here. First, sex as masculinity remains the most prominent heterosexual script on television. It even increased in its proportional pervasiveness, represented in almost three-quarters (72.1%) of the heterosexual script references, compared to Kim et al. at 45.4%. This script seems to be the dominant way that heterosexuality is scripted on television. Thus, while other components of the heterosexual script have lessened, the media seem to promote a “Casanova Complex” in which men are portrayed as sex-obsessed, even though this obsession does not match with reality (Smiler, 2013).

Second, the prevalence of the complementary good girls script was similar in the two samples. The notion that women's virtue is tied to their sexuality represents a stable minority of the representations of the heterosexual script (12.3% in the present sample versus 11.5% in Kim et al.'s sample). A stable message conveyed in television targeting young people is that in tandem with men's seemingly uncontrollable sexual impulses, a crucial component of women's sexual role is to manage male sexuality (Tolman, 2016).

Third, the homophobia scripts were rare in both studies, but even rarer in the present. One explanation for this is the increased presence of characters with non-heterosexual identities portrayed in the television shows in our sample, including *Glee*, *Scream*, and *Young and Hungry*. Perhaps the acceptability of mocking men for being gay and sexualizing the lesbian experience is falling out of favor in youth-targeted television.

Despite the similarities between the two studies, we highlight two notable differences. First, at 15.53 references per hour, the heterosexual script occurred more frequently in the Kim et al. (2007) than in the present study ($M = 4.60$ per hour). Thus, it can be concluded that average television viewers encounter the heterosexual script *less often* as they would have 15 years ago. At least in terms of frequency, youth-targeted television is not relying as much on the heterosexual

script as it was 15 years ago. This could be because the specialized platforms of the modern television landscape (e.g., Netflix, Free Form) have relative more freedom to represent sexuality in more diverse and gender-equitable ways compared to broadcast television from 15 years ago. Second, in the Kim et al. (2007) study, the ideas that women want more commitment and men want less commitment were relatively equally represented (8.0% and 8.4%). In the present study, we saw a greater disparity between the masculine and feminine versions of the commitment scripts. In 15.2% of the heterosexual scripts, men wanted less (or no) romantic commitment, but in only 3.8% of the heterosexual script references, women wanted more. Although the differences between each script in each study were not statistically significantly different (see Table 2), we tentatively point to a trend toward less commitment, a finding that is in line with the supposed norms of the hookup culture (Garcia et al., 2012).

Variations in the Heterosexual Script according to Contextual Features

As behavioral guides for how men and women “should” act in sexual encounters, sexual scripts are particularly salient during adolescence. Thus, we examined television programming that targeted audiences across adolescent development: early adolescents (or “tweens”) in tween programming, middle-to-late adolescents in teen programming, and late adolescents and emerging adults in programs featuring characters in their 20s (i.e., young-adult programs). One might view each type of programming as providing graduated steps in young viewers' sexual socialization. Tween programming is likely a source of anticipatory socialization, as the scripts provided there are for characters who are considering sexual relationships (Gerding & Signorielli, 2014). By contrast, teen programming provides scripts for early or new sexual relationships, while young-adult programming provides scripts for those who are sexually experienced.

The sexual references (about two per episode) and sexual scripts (about 36% of sexual references) in tween programs were rare. Of the scripts coded on tween shows, the only one

that had any regularity was the sex as masculinity script, occurring in 26.9% of the sexual references coded in tween programming. Thus, in terms of sexual socialization, tween programming is not providing much heterosexual scripting, but when the heterosexual script is invoked, it is dominated by the idea that boys and men are obsessed with sex. For example, as a way to feel acceptance, a character named Bernie from the tween show *Bizaardvark* says to his older friend that he dates a lot of girls immediately after murmuring something embarrassing that he hopes his friend did not hear. Similarly, the sex as masculinity script was invoked just as often by teen characters as by young-adult or adult characters. Across age of target audience and character age, the sex as masculinity script was the most prevalent and consistent component of the heterosexual script, which is a problematic message as it normalizes the idea of uncontrollable male sexuality (Smiler, 2013).

Beyond the sex as masculinity script, the portrayals of the good girls and masculine commitment scripts were more prevalent in young-adult programs than in tween programs; in both cases, teen programs split the difference. Similarly, both commitment scripts (masculine and feminine) were the *least* often invoked by teen characters, suggesting that the gendered dynamics of commitment (men avoid it; women want it) were more often the domain of older characters (young-adult and adult). Perhaps this theme was best exemplified in the young-adult show, *My Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. Main character Rebecca is “crazy” about securing a romantic commitment from her childhood boyfriend, and he does not reciprocate her level of interest. Similar storylines about twenty-something women wanting commitment and men avoiding it were prevalent in other young-adult shows such as *New Girl*, *Love*, and *Jane the Virgin*.

