Spring 2017

Remnants of the Bodice Ripper: How Consent is Characterized in Heterosexual and Lesbian Erotic Romance Novels

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Senior Project Submitted to

The Division of Science, Mathematics, and Computing

of Bard College

By

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2017

Acknowledgements

A very special thank you to my Senior Project Advisor, Kristin Lane. I will always be glad that through stress, frustration, and many deadlines, you and I could always share a laugh. Thank you for encouraging me to create such a unique project, and pushing myself further than I thought I could go.

To my friends, thank you for tolerating my late nights, grumpy attitudes, and emotional breakdowns throughout this project. I hope you enjoy the end result. May we always be good forces upon our respective passions.

To my boyfriend, Justin, thank you for listening to me quote the corniest excerpts of erotic novel after erotic novel, and assuring me I am indeed a superwoman when I doubted myself the most.

To my parents, thank you for teaching me the importance of a college education from an early age. Despite the numerous times I've wanted to give up, I am so thankful you both helped me reach the extremely satisfying end of my undergraduate education.

To Tom Hutcheon, Amy Winecoff, Sarah Dunphy-Lelii and Farnaz Kaighobadi of Bard's Psychology Department, past and present, thank you for continually introducing me to novel fields of interest and providing me with the necessary resources to get the most out of my Psychology degree. You all make science look super cool!

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Abstract

The present study aims to better understand the relationship between gender role representation and characterization of sexual consent in erotic romance novels. To test this, two coders read the current best-selling heterosexual and lesbian romance novels listed on Barnes & Noble's website and coded for both adherence to the Western Sexual Script and clarity of sexual consent. Western Sexual Script is the pervasive set of typical gender roles perpetuated in contemporary media. Statistical analyses found that there was a main effect of character's gender identity on "gender typical traits" for wealth, sexual experience, dominance, and passivity, meaning that masculine characters received higher ratings of wealth, sexual experience, and dominance, and feminine characters received higher ratings of passivity. Higher ratings of clear sexual consent were found in lesbian versus heterosexual novels. Limitations and direction for future studies are discussed.

While recent data have shown that 28% of U.S. adults have not read a book in the past year, the remaining 72% includes readers of print books, audio books, and, most recently, e-books (Raine, 2015). Authors are forced to create more compelling plot lines with the growing prevalence of "hotter" pastimes, such as TV, social media, and on-demand movies. So what are people reading when they choose to pick up a book? According to 2014 Nielsen results, the Romance/Erotica genre profited the most of any genre, coming in with $1.44 billion in revenue (*RWA*, 2014).

The present study is interested in how consent is characterized in contemporary erotic romance novels. Specifically, I am looking to see if there is a difference in the way that consent is characterized in heterosexual versus lesbian erotic romance novels. This is considered in light of sexual script and the dialogue regarding sexual interactions. Using the Western Sexual Script as a guide, a model of gender role representation, I will assess how the characters in the books fit into the gendered roles ascribed by said script. Secondly, I will code for presence or absence of explicit consent leading up to sexual encounters between the characters in the books. These two explorations of gender and script will help to create a more comprehensive understanding of gender roles and power dynamics perpetuated by contemporary literature.

Given the small amount of literature and colloquial understanding of sexual violence in lesbian relationships, I am interested in how consent is characterized in novels depicting lesbians, void of masculinity. I am also motivated by the construction of gender roles, sexual script, and expectations put forth by the media and how it is perpetuated in real life. While my study cannot prove whether or not these books encourage and/or cause action in reality, it is important to consider their content in light of their popularity and primary audience.

It is also essential to consider the relationship between domestic violence and/or rape and these books. While studies have shown that adult magazine circulation, notably including *Playboy* and *Hustler*, correlates with rape incidence state-by-state, it is unclear the direction of this relationship (Scott, 1988). Regardless of the results of the present study, the findings will have a similar takeaway.

Because of the clear demand for these books as noted in the first paragraph, this study will look at the best-selling Erotic Romance Novels for both heterosexual and lesbian characters rather than a singular entity's "Best Rated List," such as *NYT* Best Book list, which is selected based off of editors' opinions (*NYT*, 2016). This aims to capture the cultural significance of the genre at hand.

My first research question is, "How is consent characterized in heterosexual erotic romance novels compared to lesbian erotic romance novels?" This will be assessed using a coding system examining the presence or absence of explicit consent of sexual acts on a 7-point scale.

My second research question is, "How does the Western Sexual Script relate to presence or absence of explicit consent?" More information about sexual scripts and the Western Sexual Script will be described within this introduction.

I hypothesize that less explicit consent will be present in heterosexual versus lesbian erotic romance novels. I also hypothesize that those books that more closely follow the Western Sexual Script will have less incidences of explicit consent than those that do not follow the Western Sexual Script.

To better understand the foundation of the study, namely, the way that gender differences are perpetuated through these novels via a sexual script, let us first review the basis of script theory and gender roles.

Schema and Script

The present study aims to better understand the perpetuation of roles in the media. To first understand this, one must reflect upon the cognitive processes of categorizing people into groups. Humans use shortcuts known as *heuristics* in the psychological community to help us make sense of the world. The *representativeness heuristic*, in particular, uses information that we know to make inferences about a person and/or group of people (Kahneman, 1974). When using the representativeness heuristic, one assesses an object or person and compares its similarity to other object or people within the category. While we use heuristics for the sake of time and effort reservation, it can likely be unreliable. Further, this process oftentimes feeds into stereotyping and bias. The landmarks of this theory, Kahneman and Tversky, use a librarian as an example - your neighbor is quiet, introverted and withdrawn. We assess the likelihood that his profession is a librarian by how well these traits line up to our stereotype as "librarian," (Kahneman, 1974). As you can see, a set of expectations is upheld by society of what a librarian "should" look like.

Later studies have confirmed that people, beginning in childhood, use the representativeness heuristic to make decisions about people. A study testing 1st, 3rd, and 6th graders found that this heuristic arises in early age.

To test use of the heuristic, the researchers presented the children with 13 scenarios and asked them to answer the corresponding questions. An example of this scenario is as follows:

"Juanita's class (residence hall): 10 girls are trying out to be cheerleaders and 20 are trying out for the band. Juanita is very popular and very pretty. She is always telling jokes and loves to be around people. Do you think Juanita is trying out to be a cheerleader or for the band?" (Jacobs, 1991, pg. 169). This quote outlines some of the traits that we rely upon to cue us into understanding the person of interest; for example, popularity and attractiveness are expected traits of cheerleaders, in this case. They then asked the children why they chose that answer, and coded for use of the representativeness heuristic.

The researchers found that the children used information based off of judgements of social groups (the representativeness heuristic) and that the use of this increased over time, meaning that 6th graders used it more than 1st graders (Jacobs, 1991).

Our perception of cheerleader and librarian are based off of both cheerleaders and librarians we know and the media portrayal of these identities. But this judgement occurs in something as broad as gender, as well. What is a woman like? What is a man like? We know that there are socially constructed answers to these questions, but where do they come from, and do they really affect they way we treat one another?

Like a heuristic, a schema is another mode of organizing information about the world. People have *gender schemas*, or the way that we organize our beliefs about men and women. *Gender typing* is a feature of gender schema, and is defined as "the process by which a society thus transmutes male and female into masculine and feminine," (Bem, 1981, pg. 354).

Whether or not we have experienced a circumstance or not, humans have schemas for most social interactions. A *schema* is defined as "a knowledge structure consisting of any organized body of stored information"; or more simply, an expectation of what behaviors are appropriate in the world (Gilovich, 2012, pg. 17). For example, we have schemas regarding

parties, public transportation, ordering at a restaurant, and sexual initiation. Although one might

not have been on a subway before, there is likely a set of expectations regarding how to navigate

the subway. An existing schema of the subway is likely characterized by many people, frequent

stopping, or dirtiness.

     Script, on the other hand, is a similar thought process to schema, but more specific to

one's actual interactions. The term *script* was coined by sociologist Madeleine Akrich in her

1992 article, "The De-Scription of Technical Objects." In this piece, she draws parallels between

society and technology, in the sense that just as objects are designed to fit into their surroundings,

scripts are designed for humans to fit into their schemas and therefore experiences.

     "... we have to go back and forth continually between the designer and the user, between

the designer's projected user and the real user, between the world inscribed in the object and the

world described by its displacement, (Akrich, 1992, pg. 209). Hence came the formation of

script as a concept in which society dictates, yet people find ways to fit into. In sum, a script is

how we fit into our existing schemas.

     Using the subway example again, the script of a person on a subway may include letting

a pregnant woman sit instead of you, or keeping your bag close to your body as to leave more

room for others.

     For the present study, schema and script are imperative to understanding how men and

women are treated differently in society. A gender schema, for example, is that men are more

dominant than women. The script of a woman, then, may be to let her boyfriend dominate her in

bed. My research is interested in how erotic romance authors construct the gender and sexual

scripts of their characters.

The process of using schema and script use is an adaptive characteristic of humans, or else we would be forced to treat every new encounter as completely foreign. These cognitive processes create shortcuts to navigate the world and our social interactions.

A study looking at self sex-typing using the Bem Sex Role Inventory found that those men and women who received high scores consistent with their gender (i.e. high "masculinity" score when a male) were more likely to gender nouns in a word-pairing exercise (Bem, 1981).

In sum, men and women who reported having a stronger ties to their gender (via a higher score on the Sex Role Inventory) applied gender to word pairs more often than those who did not score consistently with their gender, suggesting that their self-schema of gender influenced their perception of the external world, in this case, common words. With this in mind, this study provides evidence for gender schema and therefore application of gender stereotypes. It also supports the idea that abstract objects and verbs have gendered connotations, suggesting that heuristics and gender stereotypes, as previously mentioned, build off of such words.

To answer the question, "where do these expectations derive from?" a study was conducted to assess the role of parents. The basis of this study relies on the *expectancy effect*, or the phenomena that one anticipates a result and consequently acts consistent with that effect, unconsciously. The study uses the fact that women self-select into secretarial work versus vocation work, despite the fact that programs exist to make entry equal for both genders, (Eccles, 1990).

Children grow up with expectations of who they should be, usually with large influence from their parents and educators. In an analysis of sex education classes, female sexuality is often cast into a negative light compared to male sexuality. It was also found that as boys and

into manhood, men often "swap stories" about sexual encounters and circulate pornography, whereas this was not present in female friend-groups, (Hauck, 2015).

Parents are influential as well. A longitudinal 7-year long study followed a sample of kindergarteners and their partners and found, on average, parents rated their daughters are more competent in English than sports, and vice versa for their sons (Eccles, 1990).

This study provides evidence that parents hold a set of expectations for their children based off of their gender. Based off of what we know of men and women's tendencies to select different occupations, the researchers hypothesize that a "self-fulfilling prophecy" is occurring here, meaning that the children are growing up with internalized beliefs about their strengths and weaknesses based off their gender and therefore acting in line with them, (Eccles, 1990).

But really, what should one make of this? Even if gender roles do exist, are they necessarily problematic in our daily lives?

Evidence says yes, they are. A study looking at gender roles and objectifying media showed that men who were exposed to TV shows that objectify women were more likely sexually harass and coerce women than men who were exposed to both a TV show with women in professional roles and a control nature TV show (Galdi, 2014).

This study supports the idea that internalized gender norms (or "masculine norms" as labeled in this study) correlate with higher Likelihood of Sexual Harassment scores, which are also heightened by exposure to objectifying media. Evidence like this that presents real-life consequences of gender role consumption is necessary to understand the importance of studying gender presentation in the media. With the present study in mind, both the characterization of consent and gender role typicality in erotica could potentially affect readers more than they even know.

Now that we are familiar with how gender roles emerge, how they are perpetuated, and how they translate into the real world, we can better understand the way that gender roles influence how men and women interact in their sexual habits, which will be described in the following section.

Sexual Script Theory

If you recall, *scripts* are the expected dialogue and behaviors that stem from our schemas of social interactions. Social expectations are held for men and women differently, including their sexual habits. One example of this set of expectations is known as the Western Sexual Script, and while it the terminology dates back to 1973, it outlines the conventional way that women and men are depicted for years before, (Gagnon*,* 1973).

A gendered script is essentially what roles we as a society assign to men and women; it is the set of expectations we have regarding the behaviors and interests of men and women distinctly (Gagnon, 1973). While this theory is often discussed within the conversation of socialization, other scientists theorize that gendered and sexual scripts are actually cognitive - humans are socialized to shape their cognitive beliefs regarding genders and therefore shape the way they treat gender (Frith, 2001).

The idea of the "Western Sexual Script" is imperative to understand the manifestation of gendered roles in general, specifically in romance novels for the sake of the current study. The idea of male dominance compared to female submission, for example, is described as part of the Western Sexual Script, as coined by researchers Gagnon and Simon (1973). Another trope is as follows: Western men are thought to focus on sexual pleasure and/or experimentation whereas

Western women are thought to be more concerned with romance in terms of sexual activity.

(Gagnon, 1973).

Traditional Sexual Script (a closely related derivative of the Western Sexual Script),

describes men as "oversexed" and women as "undersexed"; men are seen as "initiators," whereas

women are "recipients." The Traditional Sexual Script is unique as it posits that men are

"enhanced" by their sexual encounters, whereas women are "devalued." Researchers conclude

that these characteristics encourage sexual coercion – a man is likely to initiate sex if it increases

his value as a man amongst other "oversexed" men; on the other hand, because of the woman's

"undersexed" nature, she must be coerced into having sex and play a passive role, as sex

threatens her value in society, (Byers, 1996). In a 1996 study, two researchers asked college-

aged, unmarried men what they thought a woman meant when they denied his sexual advance.

While the majority of men reported that the woman wanted them to stop, 22% believed they

wanted the man to try again on a later date, 29% believed that they wanted the man try again

later that night, and 15% did not believe that the woman wanted the man to stop his advances,

(Byers, 1996).

This finding indicates that the communication between two partners is not necessarily on

the same page. What one is saying is not being taken to be what one means, which has dangerous

implications. In sum, it suggests that sexual coercion is the result of male expectation in response

to female expectation; in this case, the man expects to have sex while he assumes the female to

not outright admit to wanting sex, as it may "devalue" her, according to Byer's theory (Byer,

1996).

According to Gagnon and Smith, scripts are formulated along three levels: "cultural

scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts," (Gagnon, 1973). It should be noted that

a sexual script is not necessarily the same as sexual behavior – the script is how sexual

expectations are portrayed, although behavior may ultimately differ.

Interpersonal scripts are the dialogue (be it a romance novel, a movie, an online dating

scenario, or even a real-life interaction) in which one tailors the broader cultural information, or

the schema, regarding gender roles to fit the specific interaction at hand.

Lastly, the intrapsychic scripts are a form of internal dialogue that strengthens behavioral

expectations through the form of memories, fantasies, and so on. For example, women may

fantasize that their boyfriend is more dominant in bed than he is in reality, for it is consistent

with the Western sexual script for men to be dominant and women to be submissive. Seeing as

though romance novels are aimed at women's fantasies, intrapsychic scripts are particularly of

interest to studying the presence of sexual fantasy in contemporary literature.

These scripts oftentimes emerge around the same time as puberty, but are not limited to.

"Coming out" as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, finding oneself attractive, and rape stories, for

example, are part of the foundation of discovering the sexual self via intrapsychic scripts. To

look further into this, Michael S. Kimmel, author of *The Sexual Self: the Construction of Sexual

Scripts*, conducted a series of interviews regarding the formation of sexual scripts.

Based off his interviews with white, middle-class Americans aged 19-26, he found that

"dirty magazines" such as *Playboy* and other books played a large role in young people's

introduction to sex. Many women reported even feeling scared or bad as girls about the

depictions of women (*"Oh my gosh, is this what I'm going to look like??")*. Another common

trope found was feeling "old" or slow in sexual development. One woman reported feeling "old"

for her first kiss at 15. Others compared themselves to their friends, feeling that they were less

"promiscuous" than their friends and peers.

"Losing virginity" is another popular focal point. While many had awkward experiences, some were good, and others were a result of sexual trauma and/or rape (Kimmel, 2007). Similarly, a study assessing feelings of virginity status in college students, females felt "more pressure" to remain a virgin than their male counterparts, (Sprecher, 1995).

The qualitative data of Kimmel's interviews is telling of how the average American constructs his/her sexual self, of the beginning of his/her intrapsychic script.

Intrapsychic scripts often come through in filmmaking; in particular, in porn. Kimmel describes the script-writing process in pornography - or, lack thereof. While a scene and theme are set, oftentimes the story unfolds based off of the director's personal intrapsychic script, or his/her fantasies, (Kimmel, 2007). Considering that up until recently, the pornography industry was comprised of nearly only male directors, the scripts perpetuated in most pornography are from the perspective of the male fantasy (Pearson, 2015).

These three levels - cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic - work in tandem to localize the more general beliefs arising from the cultural script, (Gagnon, 1973).

Romance novels published between 1989 and 2009 adhered to the Western sexual script more often than not (Menard, 2011). Researchers found that distinct characteristics of the script, such as general attractiveness, heterosexuality, being able-bodied, penile-vaginal intercourse, and "vanilla" sex (no "kinky" sexual behaviors) consistently appeared throughout these novels, as well as the appearance of the script. The only significant change across time in these novels was the use of contraceptive increased in the latter years (Menard, 2011).

Romance books published between 1989-2009 tended to fall along a script that granted more agency and dominance to male characters than to female characters. In addition, male characters were more likely to have had prior sexual experience compared to female characters

and to initiate sexual encounters more often (Menard, 2011). This difference in sexual behavior contributes to the power dynamic (in this case, imbalance), between men and women as often promoted in the media. Men are more likely, for example, to be depicted in media as more career-oriented than women, who are more likely to be depicted as more invested in romantic situations, (Lauzen, 2005).

The presentation of gender roles and script is seen in television as well. In a study coding for the appearance of the Western Sexual Script in leading TV sitcoms, the researchers found that male characters exhibited preference for "sexual fulfillment" over "emotional intimacy," whereas female characters desire a relationship, boyfriend, or husband (Kim, 2007).

With these trends of romantic fiction in mind, I am interested in how these effects translate into contemporary erotic fiction. On top of the power dynamic between the two characters within their relationship, how do sexual scripts and gender expectations manifest in their physical sex scenes? This is where interest for my experiment arose. I aim to study not only the way that power dynamics between male and female characters are depicted, but also how this depiction differs from that of lesbian couples in erotic romance novels.

It is important to note that Gagnon and Simon's initial theory is heteronormative in the sense that it examines the relationship between a man and a woman. The present study is novel in that it examines sexual script in lesbian relationships, rather than "male versus female" like most current research has explored.

So how do lesbian relationships fit into, if not this script, any sexual script? While it has been established that men are generally depicted as the "dominating" character, following pervasive gender roles, what does the power dynamic between two women, void of "masculinity," look like?

In short, we don't currently have a well-known image of this relationship. According to an analysis of 2014-2015 American television and movie characters, only two percent of characters in 414 shows were lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Additionally, 72% of the LGBT characters were male, meaning that lesbians are rarely represented in this media form (Diep, 2016). And when lesbians or women having sexual contact with women are depicted in the media, it is oftentimes fetishized. More often than lesbian relationships is "girl on girl" experimentation, which has been coined as "heteroflexibility," meaning that straight women "experiment" sexually with other women (Diamond, 2005). Samantha from *Sex and the City*, for example, is a prime example of heteroflexibility. During one episode, she enters a relationship with a woman, yet there is no question that she is still "straight" and able to have relationships with men (*Sex and the City*, 2001). This has also been described as "bisexuality a la mode," enforcing the idea that one's heterosexuality is not "threatened" by experimentation, and in fact it is viewed as "hot" rather than romantic (Jackson, 2009).

While not all TV shows or movies depict lesbianism as a passing "fling," the "butch" versus "femme" dichotomy has been a persistent theme within representation of lesbians dating back to the 1930s (Schwartz, 2016). While representation of lesbian relationships is occurring, this dichotomy fits into the heteronormative Western Sexual Script of "masculine" and "feminine," rather than expanding or improving upon the script to be inclusive of all gender performances.

As Gibson and Meem write in, *Teaching, Typecasting, and Butch-Femme Identity*, ".....we now reject the heterosexual assumption that the gender territories we staked out in young childhood are to be feared. We embrace them and rename them femme and butch. Femme describes lesbian behavior and appearance that fit heterosexual stereotypes associated with

women; butch describes lesbian behavior and appearance that fit heterosexual stereotypes associated with men," (Gibson, 1996, pg. 12).

In short, both the media industry and society have placed lesbians inside a script that doesn't fit them for the sake of perpetuating gender roles society is comfortable with. This still does not allow for variance.

One researcher used a qualitative, semi-structured interview style to examine 20 women who have sex with women to explore how they negotiate their sexual boundaries, specifically coding for themes of socialization and upbringing, learning sexuality, sex/intimacy experiences, and demographics (Wasley, 2013).

The researcher found that women relied upon the Western Sexual Script, and then "Ad-libbed," as the author calls it, meaning the women sort of "make it up" as they go, without a present and known script specific to lesbians in their lives, especially in their first time having sex with a woman. She found that they either used blogs, pornography, or books to learn how to have "lesbian sex," or had sex with a woman who was experienced in it (Wasley, 2013).

While most women did not use the terms 'butch" or "femme," dominant and submissive roles emerged within the relationship between two people, as consistent with Gagnon and Smith (Gagnon, 1973). The women often used "top" or "bottom" in lieu of "dominant" or "submissive," and adhered to whichever role they identified as throughout their various relationships. Some women, however, were more fluid in their role identification. She also found that these women tended to negotiate their sexual encounters before acting on them, more so than heterosexual couples, (Wasley, 2013). This study suggests that while many women who have sex with women use the Western Sexual Script as a guideline, there are instances (initiating and/or defining sex, for example) that need to be "ad-libbed" because a current script does not exist that

is suited to them. This method of sexual negotiation within lesbian relationships is relevant to the present study, for it indicates a conversation occurs prior to initiation, which could increase the likelihood of discussing consent.

Despite the shortcomings and traditional nature of the Western Sexual Script, it persists in popular media today. It is evident, both from the statistics from the Romance Writers of America (RWA) and what is colloquially known, that women are the target audience for romance and/or erotic novels. *50 Shades of Grey*, the landmark for contemporary erotic fiction, has even been labeled as "mommy porn" (Whitehead, 2013). This is compelling, as 84% percent of romance books writers identify as women (RWA, 2014). Romance novels follow a distinct gendered script that is not necessarily empowering for women, after considering the social limitations as discussed earlier, such as less emphasis on their career.

Is this phenomena a product of socialization? Or is it a product of a high-demand fantasy? Both answers are supported by existing literature. From reviewing the current climate of romance novels, it is clear that there is a market for romanticized accounts of forced sexual encounters. In the next section, I will discuss possible explanations for the prevalence of rape fantasies, therefore attempting to explain the high demand for these novels.

Fantasy

While procreation is a human necessity, sexual arousal is actually quite complicated. The processing of the pleasurable sensations of sex occur within the limbic system, specifically the the amygdala, the hippocampus, and the limbic lobe. Sexual desire is then controlled by our sex hormones, testosterone for men and estrogen for women (Adams, 2011).

Neurologically, sexual arousal has been found to manifest in the same way that motivation does. A neural circuit connects the part of the brain responsible for sexual motivation to the central nervous system, where the genital state can therefore change according to the neural state. For sexual arousal in particular, the signals from the neurotransmitters released in the brain transfer from the central nervous system to the peripheral nervous system, associated with the spinal cord, therefore activating the sexual organs (i.e. erection) (Won Kim, 2013).

Sexual arousal is dependent upon cues, or a visual representation of something attractive to us. The integration of visual cues into the physical manifestation of arousal is the basis of the Incentive-Motivation Model. This model explains that sexual arousal derives from incentives and cues that stimulate the nervous system, therefore leading to sexual motivation and genital arousal (Toates, 2009).

This model explains sexual deviance emerging in childhood. Sexual cues derive from associations one has with his/her sexuality and sexual experience. While a sexual cue in "normal" development may be lingerie, early association of sex with abuse, for example, may lead to abuse and violence to become a sexual cue for an individual. This theory aims to explain where paraphilic disorders, or deviant sexual attraction, originate (Toates, 2009).

In a study coding self-reported fantasies in men and women, researchers found that while men who fantasized about exercising dominance over his sexual partner(s) scored high on the Rape Myth Acceptance scale, women showed no such pattern. In fact, women who fantasized about being dominated actually scored lower on "victim blaming" of sexual harassment victims, (Zurbiggen, 2004).

So, despite the fact that women in this study did not hold problematic attitudes towards women or rape victims, they still desired dominance being exerted over them, some of them categorical rape fantasies (Zurbiggen, 2004).

The idea that we may "secretly" want things that seem unsavory is not a new phenomena. In 1920, Sigmund Freud wrote, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in which he discussed the idea of "death drive." He proposed that "death is the real result of life and therefore in so far its aim, while the sexual instinct is the incarnation of the will to live," (Freud, 1920, pg. 40). Freud and many modern psychologists believe that there is something inherently self-destructive in humans, as indicated by the way we take risks, revel in the terror of the evening news, or even take great joy in sleep, essentially a comatose state, (Mills, 2006).

Intrusive thought, which is the phenomena in which unwanted thoughts and/or images recur in one's mind, is a staple in diagnosing Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Oftentimes these thoughts are regarding cleanliness, doubt, aggression, contamination, and sexuality (Clark, 2014).

They are not, however, limited to patients with OCD. Sexual fantasy and guilt of such thoughts is not uncommon. In a study assessing sexual fantasy in college students, a quarter of the students felt guilt about their sexual fantasy during sexual intercourse; specifically, women who fantasized about men using force against them felt more 'frightened, guilty, disgusted, and less happy,' than those whose fantasies were void of that characteristic, (Byers, 1998).

In this paper, I am looking at sexual fantasy in terms of intrusive thought, specifically, the idea of rape fantasy. In the next section, I will explain how rape is fantasized about, despite the negative consequences of its occurrence.

Prevalence of and Explanation of Rape Fantasies

To begin, it is necessary to look at the existing definition of legal rape. The legal definition of rape as on 2012 in the United States is: ""The penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim," which is followed by "This definition also includes instances in which the victim is unable to give consent because of temporary or permanent mental or physical incapacity. Furthermore, because many rapes are facilitated by drugs or alcohol, the new definition recognizes that a victim can be incapacitated and thus unable to consent because of ingestion of drugs or alcohol," (DOJ.gov, 2012). Statutory rape is also considered legal rape, which is defined as a legal adult having sex with a minor, but the age at which one is considered "legal" varies state-by-state.

Rape fantasy does not generally reflect the legal definition of rape explicitly. It is generally characterized by lack of control, being dominated, and a man who "can't help himself." (Bond, 1986).

Rape fantasies, nonetheless, are not uncommon. In fact, they are fairly prevalent - 31% to 57% of women report having rape fantasies frequently, as shown through a qualitative review of 20 studies ranging from 1974-2006. In these studies, participants use self-reports to describe their sexual fantasies; these responses are then coded for rape. (Critelli, 2008). The statistic (31-57%) could likely be an underestimate after accounting for a reporting bias – reporting that you engage in a taboo thought such as rape fantasy may be difficult for one to report, therefore under-reporting may be a factor.

Considering the obvious negative connotations surrounding actual situations of rape, as well as psychological and physical damage that follow a forced sexual encounter, researchers remain puzzled as to why women would fantasize about rape. For many years, there has a been widely-accepted stigma attached to women who report having forceful submission fantasies – it is simply chalked up to pathology, (Hawley, 2009). Researchers Hawley and Hensley have argued that there is something intrinsically wrong with women who fantasize about being raped in the legal sense, suggesting that the fantasies are associated with sex guilt and responsibility. Specifically sex guilt theory states that rape fantasies may be a function of high levels of sex guilt (Hawley, 2009).

The Mosher Sex Guilt Scale (1966, then revised in 1998) is an instrument that evaluates morality and guilt, specifically in sexual encounters, along three scales: sex guilt, hostility guilt, and morality-conscience. Sex guilt is defined as the expectation that self-punishment will follow if "proper behavior" is not followed, (Janda, 2011). Consistent with Freudian theory, the sex guilt theory explains that being forced to have sex diminishes both anxiety and responsibility of the woman, therefore leading her to prefer forced sexual encounters, (Hawley, 2009).

The most grounded theories based off the existing evidence are *biological predisposition to surrender*, *sympathetic activation*, and *adversary transformation*. There is no evolutionary advantage to being raped, for it increases the likelihood of inferior gene implantation, (Critelli, 2008). So, there must be another function at hand.

Other studies have shown predisposition to surrender in animals (birds, reptiles, mammals) evolve from "primitive brain structures" that have proven successful as mating strategies. Perhaps humans have this sort of strategy as well (i.e. seeking out dominance); rape

and surrender are not the same, and though rape fantasy may be a manifestation of this desire, real rape is not desired, (Critelli, 2008).

Unrelated studies have shown that arousal is often misattributed to situations that are fearful because it activates the same reaction in the sympathetic nervous system, (Meston & Frohlich, 2003). Therefore, a fearful situation such as being raped (or the thought of being raped) may trigger *sympathetic activation* and be mistaken for arousal. Following other studies regarding arousal and its path to sexual arousal through fear, violence, and anxiety, it seems likely that there could be scientific evidence to back this claim up, though no study presently does so in terms of sexual assault cases.

Lastly, the *adversary transformation theory* makes sense, though it lacks empirical evidence. It is directly related to my study as it is based off of the "romance novel" cliche of the woman being the object of lust and the man acting on it; though ultimately the two fall in love and the woman transforms the "cruel" and wild man into her lover, ultimately "taming" him, (Critelli, 2008).

This is an example of a storyline falling along a gendered script – the woman and man have distinct roles that are not interchangeable. The gender roles purported by this theory create a power imbalance as described in sexual script theory, catering to the Western Sexual Script. While there is no scientific backing at the moment on this, it seems likely to me that this trope could be internalized and romanticized.

Feminist scholar Susan Brownmiller (1975) supported the theory of male rape culture as the impetus of rape fantasies in women. She suggests that "the rape fantasy exists in woman as a man-made iceberg," (Brownmiller, 1975, pg. 910). She sets forwards many examples in society where men are painted as the aggressor and woman as the vulnerable victim. Therefore, she

suggests that as women are not granted access to their own sexuality, their fantasies are mere products of a male-dominated society.

Because people tend to hold more favorable beliefs regarding their ingroup members and more unfavorable beliefs regarding outgroup members, it makes sense that men are more likely to "victim blame" women (i.e. come up with beliefs that justify sexual assault against the woman who was assaulted). They are also more likely to defend the rapist, as men are the majority of rapists and women are the majority of victims, therefore promoting rape acceptance (Ward, 1995).

There are no existing studies that have successfully been able to test these theories of socialization directly, but it is clear that male expectations have permeated culture as a whole, in particular, those aspects of society that are tied to sexuality. It is interesting to note, however, that feminists (those comfortable supporting the ideology that women are equal to men) are just as likely as non-feminists to report experiencing forced sexual fantasies (Critelli, 2008). While Brownmiller's work dates back to the mid-70s, I appreciate this perspective that takes into account the epic influence of socialization and the media's role in shaping a society's mindset, as opposed to more neurological-based theories as mentioned before.

A newer theory proposed by Hawley and Hensley (2009) aims to explain the prevalence of forceful submission fantasies. These fantasies are a means of connecting "highly agentic, dominant women" to "agentic, dominant men." The women, who are "alpha females," or highly dominant themselves in nature, actually prefer submission fantasies to meet dominant men. Interestingly enough, both men and women preferred the submissive position (i.e. the position in which he/she is the recipient of forceful touching/kissing) in a series of sexual vignettes (Hawley, 2009).

It was preferred by both men *and* women; in fact, women preferred the male dominance vignettes significantly less than men preferred the female dominance vignette.

This supports the theory that women prefer a submissive versus dominant position in sexual acts, but it does not adhere to the Western Sexual Script in the sense that men did not prefer to be dominant as opposed to submissive towards women.

While rape fantasies are not often openly discussed in the discourse of sexuality, it is clear that they do exist and there are potential both biological and social explanations behind them. With this in mind, it is integral to study how and when rape fantasies arise, to better understand how they are potentially perpetuated in the media, specifically, erotic literature.

Conditions for Rape Fantasies

This information allows us to begin to understand why rape fantasies may exist in our culture. But *how* do they arise and manifest? In particular, how do they manifest in a healthy way? It is evident that women do not want to get raped. Compared to women who were victims of non-sexual traumatic events (car crash, being robbed, etc.), victims of sexual assault are more likely to have major depressive disorder, eating disorders, anxiety disorders, and PTSD, supporting the negative consequences of being raped (Faravelli, 2004).

A study uncovered the specific conditions that must exist in order for rape to be fantasized about (Bond, 1986). Participants completed a guided imagery exercise in one of three conditions. In the *erotic fantasy* condition, participants envisioned a situation characterized by lust and desire in which the victim "lets" the rapist attack her. The *realistic rape, ambiguous responsibility* condition made the responsibility of the rapist and victim ambiguous. Here, participants envisioned a situation with an initial physical attraction followed by a violent rape.

After the rape, the victim was asked if she "fought hard enough" and if she will report him. The *realistic rape, unambiguous responsibility* condition was like the previous condition but the victim is told that she did nothing wrong and is assured she would report him. Participants were more aroused and had more positive affect in the *erotic fantasy* condition than in the other two conditions. (Bond, 1986).

Contrary Argument

Despite the negative consequences of rape as mentioned in the previous section, there is a school of thought that asserts that there is an evolutionary advantage to rape. Notably, authors Randy Thornhill and Craig T. Palmer discuss the biological and evolutionary forces behind rape in their highly-controversial book, *A Natural History of Rape*. In this, they view rape as a byproduct of sexual desire and mate selection. They criticize the opposing popular theory that rape is not sexually motivated (as upheld by Susan Brownmiller, most notably) by attesting that victims of rape are usually young and attractive; they also find that rape is cross-cultural and even cross-species (e.g., in animals) as evidence that a sexual drive, rather than a socially-constructed drive, is the impetus for rapists. The authors believe in and attempt to propose solutions to prevent rape, mainly by educating young boys against it, but still attest that rape is Darwinian and a byproduct of natural selection, (Palmer & Thornill, 2000).

Other scientists propose similar theories of rape through the lens of evolutionary psychology. "Reproductive cheating," for example, is the theory that men attempt to impregnate as many women as possible to spread their DNA without having to invest in family caretaking by raping women, (Miller, 2014). This occurs not only in humans, but animals – specifically ducks, scorpionflies, and orangutans (Crawford, 1986).

Present Study

In sum, it is evident that there is a market for the romance industry, as shown by the Nielson ratings of recent years (RWA, 2014). Women are known to be the primary consumers of these novels, and with rape and force-related fantasies reported to be prevalent, it is not far-fetched to assume these fantasies are depicted in romance novels aimed at women's fantasies.

There is also evidence that the Western Sexual Script and Traditional Sexual Script are present in romance novels (Menard, 2011; Byers, 1996). The scripts create a power imbalance between men and women by assigning different stereotypes and cultural expectations to gender distinctly (Gagnon, 1973), and even encourage coercion of males to females when initiating sexual intercourse, (Byers, 1996).

Considering these pieces of evidence together, particularly in light of the Western Sexual Script's depiction of masculinity and men, the present study aims to assess how consent is depicted differently in heterosexual versus lesbian erotic romance novels. In the next section, I will describe the methods used to quantify the presence of absence of explicit consent in these novels, as well as code for gender stereotypes as perpetuated by the aforementioned sexual scripts.

Method

Design

The study used a 2 (gender identity: masculine, feminine) x 2 (novel type: heterosexual, lesbian) Mixed Factorial design, with gender identity as the within-subjects measure, and novel type as the between-subjects measure. The novel type read and gender identity of the character are the

independent variables, and the ratings of the measures (gender typicality and consent) are the dependent variables. These measures will be outlined below.

Novel Selection

The researcher used the Barnes and Noble best-selling list as the inclusion method of the novels. The use of Barnes and Noble Best-Selling list is used for a few reasons. Firstly, Barnes and Noble offers both online and print versions of most of their books, expanding the accessibility of each novel, as opposed to offering solely print books. Secondly, best-selling books are best suited for the present study rather than those chosen for a list as "best," for it accounts for demand rather than subjective evaluation. Thus the rating of the novel is not dependent upon a seller's opinion, and instead relies upon the audience.

The genre used for this study is Erotic Romance, specifically Lesbian Erotic Romance and Heterosexual Erotic Romance. This is where the researcher expected to find the most data regarding sexual consent, for sexual relations are required to be classified as an Erotic novel. The researcher used the top 5 best-selling heterosexual erotic romance novels and the top 5 best-selling lesbian erotic romance novels, based off of the Barnes and Noble website at the time, October 15th, 2016 (*Barnes and Noble,* 2016). Barnes and Noble categorizes these lists in order of best-selling books at the time. Inclusion for erotic romance novels includes at least two characters romantically and sexually involved with one another.

A few books were excluded if the following characteristics were present: a polyamorous relationship and/or multiple sexual relationships (as opposed to a sexual relationship between two characters); a collection of erotic short stories (as opposed to a singular story with the two characters); multiple books by one author (as opposed to one book per author as to avoid any

particular writing styles of the individual author - for example, only one of EL James' books was read, despite the fact that all of the *50 Shades* novels are on the best-selling list).

For the sake of this study, "Sexual relationship" is defined as a relationship in which sex (Penetrative sex via penis and vagina, oral sex via fellatio, cunninglus, anal sex, "scissoring," mutual masturbation, touching of each other's genitalia) reoccurs between the two characters throughout the novel.

Exclusion occurred based off of the synopsis of the book. The Barnes and Noble website includes a plot synopsis and details about the book for each novel. If the book is a series of short stories, this would be noted here. If the book is about a polyamorous relationship, this would be noted here. All best-selling novel synopses were read until criteria was met.

Lastly, while other studies examining romance novels use the RITA Award, an award created by the Romance Writers of America to "recogniz[e] outstanding published romance novels and novellas" as a basis of inclusion, their judging criteria is problematic to the present study. It is as a follows:

- Does the entry contain a central love story?

- Is the resolution of the romance emotionally satisfying and optimistic?

- Does the entry fall within the category description?

(RWA, 2016).

Because this study aims to assess the presence or absence of dark element of rape in my study, it seems merely peripheral to look for novels that must have an "emotionally satisfying and optimistic" resolution. With these limitations in mind, a bestselling list from a renowned bookstore such as Barnes and Noble seems best-suited to answer the current research question.

Coding Scheme

The coding system used to assess the novels aimed to capture both aspects of the hypotheses: firstly, the Western Sexual Script and its perpetuation of gender roles; secondly, the characterization of consent. Consequently, the coding system measured: *Monetary Wealth*, *Sexual Experience*, *Dominance*, *Passivity*, *Professionalism*, *Domesticity*, *Sexual Attraction*, *Emotional Attraction*, *Explicit Consent of Sexual Act*, *Explicit Consent of Violence in Sexual Act*, *Substance Use*, *Total Number of Sexual Acts between Characters*, and lastly, *Is it Rape*? as an overall conclusion of each book. Each item is reviewed below and grouped as appropriate. The detailed coding scheme is included in the Appendix.

For each variable, the primary author coded all 10 novels. A secondary coder coded six of the novels to check for reliability of the coding scheme. These six were chosen based off of length; the second coder was only reimbursed for a limited amount of time, so the two longest books of each category were excluded for her for the sake of reading the most possible books in the time span.

For each of the novels, the relationship that most of the content of the book is dedicated to is used to designate the two main characters. For the items that are coded for both characters, in the heterosexual novels the male character is indicated by "M" and the female as "F"; for the lesbian novels, the female character who exhibits more of the typical "masculine" traits as defined by the Western Sexual Script will be considered the "masculine" partner, and will also be indicated by "M"; conversely, the female character who exhibits more of the typical "feminine" traits will be considered the "feminine" partner, and will be indicated by "F." This was decided after the novels were read and rated.

Monetary Wealth. Gagnon and Kimmel explain that male's position of authority and his focus on career are trademark of the Western Sexual Script, (Gagnon, 1973). Essentially, he is depicted as the breadwinner. In fact, another sexual script of women specifically cast the woman as a "Gold Digger," or a woman who pursues a wealthy man in hopes of attaining some or all of his money, (Stephens, 2003). With this in mind, each character's wealth was coded: M and F distinctly.

"Wealth" was defined as "access to material resources, and/or income." Coders evaluated characters' wealth based on the following criteria: "Salary, family money, unspecified resources, apparent disposable income" on a scale from 1-7, with higher numbers meaning greater wealth.

A bivariate correlation found that there was a significant interrater reliability in Wealth,

$r = 0.765$, N = 12, $p = 0.004$.

Sexual Experience. While men are encouraged to have multiple sexual partners, women's sexuality is often either expected to be limited to one man or entirely suppressed (Gagnon, 1973; Sprecher, 1995). With this in mind, "sexual experience" felt suiting as a classification of the Western Sexual Script. I, again, coded for Sexual Experience for each character, M and F distinctly.

"Sexual experience" was defined as "multiple sexual partners, kinks, fetishes, intensity of sexual acts, and presence/absence of virginity." Coders evaluated characters' sexual experience based on the following criteria: "Multiple sexual partners, "virginity"/lack thereof, kinkiness/lack thereof, fetishes/lack thereof, numerous sexual acts explored (oral, penetrative, anal, etc.)" on a scale of 1-7, with higher numbers meaning more sexual experience.

A bivariate correlation found that there was a significant interrater reliability for Sexual experience, $r = 0.835$, N = 12, $p = 0.001$

Dominance vs. Passivity.

In leading depictions of sexual script theory, the male is depicted as the "initiator" of sex, and the "aggressor," (Byers, 1996; Gagnon, 1973). In short, the male is seen as "dominating," both inside and outside of the bedroom. The opposite of this is "passivity," which is generally how the female is depicted. Byers describes the female as the "unassertive, passive woman" who is "concerned about the male's needs," therefore letting him dominate the situation, (Byers, 1996, pg. 11). I, again, coded for both Dominance and Passivity for each character, M and F distinctly.

"Dominance" was defined as "Asserting control over someone/other people, and/or "alpha" male/female." Coders evaluated characters' dominance based on the following criteria: "Controlling a partner, controlling a friend, physical dominance, sexual dominance, power over a body of people" on a scale of 1-7, with higher numbers meaning more dominate.

"Passivity" was defined as "Other people can control you, not playing in active role." Coders evaluated characters' passivity based on the following criteria: " Lack of control with people, lack of active role in career, lack of active role in sex" on a scale of 1-7, with higher numbers meaning more passive.

A bivariate correlation found that there was no significant interrater reliability for Dominance, $r = 0.558$, $N = 12$, $p = 0.059$, though it was approaching significance.

There was, however, a significant interrater reliability for Passivity, $r = 0.644$ $N = 12$, $p = 0.024$.

Professionalism vs. Domesticity. As mentioned under the *Wealth* section, men are depicted as the

"breadwinner" and more career-focused than women, according to the Western Sexual Script

(Gagnon, 1973). The opposite end of this spectrum would be domesticity, which is expected of

women, based off the same logic. I coded for both Professionalism and Domesticity for each

character, M and F distinctly.

"Professionalism" was defined as "Investment in career and/or seriousness regarding

work." Coders evaluated characters' professionalism based on the following criteria: "Amount of

investment and time put into job, amount of interest in job, amount of time spent at job,

seriousness regarding job, success at job" on a scale of 1-7, with higher numbers meaning more

professional.

"Domesticity" was defined as "Interests and/or abilities pertaining to the home or family

life." Coders evaluated characters' domesticity as "Cooking, cleaning, taking care of children,

taking care of family members, taking care of other people, staying home" on a scale of 1-7, with

higher numbers meaning more domestic.

A bivariate correlation found that there was no significant interrater reliability for

Domesticity, $r = 0.514$, $N = 12$, $p = 0.087$.

There was also no significant interrater reliability for Professionalism, $r = 0.274$, $N = 12$,

$p = 0.389$.

Sexual Attraction vs. Emotional Attraction. While both often work in tandem to propel attraction,

the Western Sexual Script expects men to be sexually-driven in intimate relationships, whereas

women are to be emotionally-driven in intimate relationships; as Byers explains, men are

"oversexed" while women are "undersexed" (Gagnon, 1973; Byers, 1996; Kim, 2007). I coded

for both Sexual Attraction and Emotional Attraction for each character, M and F towards one

another.

"Sexual Attraction" was defined as "Physical attraction to the other character, intense

desire to have sexual relations with the other character." Coders evaluated the characters' sexual

attraction to one another based on the following criteria: "Physically attracted, sexual desire,

weighs sexual attraction over or equal to emotional attraction to the other character" on a scale of

1-7, with higher numbers meaning high sexual attraction levels.

"Emotional Attraction" was defined as "Mental connection to the other character,

attracted to other character's mind, attracted to personality of other character." Coders evaluated

the characters' emotional attraction to one another based on the following criteria: "Attraction

based on personality/mental state, emotional dependence, personality valued," on a scale of 1-7,

with higher numbers meaning high emotional attraction levels.

A bivariate correlation found that there was no significant interrater reliability for Sexual

Attraction, $r = 0.562$, $N = 12$, $p = 0.057$, though it was approaching significance.

There was also no significant interrater reliability for Emotional Attraction, $r = -0.026$, N

$= 12$, $p = 0.936$.

Explicit Consent of Sexual Act. Because the area of interest of the study is how consent is

characterized, it is natural to code for the dialogue that leads up to the occurrence of a sexual act.

Explicit Consent was defined as "The permission of one character for another character's sexual

advances, via explicitly saying 'yes' when asked about a sexual act, and/or asks for the sexual act

to be made upon them." Coders evaluated the level of explicit consent of each sexual act using

the following criteria: "Character explicitly says "yes" when asked about sexual act; and/or asks

for sexual acts to be made upon them" on a scale of 1-7, with higher numbers meaning explicit consent, and lower numbers meaning explicit non-consent (which was defined as "the character explicitly says "no" when asked about sexual act; and/or explicitly asks another character to stop act and they do not").

A bivariate correlation found that there was no significant interrater reliability for Sexual Consent, r = -0.166, N = 12, p = 0.606

Explicit Consent of Violence in Sexual Act. Similarly, the coders considered the dialog leading up to inflicted violence in sexual acts. Explicit consent of violence in each sexual act was defined as "The permission of one character for another character's sexual advances of physical hostility and/or pain infliction, including hitting, slapping, punching, tying up, bondage, BDSM, biting, kicking, throwing, scratching, grabbing, choking." Coders evaluated the level of explicit consent of violence in each sexual act based on the following criteria: "Character explicitly says "yes" when asked about violent act; and/or asks for violent acts to be made upon them; and/or character stops when "safe word" (preexisting agreed upon term between characters that signals termination of violent act" on a scale of 1-7, with higher numbers meaning explicit consent, and lower numbers meaning explicit non-consent (which was defined as "Character explicitly says "no" when asked about violent act; and/or character does not stop despite use of "safe word").

Ultimately, due to lack of violence in the novels, this variable was not included in the data analysis.

Substance Use. Due to the legal definition of rape as discussed in the Introduction, consent is unable to be given during substance use, and was coded for (DOJ.gov, 2012). I counted each time one of the two characters engaged in a drug/alcohol substance in the novel.

A bivariate correlation found that there was a significant interrater reliability for Substance Use, r = 0.906, N = 12, $p \leq 0.001$.

Total Number of Sex Acts between Characters. To accurately reflect the level of consent in the novels of interest, it is necessary to take a total count of the number of sex scenes in each book between the two characters. "Sex Act" is defined as "Penetrative sex (penis and vagina), oral sex (fellatio, cunninglus), anal sex, "scissoring," mutual masturbation, touching of each other's genitalia." This score was found by the coders counting each sex scene, resulting in a numerical tally.

A bivariate correlation found that there was a significant interrater reliability for Total Sex Acts, r = 0.919, N = 12, $p \leq 0.001$.

Is It Rape? Due to the novel nature of this study, a subjective item was necessary that the coders could use to ultimately indicate whether or not it seemed like rape was present in the book. This can be useful to improve future studies to include more accurate depictions of consent and/or rape when coding. While the other measures derived from empirical data, this measure is a tool for reflection. Due to the lack of response on this measure, it will not be included in statistical analyses.

Results

To best interpret the results of this study, it is important to keep in mind the small sample size of books read (N = 5 for heterosexual novels, N = 5 for lesbian novels). Therefore, effects that are not statistically significant at a $p \leq 0.05$ level may still be interpreted based on effect size.

Wealth

To test the degree to which wealth differed as a function of book type and gender identity, I conducted a 2 (Book Type: Heterosexual or Lesbian) x 2 (Gender Identity: Masculine or feminine) mixed Factorial ANOVA (Figure 1). A significant main effect of gender ($F(1,8) = 5.26$, $p = 0.051$, $\eta p^2 = 0.396$) showed that masculine characters received higher ratings of wealth. There was no significant main effect of book type, ($F(1, 8) = 0.576$, $p = 0.469$, $\eta p^2 = 0.67$). While the interaction between gender and book type was not significant, ($F(1, 8) = 2.20$, $p = 0.176$, $\eta p^2 = 0.216$), the large effect size indicates the difference in wealth for masculine and feminine characters differed by book type. Simple effects tests showed that in heterosexual novels, masculine characters were rated as wealthier than feminine characters, $t(8) = 2.12$, $p = 0.101$, d = 1.13. Though the p-value merely approached significance, the effect size is large. In lesbian novels, however, masculine characters had similar levels of wealth as feminine characters, $t(8) = 0.885$ $p = 0.426$, d = 0.63. Although the effect size of this test is not small, indicating that the same pattern (masculine characters scoring higher on wealth) was present in lesbian novels as well, the degree to which this is occurs is is not a strong as in heterosexual novels.
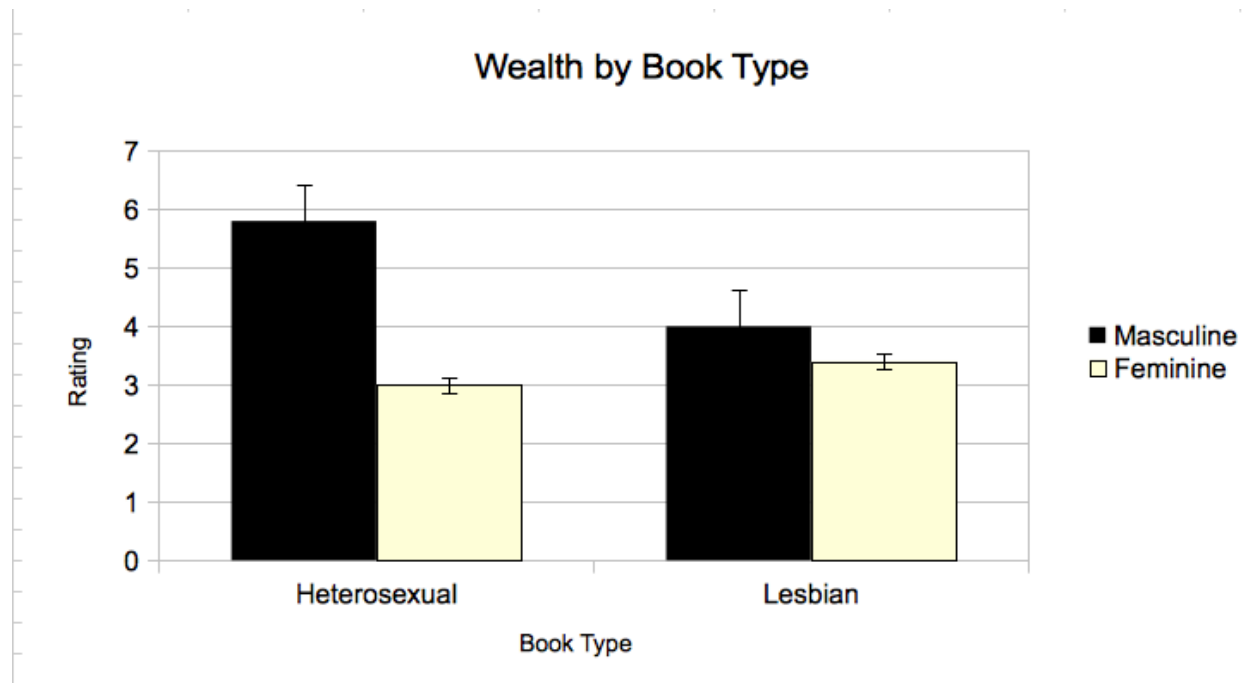
Figure 1. Mean ratings of Wealth in Heterosexual and Lesbian novels for Masculine and

Feminine characters. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Sexual Experience

To test the degree to which sexual experience differed as a function of book type and gender

identity, I conducted a 2 (Book Type: Heterosexual or Lesbian) x 2 (Gender Identity: Masculine

or feminine) mixed Factorial ANOVA (Figure 2). A significant main effect of gender with a very

large effect size ($F(1,8) = 20$, $p = 0.002$, $\eta p^2 = 0.714$) showed that masculine characters received

higher ratings of sexual experience. There was no significant main effect of book type on sexual

experience ratings, ($F(1, 8) = 0.348$, $p = 0.572$, $\eta p^2 = 0.042$). While the interaction between

gender and book type was not significant, ($F(1, 8) = 2.22$, $p = 0.174$, $\eta p^2 = 0.217$), the large

effect size indicates the difference in sexual experience for masculine and feminine characters

differed by book type. Simple effects tests showed that in heterosexual novels, masculine characters were rated as having significantly more sexual experience than feminine characters, $t(8) = 5.66$, $p = .005$, d = 2.79. In lesbian novels, however, masculine characters and feminine characters did not differ significantly in sexual experience ratings, $t(8) = 1.75$, $p = 0.154$, d = 1.27, though the large effect size indicates that masculine characters in heterosexual books received the highest rankings on this measure.
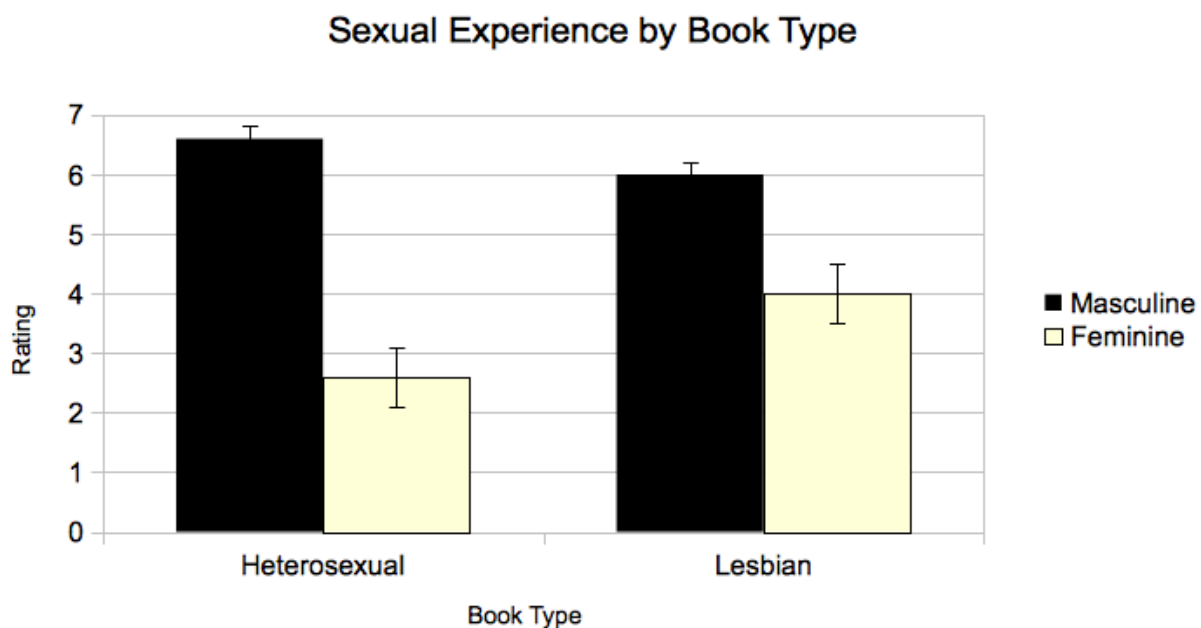

Figure 2. Mean ratings of Sexual Experience in Lesbian and Heterosexual books for Masculine and Feminine characters. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Dominance

To test the degree to which dominance differed as a function of book type and gender identity, I conducted a 2 (Book Type: Heterosexual or Lesbian) x 2 (Gender Identity: Masculine or feminine) mixed Factorial ANOVA (Figure 3). A significant main effect of gender with a very large effect size ($F(1, 8) = 32.98$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta p^2 = 0.805$) showed that masculine characters

received higher ratings of dominance. There was no significant main effect of book type on dominance ratings, $(F(1, 8) = 0.110, p = 0.749, \eta p^2 = 0.14)$. The interaction between gender and book type on dominance was approaching significance, $(F,(1, 8) = 4.88, p = 0.058, \eta p^2 = 0.379)$, with a large effect size, indicating that the difference in dominance for masculine and feminine characters differed by book type. Simple effects tests showed that in heterosexual novels, masculine characters were rated significantly higher in dominance than feminine characters, $t(8) = 4.43, p = 0.01, d = 2.43$, with a very large effect size. In lesbian novels, masculine characters were also rated significantly higher in dominance than feminine characters, $t(8) = 4.0, p = 0.02, d = 1.98$. Both tests yielded large effect sizes.
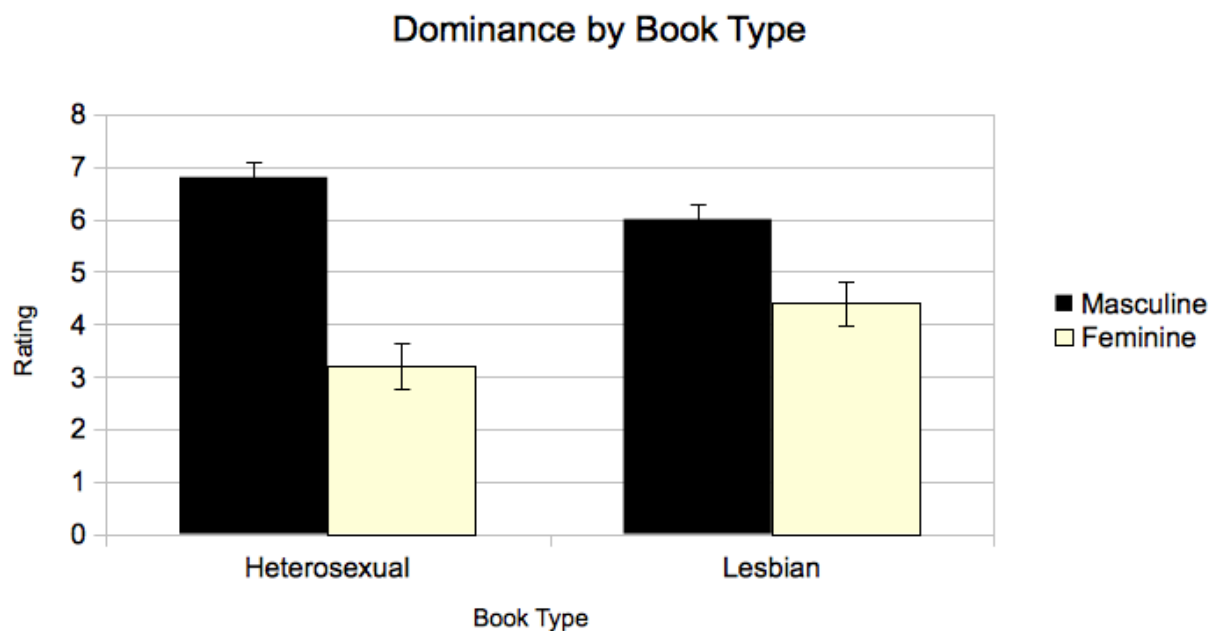

Figure 3. Mean ratings of Dominance in Heterosexual and Lesbian novels for Masculine and Feminine characters. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Passivity

To test the degree to which passivity differed as a function of book type and gender identity, I

conducted a 2 (Book Type: Heterosexual or Lesbian) x 2 (Gender Identity: Masculine or

feminine) mixed Factorial ANOVA (Figure 4). A significant main effect of gender with a large

effect size (F(1, 8) = 22.56, p = 0.001, ηp^2 = 0.738) showed that feminine characters received

higher ratings of passivity. There was no significant main effect of book type on passivity

datings, F(1, 8) = 0.529, p = 0.488, ηp^2 = 0.62). The interaction between gender and book type

on passivity ratings was approaching significance, (F(1, 8) = 5.06, p = 0.055, ηp^2 = 0.388) with

a large effect size, indicating that the difference in passivity for masculine and feminine

characters differed by book type. Simple effects tests showed that in heterosexual novels,

feminine characters were rated significantly higher in passivity than masculine characters, t(8) =

3.81, p = 0.02, d = 1.8, with a very large effect size. In lesbian novels, feminine characters were

rated significantly higher in passivity than masculine characters as well, t(8) = 3.16, p = 0.03, d =
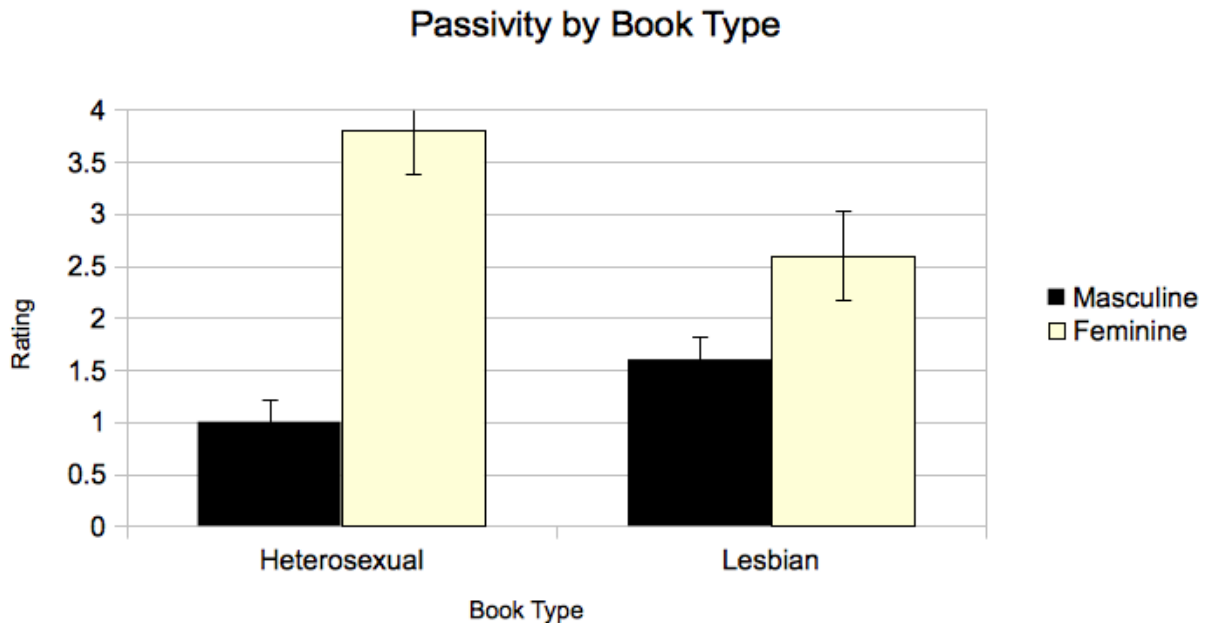
1.82, with a large effect size.

Figure 4. Mean ratings of Passivity in Heterosexual and Lesbian novels for Masculine and Feminine characters. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Professionalism

To test the degree to which professionalism differed as a function of book type and gender identity, I conducted a 2 (Book Type: Heterosexual or Lesbian) x 2 (Gender Identity: Masculine or feminine) mixed Factorial ANOVA (Figure 5). There was no significant main effect of gender on professionalism ratings, $(F(1, 8) = 1.77, p = 0.220, \eta p^2 = 0.181)$.

There was also no significant main effect of book type on professionalism ratings, $(F(1, 8) = 0.56, p = 0.819, \eta p^2 = 0.007)$. The interaction between gender and book type on professionalism ratings was not significant, $(F(1, 8) = 3.98, p = 0.081, \eta p^2 = 0.332)$, but the large effect size indicates that the difference in professionalism ratings for masculine and feminine characters differs by book type. Simple effects tests showed that in heterosexual novels, masculine

characters were rated significantly higher in professionalism than feminine characters, $t(8) =$ 3.35, $p = 0.28$, $d = 1.66$. In lesbian novels, however, masculine characters had similar levels of professionalism as female characters, $t(8) = 0.38$, $p = 0.72$, $d = 0.29$.
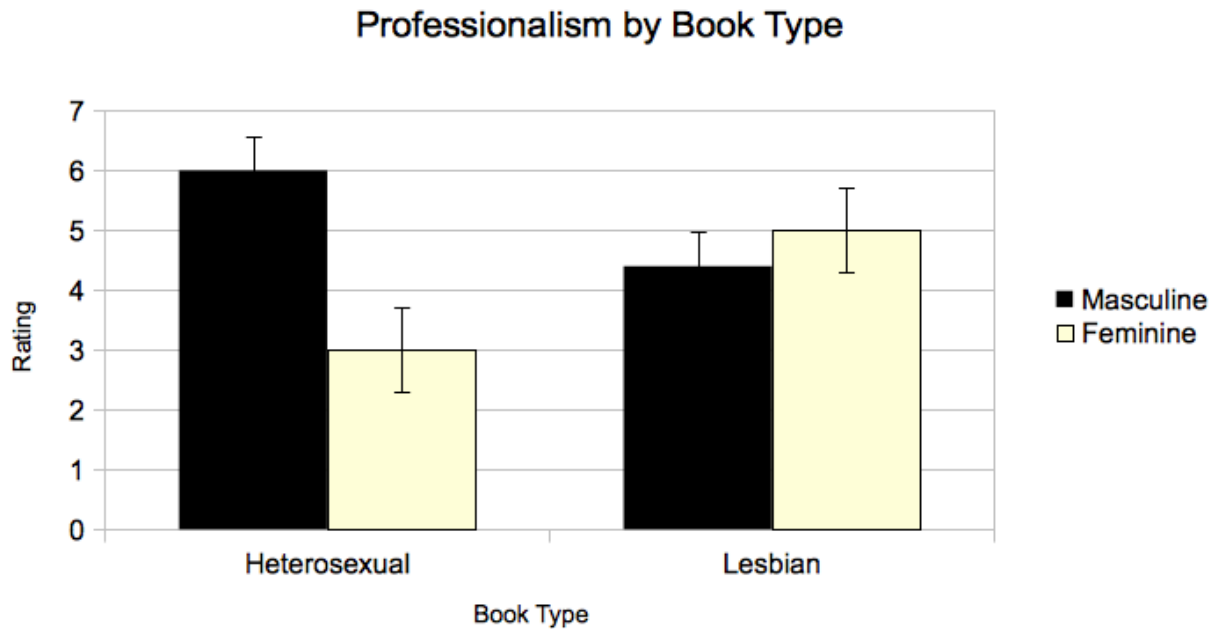
Professionalism by Book Type

Figure 5. Mean ratings of Professionalism and Heterosexual and Lesbian novels for Masculine and Feminine characters. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Domesticity

To test the degree to which domesticity differed as a function of book type and gender identity, I conducted a 2 (Book Type: Heterosexual or Lesbian) x 2 (Gender Identity: Masculine or feminine) mixed Factorial ANOVA (Figure 6). There was no significant main effect of gender identity on domesticity ratings, $(F(1, 8) = 1.44$, $p = 0.265$, $\eta p^2 = 0.152)$, but the large effect size indicates that feminine characters received higher ratings of domesticity. There was no significant main effect of book type on domesticity ratings, $F(1, 8) = 0.629$, $p = 0.488$, $\eta p^2 = 0.31$), but the large effect size indicates that domesticity ratings did differ by book type, with

heterosexual novels having higher ratings of domesticity. The interaction between gender and

book type on domesticity ratings was not significant, $(F(1, 8) = 2.07, p = 0.188, \eta p^2 = 0.206)$

with a large effect size, indicating that the difference in domesticity for masculine and feminine

characters differed by book type, with feminine characters rating higher in domesticity. Simple

effects tests showed that in heterosexual novels, feminine characters were rated significantly

higher in domesticity than masculine characters, $t(8) = 3.77, p = 0.02, d = 1.52$. In lesbian novels,

however, masculine characters had similar levels of domesticity as female characters, $t(8) =$
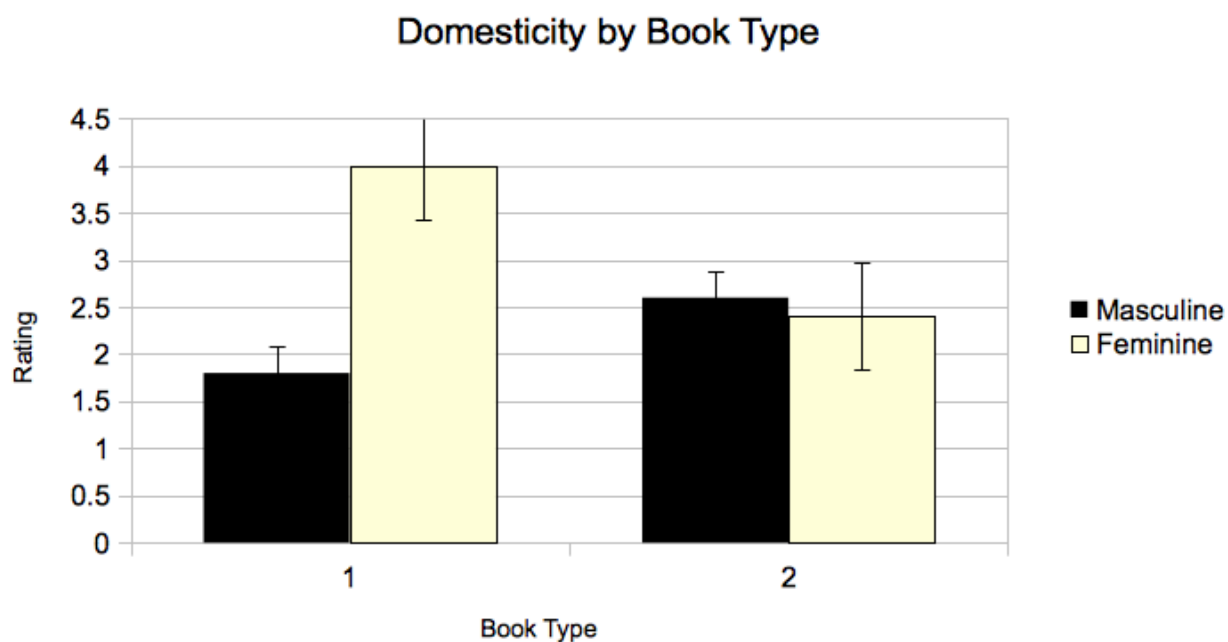
$0.128, p = 0.91, d = 0.09$.

Figure 6. Mean ratings of Domesticity in Heterosexual and Lesbian novels for Masculine and

Feminine characters. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Sexual Attraction

Because the ratings of sexual attraction for masculine and feminine characters in heterosexual

novels were the same and the ratings of sexual attraction for masculine and feminine characters

in lesbian novels were the same, there is no distribution of variance and therefore no statistical

analysis can be run. There are no differences between gender identity for sexual attraction

ratings, but there main effect of book type approaches significance: $F(1, 8) = 2.25$, $p = 0.172$, ηp^2

$= 0.22$), indicating that there are higher ratings of sexual attraction for both characters in

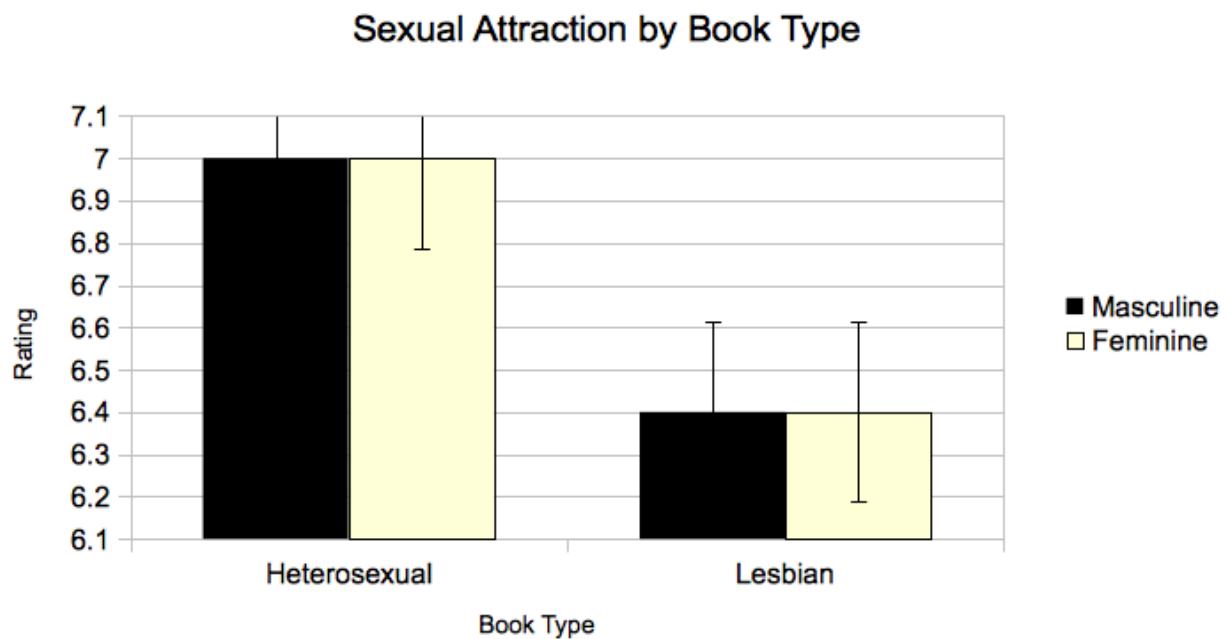heterosexual novels, versus lesbian novels.

Figure 7. Mean ratings of sexual attraction in Heterosexual and Lesbian novels for Masculine

and Feminine characters. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Emotional Attraction

To test the degree to which emotional attraction differed as a function of book type and gender

identity, I conducted a 2 (Book Type: Heterosexual or Lesbian) x 2 (Gender Identity: Masculine

or feminine) mixed Factorial ANOVA (Figure 8). There was no significant main effect of gender

identity on emotional attraction ratings, ($F(1, 8) = 3.60$, $p = 0.94$, $\eta p^2 = 0.310$), but the large

effect size indicates that feminine characters received higher ratings of emotional attraction.

There was no significant main effect of book type on emotional attraction ratings, $F(1, 8) =$ 0.151, $p = 0.707$, $\eta p^2 = 0.19$), but the large effect size indicates that emotional attraction ratings did differ by book type, with heterosexual novels having higher ratings of emotional attraction. The interaction between gender and book type on emotional attraction ratings was not significant, $(F(1, 8) = 0.400, p = 545, \eta p^2 = 0.048)$.
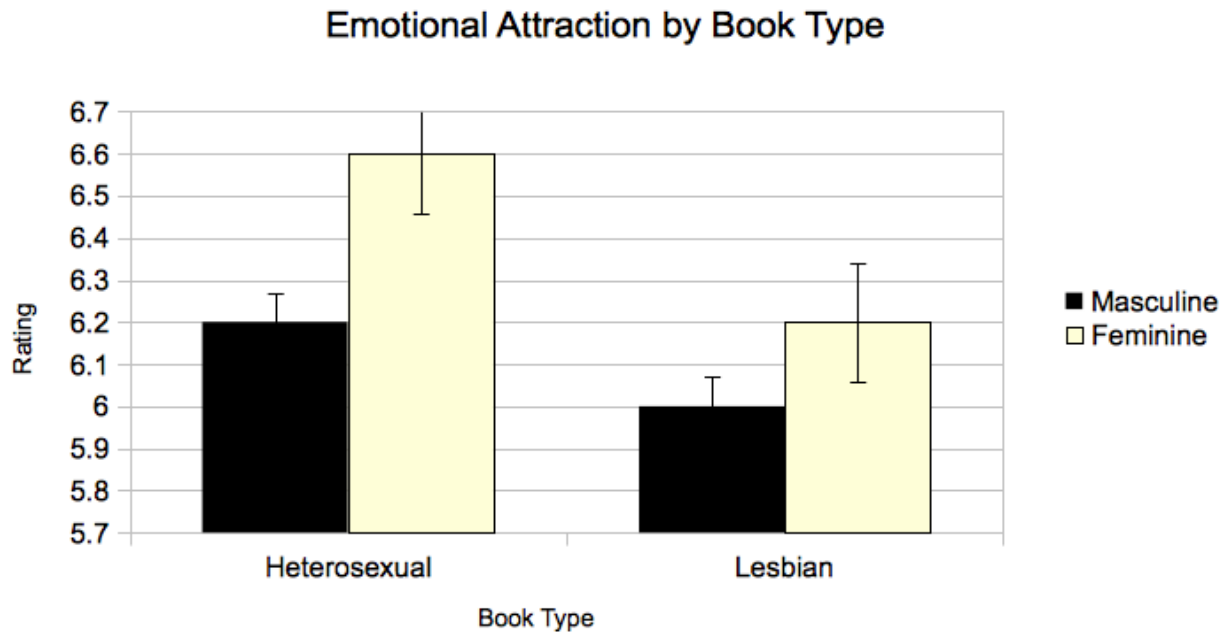

Figure 8. Mean ratings of Emotional Attraction in Heterosexual and Lesbian novels for Masculine and Feminine novels. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Sexual Consent

To test the degree to which sexual consent differed as a function of book type, I conducted an independent t-test (Figure 9). There was no significant difference between heterosexual (M = 4.4, SD = 1.14) and lesbian novels (M = 5.6, SD = 1.52) on ratings of sexual consent; $t(8) = 1.41$, $p =$ 0.195, Cohen's $d = 0.893$. While this result is not significant, the large effect size indicates sexual consent differed by book type, with higher ratings of consent in lesbian books.
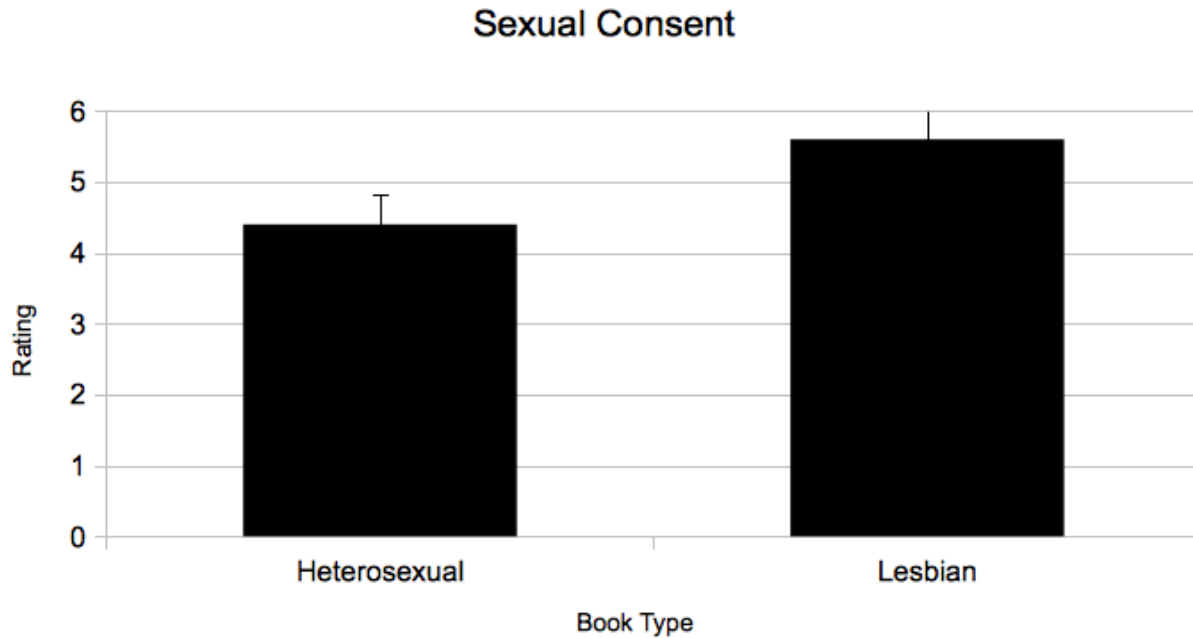
Figure 9. Mean ratings of Sexual Consent in Heterosexual and Lesbian novels. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Substance Use

To test the degree to which substance use differed as a function of book type, I conducted an independent t-test (Figure 10). There was no significant difference between heterosexual (M = 10.2, SD = 8.98) and lesbian novels (M = 7.8, SD = 7.46) on ratings of substance use; t(8) = 0.460, *p* = 0.658, Cohen's *d* = 0.291.

Figure 10. Mean number of Substance Use occurrences in Heterosexual and Lesbian novels. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Total Sex

To test the degree to which total sex differed as a function of book type, I conducted an independent t-test (Figure 11). There was no significant difference between heterosexual (M = 9.2, SD = 4.32) and lesbian novels (M = 5.6, SD = 3.36) on ratings of total sex; t(8) = 1.47, *p* = 0.180, Cohen's *d* = 0.93. While this result is not significant, the large effect size indicates that total number of sex scenes differed by book type, with higher ratings and therefore more sex scenes in heterosexual novels.
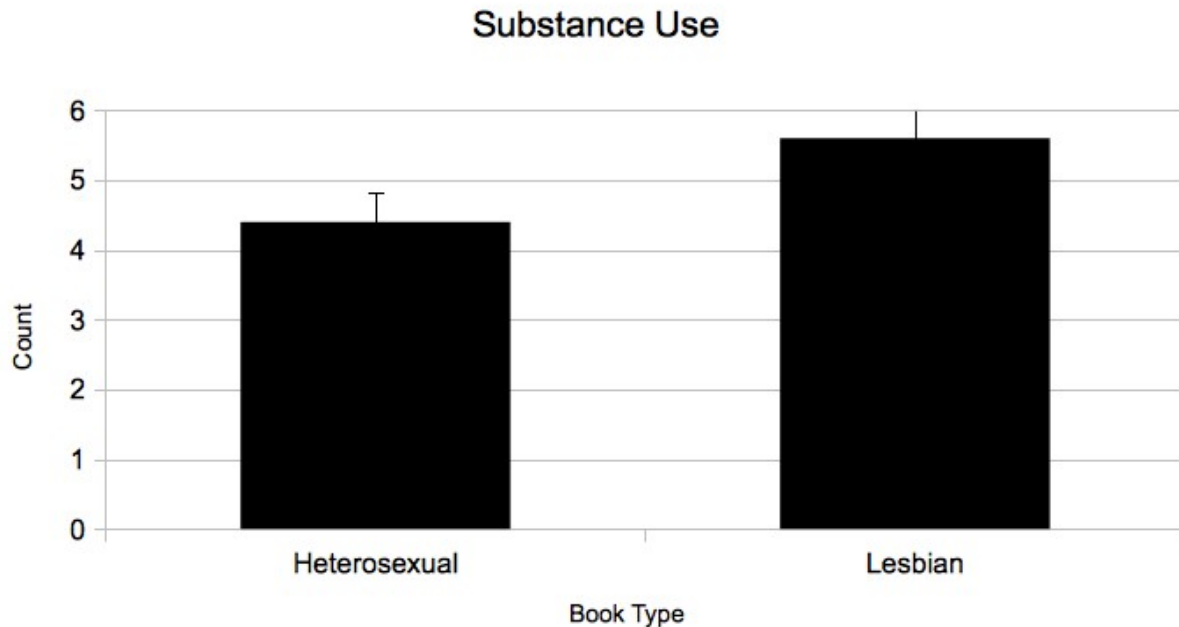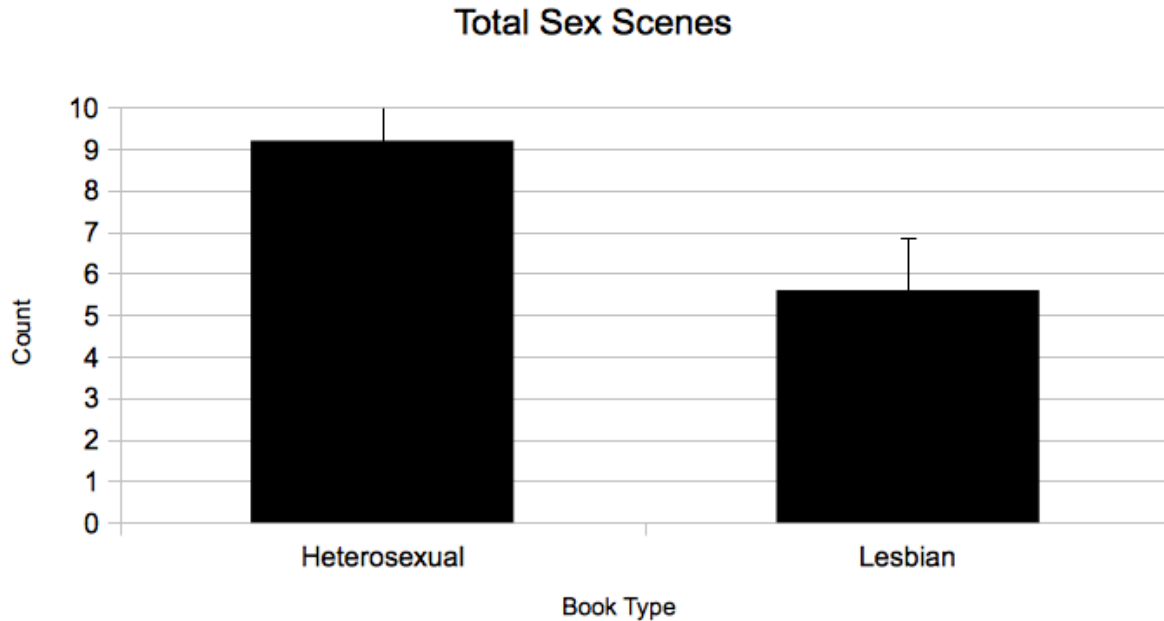
Figure 11. Mean number of Total Sex Scenes in Heterosexual and Lesbian novels. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Is it Rape?

Although *Is it Rape?* was included as one of the coding measures, only two out of ten novels received ratings of "Yes," and both were indicated as being initiated by the masculine character. Due to the lack of data on this measure, it will not be included in the statistical analyses.

Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between gender role perpetuation via the Western Sexual Script and the presence of sexual consent across contemporary heterosexual and lesbian erotic romance novels. This was completed by creating a coding scheme that assessed both gender typicality and explicitness of consent. These measures were rated on a scale of 1-7 by the coder upon completion of each novel. Statistical analyses found that there was a

significant main effect of gender on four of the outcome measures: Wealth, Sexual Experience, Dominance, and Passivity, with masculine characters receiving significantly higher scores of Wealth, Sexual Experience, and Dominance than feminine characters, as predicted; feminine characters received significantly higher scores of Passivity than masculine characters, also as predicted.

The main effect of book type on the outcome measures yielded no statistically significant main effects, but the following approached significance: domesticity, sexual attraction, emotional attraction, sexual consent, and total number of sex scenes. Specifically, heterosexual novels had higher ratings of domesticity, sexual attraction, and emotional attraction compared to lesbian novels, as well as more total number of sex scenes. Lesbian novels had higher ratings of sexual consent compared to heterosexual novels.

While some of the effects were not statistically significant, this is likely due to the sample sample size of the study and should additionally be considered based on the effect size. With that in mind, all of the measures yielded large effect sizes, except for Substance Use and Is it Rape? (the latter of which was not included in the analysis). Professionalism ratings were higher for masculine characters than feminine characters, as predicted; Domesticity and Emotional Attraction ratings were higher for feminine characters than masculine characters, as predicted. Sexual Consent was rated as less explicit in heterosexual novels, as hypothesized.

Overall, the measures tended to adhere to the Western Sexual Script in heterosexual novels more often than lesbian novels. This, paired with less explicit consent in heterosexual novels, supports my hypothesis that those books that more closely follow the Western Sexual Script will have less incidences of explicit consent than those that do not follow the Western Sexual Script.

Although the results are enticing, it is important to consider the directionality of these findings. As proposed in the Introduction, are these roles perpetuated by the media because the audience desires them? Or does the audience desire them because they are being perpetuated by the media? It is difficult to parse out the direction of demand here, and only qualitative interviews from the readers of said novels could potentially hint towards the answer to this question.

Consider violence and/or rape in sexual relationships. There is little research regarding if those who have alleged "rape fantasies" are currently in abusive relationships or not. While there is inconclusive literature suggesting that those who have experienced sexual abuse in childhood experience rape fantasy (Gold, 1991), it is unclear whether or not there is a relationship between those who have rape fantasies and the likelihood of being in an abusive relationship. Therefore, the directionality of this claim is not evident.

The culture surrounding lesbian relationships and sexual abuse may affect the interpretation of the results as well. Sexual violence in lesbian relationships is almost "unspeakable," for a language does not even exist for people to talk about this dynamic (Girschick, 2002). For example, from 1927 up until 2012, the legal definition of rape in the United States was, "the carnal knowledge of a female, forcibly and against her will," (Justice.gov, 2012). "Carnal Knowledge," rooted in Biblical, heteronormative imagery, is defined as "The act of a man in having sexual bodily connection with a woman" (The Law Dictionary, 2013). This definition leaves no room for a woman raping a man, or a woman raping a woman. Although the legal definition has changed to be more inclusive since then, this long-lasting and fairly contemporary definition is an example of how limited the discussion of sexual violence in lesbian relationships is and has been. When the acknowledgement of woman-to-woman sexual

violence does not exist, it is impossible to assign the roles of perpetrator and/or victim in this dynamic, despite the fact that this dynamic does exist, (Girschick, 2002).

These findings regarding the nature of sexual violence in lesbian relationships once again begs the question, does the literature at hand reflect this script, or does it create it? Four out of the five authors of the lesbian books read in this study self-identify as lesbian (the last one did not have a website therefore it is unknown,) (*MeghanOBrien.com,* 2013; *The Daily Beast*, 2014; *Eye on Romance*, 2017; *Kallmaker.com*, 2017). Given that qualitative interviews of lesbian women suggest that this absence of a script is very much real (Girschick, 2002), paired with the knowledge that these authors are lesbians, it seems plausible that these authors are inventing their own scripts. Although denial of sexual violence in lesbian relationships is apparent from the interviews, it seems that the authors of the books in the present study are using their voices to create scripts for lesbian readers - one that is characterized by clearer consent and less gendered roles, according to this study. While the discussion surrounding assault and violence in lesbian relationships must be expanded to fit reality, these women are beginning a conversation of sexual negotiation and dynamics in lesbian relationships that has long been silenced, *(The Daily Beast*, 2014).

Limitations

While these results suggest that heterosexual novels both follow the Western Sexual Script more closely and have less explicit consent than lesbian novels, there are factors to keep in mind when attempting to apply these results to the real world.

To begin, there are a few methodological limitations of this study. Firstly, an ideal study would have read many more books than 10 in order to generalize these findings to the genre as a

whole; it is unclear whether or not the novels read are representative of the erotic romance genre. Due to time restraints, only 5 books of each category (lesbian or heterosexual) were read; future studies should aim to read more books of each category.

Similarly, the novel selection process has drawbacks in regards to more broadly applying these findings to the Erotic Romance genre. While, as discussed, I chose the Barnes and Noble best-selling list due to its direct connection to consumer demand, the books on the list are there only briefly. I selected the novels read in this study based off of the best-selling list in October; now, months later, many of the books have been replaced. While this fast pace is typical of a list of such organization, it is integral to keep in mind that the books selected are not holistically representative of those reaching the largest audience.

Secondly, there were only two coders, and one of the coders only read 6 out of the 10 books, again, due to time and financial restraints. Because the interpretation of these results relies so much upon the coding system's operationalization of both the Western Sexual Script and consent, multiple coders would help establish a more reliable coding system. