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WOMEN, SCRIPTS AND CONDITIONING

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***Abstract**: Despite educational and employment advancements, research indicates that traditional and sexual scripts are nevertheless often considered and adhered to as related to gendered conditioning. This manuscript reviews the traditional sexual script and sexual script theory, provides application illustrations of the theories and discusses the implications of such conditioning, particularly for women.*
***Keywords**: gender, sexual script theory, traditional sexual script, conditioning, culture*.

1. Introduction: Women, scripts and conditioning

Scripts and sexual scripts are complicated concepts, addressing expectations, roles, attitudes and behavior. According to Simon and Gagnon (1986), "Scripts are essentially a metaphor for conceptualizing the production of behavior within social life" (p. 98). Citing them, Beres (2014) argues, "At the most macro level, cultural scripts relate to gender roles within heterosexuality and how sexuality is supposed to be enacted (Simon & Gagnon, 1986)" (p. 77). Regarding expectations, Byers (1996) asserts, "Scripts are cognitive frameworks for how people are expected to behave in social situations" (p. 8), adding, "Sexual scripts are learned through socialization. The sexual script that is most pervasive in North America has been termed the traditional sexual script (TSS), and it contains very different expectations for men's and women's behavior and attitudes in sexual situations" (p. 9). Much is embedded within the western cultural script, from traditional expectations about what men and women are supposed to do, to attitudes and behaviorally enacted gender roles that the man should be the breadwinner, the family supporter, be obligated to carry on the family name via offspring, be the protector, and be the unemotional, steadfast one who takes challenge head-on, sans expression of fear or apprehension (e.g., Canary & Emmers-Sommer, 1997). Whether it is opening doors for women, pulling her chair out for seating at a dinner table, leading her path descending a stairwell and

falling behind her when ascending a stairwell (in case of a fall, the woman may be caught), walking curbside on a street so that the woman may be shielded from traffic perils, the aforementioned have long-traditionally been considered acts of safety and courtesy as related to women. Such acts are woven into scripts packaged and messaged as being in the interest of her comfort, protection and safety.

Indeed, some might acknowledge the existence of etiquette and chivalry (Napier-Fitzpatrick, n.d.), and of contexts in which women are on the receiving ends of such acts, such as businesses offering "Ladies' Night" or "No Cover for Ladies" promotions, to name a few. That said, whether interwoven into the cultural script or not, it could be argued that women did not necessarily sign up to be on the receiving end of such acts nor did men necessarily sign up to be culturally and socially expected to engage in such acts. Whether women asked for these "considerations" and regard them as being of value (or as tokenizing or reductionist) are worthy of conversation; similarly, whether men asked to carry out long-held, traditional, social expectations such as being responsible for breadwinning, carrying on the family name, or being the strong protector are topics worthy of discussion as well. Indeed, a much larger conversation exists regarding these scripted expectations as related to meaning, fluidity and practice, to name a few. Whereas this manuscript focuses on women and scripts, it is important to note that script expectations and assumptions affect men and women. Specific to women, it could be contended that headway has been made regarding women's progress and gender neutralization, evolving into a more leveled playing field; others might argue that the playing field remains nevertheless tilted. To that end, the purpose of this manuscript is to address women and scripts and how women are often conditioned to manage scripts (e.g., elevating, suppressing). A goal of the manuscript is to highlight scripts as related to implications for voice and empowerment.

2. Women and scripts

Traditional and sexual scripts provide maps, if you will, of cultural, personal and interpersonal expectations as related to attitudes, behaviors and patterns (Metts & Spitzberg, 1996). Multi-layered in nature, involving cultural, intrapsychic and interpersonal components, at the cultural and social levels, scripts provide guidance for what to expect in situations and provide guidance on how to think about things and act and react appropriately. Although traditional scripts as well as sexual scripts will be further explicated in the piece, it is important to initially highlight the importance and relevance of scripts as related to thought processes and behavior. Shank's (1986) script theory addresses scripts, plans and knowledge structures as

related to memory and language processing. When patterns deviate from a script (e.g., what to expect when going to a restaurant), the potential for misunderstanding exists (Shank & Abelson, 1977). Within western society and a dating context, for example, scripts provide blueprints for general expectations and practices. For example, a dating script often involves an individual asking for the date. Typically, it is then expected that the person who asks for the date provides the transportation for the date and pays the expenses for the date (e.g., dinner bill, movie tickets, etc.). Although, of course, deviations can exist, by and large, within traditionally scripted western cultural cisgender expectations, which tend to err as more patriarchal than matriarchal in nature, it is typically expected and practiced that the man will ask for the date, provide transportation for the date, and pay for the date (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010). Within western and many non-western societies, scripts often contend that women serve as relational gatekeeper, harmonizer, are tasked to keep the home together, and are expected to do the lion's share of the household and childcare duties, to name a few (Canary & Emmers-Sommer, 1997; Emmers-Sommer, 2002; Hochschild, 2003). Over the past several years, more and more women in the U.S. are entering college, graduate school and are the primary breadwinners in the family (e.g., Perry, 2020; Simons, 2020); yet, many of the household and childcare duties, emotional and relational work, and scripted expectations remain largely consistent. The pandemic has highlighted the aforementioned and has affected women in particular. In a Brookings 10A Gender Equality Series piece, Bateman and Ross (2020) argue:

> COVID-19 is hard on women because the U.S. economy is hard on women, and this virus excels at taking existing tensions and ratcheting them up. Millions of women were already supporting themselves and their families on meager wages before coronavirus-mitigation lockdowns sent unemployment rates skyrocketing and millions of jobs disappeared. And working mothers were already shouldering the majority of family caregiving responsibilities in the face of a childcare system that is wholly inadequate for a society in which most parents work outside the home. (para. 3)

According to the Women in the Workplace study (McKinsey, 2021), the largest investigation of women in corporate America and now in its seventh year of study, women were and are more adversely affected by the pandemic than men. Women, in comparison to men, experience burnout to a significantly greater degree.

Moreover, the feelings of stress and burnout extend beyond everyday women to women who are more culturally and globally recognized, and high-earners. For example, in a recent interview, Jennifer Lopez reflects, "As the mom in the family you can feel bad for yourself for a little while, but you can't feel bad for yourself for long. You have to get up and motivate

everybody else to get up" (Justich, 2020, para. 7). Lopez's comment not only reflects the sense of responsibility Lopez experiences as a parent, but also illustrates what is conditioned for many women, particularly from a traditionally scripted standpoint—that wishes, wants and desires of others are privileged and favored over those of one's own. Aligned with cultural scripts related to social and personal expectations for women, Lopez's comment reflects feelings about what is expected of her/them. Beyoncé shares similar sentiments in a recent interview, "I think like many women, I have felt the pressure of being the backbone of my family and my company and didn't realize how much that takes a toll on my mental and physical well-being…I have not always made myself a priority" (Bjornson, 2021, para. 3). Lopez's and Beyoncé's disclosures demonstrate that even women of vast accomplishment, earning power and public recognition can nevertheless feel vulnerable to perceived social and cultural expectations of them as women.

Women often put the health and wellness of a relational partner over oneself, the children over oneself, the maintenance and upkeep of the family fabric over oneself, and even enact the role of relational harmonizer and gatekeeper with random others to keep the peace (e.g., Byers, 1996; Emmers-Sommer, 2002). Women are often conditioned to be people pleasers, even if such decisions do not rest well with them and leave them feeling uneasy, uncomfortable or exhausted. A recent piece in *The Washington Post* addresses people pleasing, noting that women and minorities have long been conditioned to push down feelings in an effort to please others (Chiu, 2022). Indeed, implications exist regarding sexual health, personal and emotional health for privileging the script of others over that of one's own. That is, her/their personal needs or desires often become pushed down, suppressed, put on the back burner and hidden for the benefit of others (e.g., men, significant others, children, family, co-workers, etc.). Engaging in behaviors that benefit others can, of course, be important to relationship maintenance and satisfaction; however, it is important to consider if such other-oriented behaviors will relate to potential detriment to one's own wants, desires or well-being.

3. The privileging of others' scripts

Elizabeth Edwards, author, attorney, mother and wife of former presidential candidate John Edwards, passed in 2010 from metastatic breast cancer. Edwards lamented that they had postponed their breast cancer screening because they was busy on the campaign trail, supporting their husband's presidential run (Berman, 2010). Edwards' apparent decision to privilege their husband's presidential campaign over their own preventative health care is not uncommon, unfortunately, as women are conditioned to often put the health and well-being of others over

that of their own. Edwards' experience can be reflective of how personal wants and desires, what is best for oneself, can become buried and hidden in exchange for adhering to cultural, social or relational expectations. It is not atypical for women to be conditioned to consider the husband first, the partner first, the children first, the relatives first, the household first, not offending and keeping calm with the outside world…first (e.g., Canary & Emmers-Sommer, 1997). Research indicates, for example, that men who are in satisfying marriages experience elevated health benefits as compared to men who are single (Gottman, 1994). Not only do such men experience elevated mental and emotional health, but they also often benefit from their spouse overseeing their health practices (e.g., wife cooks healthy meals; wife reminds them to take their vitamins; wife reminds the husband to see the doctor for their yearly check-up). Interestingly, although Gottman's (1994) found health benefits for men in satisfying marriages, their research did not find a similar positive health benefit for wives.

Indeed, there exist potential variants amid "What I am expected to do?" and "What do I want to do?". When the answers to each of the two questions are not in harmony, which of the two answers prevails? Whose wishes are privileged? One's own wishes, those of the other (e.g., a relational partner, children), or, is there a dialogue that is mutually satisfying to the parties involved? The traditional sexual script (Byers, 1996) and sexual script theory (e.g., Simon & Gagnon, 1984, 1986), respectively, can assist in addressing these considerations. To begin, the traditional sexual script is explored. Subsequently, it will be discussed in relation to sexual script theory. Finally, the implications for women's empowerment and equality will be considered.

4. Traditional sexual script

Byers' (1996) traditional sexual script addresses traditional gender roles and expectations, particularly as related to dating, courtship and sexual attitudes and behavior. As aforementioned, the prevailing sexual script in North American society is the traditional sexual script and, with it, come varied expectations attitudinally and behaviorally as related to men and women (Byers, 1996). According to the traditional sexual script, men are conditioned to take the upper hand in relationships, be the pursuer, be the "conqueror," sow their wild oats and play the field. Women, on the other hand, are more often conditioned to be passive in heterosexual relational roles, privileging the man's ego, desires and wants. A traditional heterosexual dating script can include actions such as the man asking the woman for the date, providing transportation for the date and paying for the date. Some research suggests that the script also involves attendant sexual expectations, such as the woman being expected to engage

in some level of affection and/or sexual activity in exchange for the date (Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010; Morr & Mongeau, 2004). These types of scripted expectations and attendant attitudes and behavior cast a social exchange, marketplace framework for dating behavior—that is, what is it that each party brings to the table? What are each party's bargaining chips, if you will? From a traditional sexual script standpoint, men are conditioned to use bargaining chips such as information, status, money and power to attract and maintain a mate in the relational marketplace. Women, on the other hand, traditionally speaking, are conditioned to use bargaining chips such as physical appearance, charm, being supportive, demonstrating maternal instinct, as examples, in the relational marketplace. Black and white films of yesteryear depict women as femme fatale, demure, coy—even sometimes manipulative. The woman nods in agreement, laughs at their jokes, strokes their ego and plays second fiddle to their lead. The man is conditioned to be financial support; the woman is conditioned to be emotional support.

According to the traditional sexual script (Byers, 1996), men are expected to make the first move in initiating sexual contact, whereas women are expected to protect and gate keep sexual closeness. Specifically, "men are expected to initiate and vigorously pursue dates with women, all sexual interactions, and increasingly intimate sexual activities within any given sexual interaction. Women are expected to adopt a passive, defensive stance in order to protect their perceived worth. They are expected to be prepared for and to respond cautiously to these initiations" (Byers, 1996, p. 9). Men are conditioned sexually and relationally, per the script, to be interested in and pursuant of sexual episodes with various partners as opposed to focusing on one partner and one relationship. Women, on the other hand, according to the traditional sexual script, are conditioned to be sole-partnered and relationship-oriented. Masters, Casey, Wells and Morrison (2013) contend that men more often initiate sex, are valued for sexual skill and prowess, and are more interested in casual trysts with multiple partners as opposed to settling down with one partner. Thus, according to the traditional sexual script, men are more interested in being sexually proactive and in search of sexual pleasure in lieu of monogamy and committed relationships (e.g., Byers, 1996; Frith, 2009). The traditional sexual script suggests that men's status and value are enhanced by sexual pursuits (Byers, 1996).

The traditional sexual script posits that women want to be wanted, as opposed to wanting sex, and are painted as having less robust sex drives. They are conditioned to rebuff sexual overtures and their value as a woman is elevated by being chaste (Masters, Casey, Wells & Morrison, 2013). According to the traditional sexual script, men typically pursue sexual activity and women decide whether or not sexual activity takes place (e.g., Byers, 1996). Research on the traditional sexual script finds that the script is representative, particularly for

individuals with more sexual experience (LaFrance, 2010). Because women are conditioned to protect their reputations, women might engage in token resistance, which involves women rebuffing sexual advances when they actually desire the advances (e.g., Muehlenhard & Rodgers, 1998), due to concerns of being perceived negatively for voicing a desire for sex. Despite some headway regarding gender differences in sexuality and courtship, research nevertheless also continues to provide support for the traditional sexual script (e.g., Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010; LaFrance, 2010; Klein, Imhoff, Reininger & Briken, 2019). According to the traditional sexual script, women's reputations can be diminished if they are perceived as being sexually experienced; contrarily, men's reputations are elevated by engagement in sexual activity (Byers, 1996).

Health implications exist for following or not following the script. For example, research support exists demonstrating that women might be resigned to not requesting a condom before a sexual encounter, even if they have health concerns, because the woman is worried about their partner's perception (e.g., fears partner will think the woman is 'dirty'/has an STI/STD, partner might think that the woman is promiscuous, partner might think that the woman does not trust them) (e.g., Crowell & Emmers-Sommer, 2001; Emmers-Sommer & Allen, 2005). Related, research also indicates that women are more likely to exercise alternative forms of birth control (e.g., the pill) if the woman trusts their partner and perceives the relationship as being more advanced (e.g., committed, monogamous) (e.g., Crowell & Emmers-Sommer, 2001; Metts & Fitzpatrick, 1992).

The traditional sexual script contends that women are conditioned to believe that men learn to pay attention to sexual cues and might take any sign of interest (or not) as a reflection of the woman's sexual desire (Byers & O'Sullivan, 2013). For example, some research regarding sexual coercion and rape indicates that in instances where the woman has engaged in sexual activity with the man in the past or has allowed the man to pay for the date, the untoward acts are perceived and rated as more justifiable and as less likely to be representing an incidence of rape (Jenkins & Dambrot, 1987; Littleton & Axsom, 2003; Shotland & Goodstein, 1992). "Women's perceived worth and status are seen as being decreased by sexual experience" (Byers, 1996, p. 9). "Because women are depicted as not 'really' interested in sex and as having their worth decreased by being 'too' sexually available or seemingly 'too' interested in sex", the traditional sexual script "prescribes that women are expected to place limits on the level of sexual activity in which they engage with their male partner" (Byers, 1996, p. 10). Thus, women are expected to rebuff a man's sexual advances, even if they are interested in engaging in sexual

activity. As noted by Muehlenhard and Rodgers (1998), women can be expected to convey some level of "token resistance to a man's sexual advances".

These aforementioned assumptions are often embedded into cultural scripts and presented as exchanges socially accepted as "the way it is," even if not necessarily the case. Research by McClintock (2014), for example, finds that such cultural assumptions about men exchanging wealth for a woman's attractiveness in relational pairings oftentimes does not play out; that is, findings suggest that partners more likely pair due to matching on in-kind characteristics rather than due to cultural assumptions about socially exchanging the man's wealth for the woman's beauty. Specifically, in a large sample study (n = 1507) of dating, cohabiting and married couples McClintock found little evidence for the beauty-wealth exchange when controlling for matching (e.g., educated matches with educated, beauty matches with beauty, etc.). An article appearing in *The Atlantic* (Hamblin, 2014) addressed McClintock's (2014) findings that this long-held cultural assumption of the beauty-wealth social exchange does not necessarily hold. In a related piece (Singal, 2014), psychologist Eli Finkel commends McClintock's (2014) research and comments that scientists, too, can err by only examining men's earning potential and women's attractiveness instead of both variables as related to the genders in their investigations. Similarly, research by Masters et al. (2013) found some variation in men's and women's scripts, which could assist in alleviating gender imbalance. That said, however, the authors report that most participants' cultural scripts related to traditional gender expectations for men and women in their findings. Time will tell if research findings contribute to the academic literature by demonstrating whether modifications in scripts will affect long-held cultural assumptions and practices. Related to cultural scripts and expectations, sexual script theory (e.g., Simon & Gagnon, 1984, 1986) is reflected in aspects of the traditional sexual script (Byers, 1996). The theories are related in that, as argued by Byers (1996), the prevailing sexual script in North American is the traditional sexual script. Related, although a separate theory, sexual script theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1984, 1986) reflects, among other things, traditional sexual expectations, attitudes and behaviors as related to men and women.

5. Sexual script theory

5.1. Cultural scripts

In sexual script theory, cultural scripts largely involve social and cultural attitudes and beliefs about sexuality. Cultural scripts can serve as referents for individuals regarding social and cultural expectations of what will happen in a courtship or a sexual encounter. Cultural

scripts offer guidance as related to the communal life of a culture. As such, they are common to all individuals in a certain cultural context and may be expected to be similar, but variations can also exist. Specifically, when discussing scripts, Simon and Gagnon (1984) contend, "The relevance of the three levels of scripting—cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts--is far from identical in all social settings and/or for all individuals in any given setting" (p. 53). For example, as aforementioned, according to the traditional sexual script (Byers, 1996), a typical traditional, heterosexual dating script might involve the man asking for the date, providing transportation for the date and paying the date expenses. The culmination of the date, as often depicted in the media, might involve a kiss goodnight. According to the traditional sexual script, a man might pursue additional sexual interaction given the traditional sexual script's suggestion that men pursue sexual activity and seek conquests. Women, on the other hand, according to the script, are conditioned to protect their reputation and rebuff advances. Some literature also suggests that women play coy or even manipulative (Byers, 1996; Muehlenhard & Rodgers, 1998). Women are placed in a precarious position, according to the traditional sexual script and the cultural script, in that engaging more fully in sexual activity such as sexual intercourse might be perceived as being "easy" or "promiscuous," leading to a frowned upon reputation. On the other hand, women might fear that if they do not engage in some degree of sexual activity that their partner will lose interest and seek sexual engagement elsewhere. The cultural script and traditional, heterosexual scripts place men in the driver's seat and the woman as the reactant. Often, relational and sexual expectations are communicated via media and through socialization among members of the culture sources (Ward, Reed, Trinh & Foust, 2013).

Cultural scripts' presence is reflected beyond an individual internalizing gender expectations and patterns in cultural scenarios and parameters. Scripts also represent the rebuffing or rejection of expectations and engaging in new or varied cultural examples (Whittier & Melendez, 2004). Further development of scripts indicates that mental maneuvering that can occur during sexual interaction is considered within the context of the history and cultural aspects offering a roadmap for the occurrence (Gagnon, 1990). Overall, scripts are not necessarily comprised of actions; rather, they are "cognitive frameworks" (Byers, 1996, p. 8). These cognitive frameworks encompass rules and cultural expectations (cultural script) for the actions and behaviors, "individuals' interpretations of cultural norms" that "allows cumulative personal experiences" (interpersonal script), and individuals' creation of their own desires (intrapsychic script) (Dworkin & O'Sullivan, 2005, p. 150).

Dworkin and O'Sullivan (2005) address how culture is conveyed and affects intrapsychic and interpersonal scripts. The cultural script, as related to heterosexual dating and sexual initiation contexts, aligns with male-driven dating and sexual initiation practices (e.g., the man asks, the man pays for the date, the man initiates sex, etc.). In examining male-driven practice of sexual initiation, Dworkin and O'Sullivan found that while men typically initiated dates, they also expressed the desire for a more egalitarian approach to sexual initiation. That is, the authors found that men also expressed the desire for the women to initiate sex and express their sexual interest in them. Their findings suggest variation to traditional approaches to sexual initiation scripts. To that end, Dworkin and O'Sullivan argue, ". . . culture is not homogenous, that gender relations are fluid, complex, and differ by race and class, and that individual and intrapsychic meanings are actively created by individuals in ways that do not simply reflect dominant cultural meanings, but also challenge and construct new meanings" (p. 156). Wierzbicka (2005) argues the importance of considering the cultural script, experience and change. Beyond the cultural script, as acknowledged, intrapsychic and interpersonal scripts also exist with the possibility that the three levels of script do not mesh (e.g., Masters et al., 2013). As argued here, women are often conditioned to privilege the intraspsychic script of others' over that of their own. To that end, intrapsychic scripts are addressed in the following section.

5.2. Intrapsychic scripts

Intrapsychic scripts, according to Simon and Gagnon (1984), are linked to the individual and yet, are tied to the social. Specifically, intrapsychic scripts involve an individual's personal desires, wants and private thoughts. Intrapsychic scripts are linked to cultural scripts and interpersonal scripts. Indeed, what is happening socially and culturally can influence our private thoughts and desires. In turn, the influence of cultural scripts and intrapsychic scripts can be illustrated when played out in interpersonal scripts. Simon and Gagnon argue, "Intrapsychic scripting becomes a historical necessity as a private world of wishes and desires that are experienced as originating in the deepest recesses of the self must be bound to social life: individual desires are linked to social meanings" (p. 53). As aforementioned, women are often conditioned to suppress, sacrifice or temper their own intrapsychic script, particularly if variant from the cultural script or not aligned with the intrapsychic script of another. In many instances, whether sexually, relationally, professionally (to name a few), women privilege the intrapsychic script of another over that of their own. When women do choose to privilege their own, intrapsychic script, they are often chastised for it and made to feel guilty for choosing their

desires or happiness over that of others' or as equally important as those of others'. That is, the woman might be perceived as a 'bad mother' or a 'bad wife' when choosing to allocate time to do something for themselves versus using the time to do something for their children or partner. Canary and Emmers-Sommer (1997) argue that men often use their free time to engage in leisure activities that they enjoy (e.g., play golf). Women, on the other hand, according to the authors, often engage in chores to benefit others during their free time. For example, a woman might watch their favorite television program during her free time, but is dually sewing buttons onto their husband's shirt while doing so, unloading the dishwasher, folding laundry, preparing their children's school lunches, etc. In sum, the authors argue that a woman's 'free time' is often not truly, fully their own—it is often tied to the needs of others. Overall, it is important that individuals feel comfortable expressing their voice and feel confident and safe conveying their thoughts and feelings aside from alignment with cultural scripts and/or the intrapsychic scripts of others.

A recent piece by Loofbourow (2018), for example, addresses women's privileging of the partner's script, particularly in the sexual arena. Specifically, Loofbourow contends that women often experience physical pain during sexual encounters, such as during intercourse. Yet, according to the author, women can nevertheless continue to engage in intercourse without expressing their discomfort or refraining from the act due to the discomfort or pain. Loofbourow argues that women are conditioned to shut up and put up rather than express their voice and assert their agency. All too often, it seems as though the intrapsychic script of women serves as a hidden script—a script that does not see daylight in interpersonal script interplay.

5.3. Interpersonal scripts

Interpersonal scripts, as noted by Simon and Gagnon (1984), involve meshing personal wants and desires with cultural expectations and practices into interpersonal behavior. Individuals' wants and desires can be quite variant and reflect individuals' interpretation of the social and the cultural (e.g., Humphreys & Herold, 2007; Simon & Gagnon, 1984). These interpretations play out in a variety of contexts, sexual and otherwise (e.g., Dworkin & O'Sullivan, 2005). Simon and Gagnon (1984) address individuals' attempts to connect cultural interpretations and sensemaking with ways of thinking and acting with personal thoughts and private wishes and desires in interpersonal interaction. Conditioned to be relational harmonizers and people pleasers, it is not uncommon for women to engage or interact in spaces that they are not wholly comfortable with (e.g., Emmers-Sommer, 2002).

The documentary *I am because we are* (Rissman, 2008) addresses challenges in Malawi such as hunger, water shortage and the HIV/AIDS crisis. How to reconcile traditional beliefs and customs with newer ways of thinking, technology, medicine, western influence, etc. are front and center in the piece. The documentary's title reflects the African philosophy of Ubuntu—the notion that one cannot be without the influence of others—the belief that self-interest is secondary to what is best for the community (Paulson, 2020). Examining the community focused center, one might argue that the cultural script takes precedence over the intrapsychic script. Whereas there are many scenes in the documentary that are quite compelling, one scene in particular speaks. The scene focuses on a young woman by the name of Joyce and their young son Aaron. Joyce is HIV positive and their son Aaron has AIDS and succumbs to the disease. Chituwe, the Chief of the Chadzuke village where Joyce lives, is interviewed about Joyce's child's death from AIDS. Chituwe discusses, now that their son has passed, that Joyce must engage in a village custom of "cleansing." Chituwe further explains that an individual, identified as a Wapadera, will come to the village to "cleanse" Joyce via sexual intercourse. Chituwe explains that the Wapadera is a married man who hails from another village. Chituwe furthers that no one in the village will be able to engage in sexual activity until Joyce is cleansed. Just before the Wapadera has sex with Joyce, he will say to them, "Ndikupita kufa" ("Cleansing death"). Chituwe explains that the Wapadera has to have sex with Joyce three times on the first day and will say to Joyce the following morning, "Ndikupita unialumbi" ("You have been cleansed"). In her interview, Joyce shares that they are uncomfortable with this cultural tradition, but must participate thereby keeping their personal wishes, their intrapsychic script, hidden. Joyce laments, "I am just a child. I do not have the authority to change their decision. That's the way it is". Chituwe acknowledges that the cleansing practice continues to spread HIV in the village; yet, also argues that AIDS and their cultural practice are distinct. Specifically, Chituwe contends, "Because this cleansing ritual was around long before AIDS" and that "AIDS is a guest". Chituwe expresses that the cleansing tradition has been around for generations and that AIDS is attempting to disturb their long running cultural practice, acknowledging, "Actually, it has already disturbed us". Joyce sadly acknowledges that because their child has died, they must go through this cleansing ritual. Joyce's voice trails off in the documentary as they lament that their situation is "not good," asking, "Will I live like this forever?". The scene ends with Chituwe acknowledging that once Joyce engages in the cleansing ritual, that their life can return to "normal" (Rissman, 2008). The film addresses the challenge of many Chiefs either not understanding HIV/AIDS and/or being unwilling to teach about the afflictions to the village. Butting heads are tradition and

customs versus contemporary health crises. In watching the scene, one observes who (the Chief) or what (the cultural traditional practice) is in power and who (Joyce) is acquiescing to discomfort. Joyce's narrative speaks to succumbing to a fearful and unwanted place to privilege the village custom and the village cultural script over their own intrapsychic script of feeling fearful and "not good" about the practice.

The aforementioned provides but one example of how cultural norms and scripts can affect attitudes and behavior and how the notions of privileging the scripts of others' over one's own can exist across cultures. As noted, Byers (1996) argues that scripts are cognitive frameworks that provide guidance for behavior (p. 8). Scripts typically operate unconsciously and are often resistant to change (Demorest, 1995). In the film, "I am because we are" (Rissman, 2008), resistance to change is addressed. Traditional and cultural scripts for women often involve their privileging the script of the other for the greater good of the relationship. As illustrated in the excerpt, heavy emotional and physical burdens can present due to expectations and privileging of scripts.

6. Implications and future considerations

In a piece published by the Indo Asian News Service about film project *Rajma Chawal*, published in the *Hindustan Times*, Indian filmmaker Leena Yadav's films are discussed as "opinion pieces on topics that matter to a progressive mind" ("Some of the biggest gatekeepers of patriarchy are women…", 2018). In the interview, Yadav comments on their earlier film, *Parched*, which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival in 2015 and later won the Impact Award at the Stockholm International Film festival (*Some of the biggest gatekeepers of patriarchy are women*…, 2018). The film *Parched* addresses patriarchy, gendered conditioning and survival. Asked about changes in the society around gender equality, Yadav shares with *IANS*:

> Actually, *Parched* has come from the place of social conditioning of men and women rather than talking about the gender equality. The way we are conditioned based on our gender is causing the discrimination...you understand that right? Who is the first teacher of a child? It is his/her mother. Some of the biggest gatekeepers of patriarchy are women. (*Some of the biggest gatekeepers of patriarchy*…, 2018)

Filmmaker Yadav comments that both men and women experience mind conditioning related to social expectations. Yadav furthers that it is positive, changing time for women and

voice, but that it is important that these changes are handled adeptly so that progress is not disrupted (*Some of the biggest gatekeepers of patriarchy*…, 2018).

Indeed, advancement exists from decades' past (e.g., Masters et al., 2013). Several data points demonstrate that more women are outpacing men in higher education. In an article citing data from the Council of Graduate Schools, Perry (2020) notes that women, for example, outnumbered men in 2019 in terms of entering grad school and earning PhDs (Perry, 2020). Similarly, more women have entered law school than men over the past few years (Pisarcik, 2019). That said, Pisarcik also notes that those enrollment numbers are not translating into women in leadership positions in the legal profession and the number of women leaving the profession is concerning. Similarly, a recent study by Bursztyn, Fujiwara and Pallais (2017) found that female MBA students downplayed their ambition, desired salary and willingness to travel or work long hours on a questionnaire when they perceived that male classmates would have access to their desires and ambitions; that is, the women downplayed their professional ambition because they feared men would find it off-putting.

Data also reflect that more and more women are the sole and/or primary breadwinner. For example, according to Simons (2020), 2018 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics demonstrate that 30% of women in heterosexual, dual earner marriages earn more than their husbands. Simons (2020), notes, however, in the *NPR* piece that, despite the trend, a stigma about women out-earning men still exists (Simons, 2020). Related, a recent study examining over 6,000 American heterosexual households finds that men felt comfortable with women contributing financially to the marriage until the woman started out-earning the man. Findings indicate that wives out-earning their husbands lead to the men feeling increasingly stressed and uncomfortable with the dynamic. These feelings are reflective of traditional scripted norms that the man should be the primarily breadwinner in a relationship (Syrda, 2020).

Traditional sexual scripts tend to be heteronormative in nature and, despite progress regarding fluidity and inclusivity, still appear to be strongly anchored in terms of men's and women's conditioning. Masters, Casey, Wells and Morrison (2013) argue that "heterosexual relationships are on a significant stage on which men and women enact gender" (p. 410). Men and women are socialized through interpersonal, individual and macro structures about what it means to be masculine or feminine (Risman, 2018). Gendered expectations, attitudes and behaviors are influenced by cultural scripts and those scripts, in turn, affect intrapsychic and interpersonal scripts. Cultural influence can be reflected lock-step with the intrapsychic and interpersonal levels, or reflect adjustment and change (Masters et al., 2013). Indeed, research findings also continue to demonstrate that many men and women still revert to more traditional

typed gender roles, attitudes and expectations when it comes to dating and courtship (e.g., Emmers-Sommer et al., 2010; Lamont, 2020; Masters et al., 2013). Similarly, as the current COVID crisis unfolds before us in real time, much of the data demonstrate that the pandemic is hitting women particularly hard (McKinsey, 2021). A recent piece in the *New York Times* illustrates that the woman is often the individual who has lost a job and/or had hours cut; the woman is the individual doing triple duty in trying to work, keep a home and homeschool and/or assist children at home during pandemic online learning (Cohen, 2020). Many of these home and childcare expectations have traditionally fallen upon women (e.g., Canary & Emmers-Sommer, 1997; United Nations, "Put women and girls at centre of COVID-19 recovery: UN Secretary-General. UN News," 2020); however, the pandemic has heaped extra servings of these expectations upon women. Many women feel as though if they complain or express dissatisfaction or exhaustion that they will be perceived as a bad mother, poor caretaker or unsupportive spouse or partner to a significant other. As aforementioned, a recent large scale study among working women continues to demonstrate findings that women are adversely affected by COVID and experiencing burnout (McKinsey, 2021).

Women exhibiting self-motivation and drive can be perceived as 'bitchy' or out of their lane or out of their place. Given the conditioning to often be nonassertive, women can lack the self-confidence needed to believe that they have the right to voice (e.g., Kay & Shipman, 2014).

Women's mental and emotional health are also often hanging in the balance due to scripted expectations and practices of being the relational harmonizer and gatekeeper. If the family fabric unravels or the marriage/relationship 'fails', women often internalize the failure given they are conditioned to be the emotional gatekeeper and often privilege the others' needs and wants over their own. That is, they privilege the other's intrapsychic script in lieu of their own intrapsychic script during interpersonal script interplay.

What steps might contribute to eventual paradigmatic shifts in scripts? Why is it that despite the increases in women's enrollment and/or majority representation of enrollment in college, graduate school, law school, etc. outcomes oftentimes are not equating with a more leveling of playing fields? Kodelja (2016) argues that equality of opportunity is not necessarily synonymous with equality of outcome. In addressing their Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations (2022) tackles the positions of girls and women of the world and opportunities for advancement. Similar to the aforementioned, the United Nations report ("Put women and girls at centre of COVID-19 recovery: UN Secretary-General. UN News," April 9, 2020) also acknowledges that the pandemic has been disproportionately challenging for women as many serve on healthcare front lines and engage in unpaid homeschooling and childcare. In April of

2020, the UN Secretary General put forth a call to prioritize girls and women in COVID-19 recovery efforts amid concerns that the pandemic has contributed to regression in their progress (United Nations, "Put women and girls at centre of COVID-19 recovery: UN Secretary-General", 2020).

Within the United States, England, Levine and Mishel (2020) argue that gender equality is halting and coming toward a standstill. Worldwide, an October 2020 UN Report notes that despite the rise in women's education, myriad issues remain. For example, according to the report, women's placement in the workforce has stagnated over the last 25 years, with fewer than 50% of women worldwide being in the workforce. Household chores and childrearing duties continue to be assigned to women disproportionately across cultures (e.g., Canary & Emmers-Sommer, 1997; Rao, May 12, 2019; United Nations, "Put women and girls at centre of COVID-19 recovery: UN Secretary-General. UN News," 2020). The UN Report continues that women have not made much progress in terms of occupying managerial roles in the past 25 years, with only 28% of women worldwide holding managerial positions—these statistics drop to roughly 7% when accounting for female CEOs. Further, "In political life, while women's representation in parliament has more than doubled globally, it has still not crossed the barrier of 25% of parliamentary seats in 2020. Women's representation among cabinet ministers has quadrupled over the last 25 years, yet remains well below parity at 22%" (United Nations, "Women's job market participation stagnating at less than 50% for the past 25 years, finds UN report", 2020, para. 6). The UN report contends that women continue to be in the minority worldwide when it comes to holding political positions and seats and rights to land. Women also continue to experience sexual violence and domestic abuse, forced marriage and inability to control their own bodies (United Nations, 2022).

Stoet and Geary (2019) examined gender differences in areas of human development such as education, health related issues and life satisfaction and found that, globally, countries with reduced advancement in human development tend to disadvantage women and girls whereas countries with higher levels of human development privilege boys and men. The authors found that much tied to gender roles and scripts as related to the division of labor in poorly developed countries and tied more so to health disparities in developed countries.

Related, according to the UN report, on October 2, 2020, over 100 countries committed to taking tangible actions to promote gender equality for women and girls worldwide, first sparked by the Beijing Platform for Action, put into place over 25 years prior (UN Women, "Press release: At UN high-level meeting, world leaders reignite the vision of the Beijing Platform for Action, the most transformative agenda for advancing gender equality", 2020). In

terms of where we go from here, the report offers benchmarks regarding girls and women to strive for moving forward, including ridding of discrimination of all forms, forced marriage, genital mutilation, violence and trafficking and putting into place mechanisms for women to hold high offices, control their bodies and reproductive health, offer girls and women access to technology, equalizing household and caretaking roles, and enabling policy changes regarding education, finances, and property ownership, to name a few. Academically, of value is continued investigation regarding voice, empowerment and parity. In working toward shifts in cultural scripts and gender parity, myriad changes and adjustments are needed, from modifications in dating scripts (e.g., Lamont, 2020), to shifts in educational, economic, political and social policies, including who is empowered to make and enforce such policies, (e.g., England, Levine & Mishel, 2020; United Nations, 2022), to changes at home in terms of household and childcare duties and responsibilities, to name a few (e.g., Rao, 2019; United Nations, 2020).

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to address traditional and sexual scripts and gendered expectations and practices, particularly for women, and, subsequently, to discuss how they maintain gender inequalities despite some progress being made toward change. Continued conversation about women feeling comfortable and worthy of privileging their wants, desires and voice is necessary. This sentiment holds beyond women, of course, to individuals and/or groups as related to considerations such as voice and placement within social and political structures, to name a few. It is important to note that privileging one's own feelings and agency need not be at the dismissal of feelings or agency of another; rather, individuals matter. For many years, women fought to have a seat at the table where placemats and placeholders had been traditionally quite static, depending on the table's structure and context. That said, even if seated, the table before us can remain rectangular with a designated head of table; seating can remain unevenly spaced, and the seats themselves can be positioned in uneven heights. Data points demonstrate some progress; but, as noted, not all progress is translating to states of change regarding comfort, advancement, empowerment, constancy and consistency with those changes. Indeed, more progress is to be made in bringing oft-hidden scripts to daylight and addressing educational, economic, political, health, social and relational implications as we continue to move toward a round table with more equalized seating.

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