In examining the relational context of sexual behaviors, our findings mirror previous research that has showed that sex most often occurs between committed romantic partners (Eyal & Finnerty, 2009). Almost two-thirds of the sexual behaviors happened in the context of committed relationships (65.0%). However, one in four sexual behaviors (26.3%) were hookups, and a smaller portion of sexual behaviors were between casual sex partners (8.8%), a pattern of findings similar to a recent study of nine popular U.S. television shows (Timmermans & Van den Bulck, 2018). In general, the heterosexual script was more likely to be invoked in hookups than in committed relationships, and more specifically, the two male heterosexual scripts (sex as masculinity and masculine commitment) were more likely to occur in the context of hookups than in committed relationships. For example, in an episode of *Workaholics*, Bill has sex with a woman he does not know in a virtual reality experience while other men comment on his sexual prowess in causing a woman to climax 14 times. An example of the masculine commitment script in a hookup was in an episode of *Shadowhunters*. After sexual intercourse, a man and a woman lay in bed talking, and the male partner admits that he has another lover and he does not plan to stop seeing this other woman. Together, these findings suggest that the portrayals of hookups support the male components of the heterosexual script. In the absence of a well-defined relationship status, it appears that television characters fall back on the idea of men wanting a lot of sexual experiences and the notion that men prioritize sex over romantic relationships, which are both essential “rules” of the

hookup culture (Garcia & Reiber, 2008) and the “Casanova complex” (Smiler, 2013).

That the good girls and feminine commitment scripts did *not* vary by relational status suggests that hookups do not conform to the heterosexual script for female sexuality. Timmermans and Van den Bulck (2018) found that casual sex was enjoyed by female characters just as much as male characters, a finding that contradicts the idea that women deny their sexual pleasure and instead gatekeep male sexuality (Tolman et al., 2016). Thus, portrayals in which women enjoy casual sex *and* do not seek commitment would be a counter-script to the feminine commitment script. This possibility would be an important direction for future research.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the present study provides a useful replication and extension of Kim et al.’s (2007) foundational content analysis on the heterosexual script, there are limitations that must be considered. Our ability to conduct a one-to-one comparison between the present study and Kim et al.’s study was limited by our inability to attain acceptable intercoder reliability on feminine and masculine courtship strategies. Because these scripts were not often found in sexual references, we were not able to reliably detect these scripts in our sample of pre-unitized sexual references. In the future, broadening the unit of analysis to all romantic *or* sexual references might alleviate this issue. It is also important to keep in mind that 28 episodes out of the original sample of 210 (13.3%) did not contain any sexual references. Thus, by not coding romantic references, we are missing the invocations of the heterosexual script that did not involve sexual behavior or talk. Given the latent nature of the heterosexual script variables, our team underwent many hours of training focused on consensus-building to code the final sample. Because our goal was to compare our results to Kim et al.’s study, we were reluctant to change or refine the definitions of the codebook; thus, future research might re-conceptualize these variables to improve intercoder reliability.

A limitation of the coding scheme is that counter-scripts were not coded, e.g., women wanting less commitment and men wanting more. Strictly speaking, we cannot conclude that sexual scripts from 2016 are simply less relational than they were 15 years earlier. To make these types of inferences, examining counter-scripts to the heterosexual script will also be critical to future research. According to sexual scripts theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), available cultural scripts might reciprocally shape intrapsychic scripts. Thus, with more exposure to counter-scripts, such as female characters enjoying casual sex, we would expect teen and emerging adults’ intrapsychic scripts to adapt to these counter-scripts over time.

Other limitations pertained to the sample. Because shows popular with adolescent audiences have notoriously low Nielsen ratings and because the audience is highly dispersed across many networks and streaming services, an objective measure of what constitutes tween, teen, and young-adult programming is lacking. We defined the target audience based on the age of the characters in the central cast, but without specific viewership data, this is conjecture. Other programming popular among adolescent audiences, such as

reality shows and animated programs, should be examined in the future. Future research should continue to explore tween, teen, and young-adult programming in other venues as well, most notably on YouTube.

Conclusion

In television programs from 2016, the types of portrayals of the heterosexual script was similar to the sample of 2001–2002 television programs examined by Kim et al. (2007), but the frequency of the heterosexual script has dramatically declined. In both studies, the sex as masculinity sexual script dominated. Thus, a rather stable television view of human sexuality is that men are obsessed with sex, a script that is present equally in programming targeted at tween, teen, and young-adult audiences, and among teen, young-adult, and adult characters. Further, sexual references in the context of hook-ups, more so than committed relationships, invoked the sex as masculinity and masculine commitment scripts, suggesting that hooking up is compatible with the heterosexual script of male sexuality.

Based on these findings, it is clear that heterosexuality on television is portrayed as a male endeavor. In the context of the #MeToo movement, in which sexual harassment and assaults perpetuated by powerful men have come to light, such pervasive messages of men prioritizing sex above all else could potentially contribute to a culture in which men's sexually aggressive behaviors are excused based on their obsessive focus on sex. Thus, it is important for parents and educators to discuss the male-dominated heterosexual script with adolescents as well as to discuss other ways in which boys and men can express masculinity.

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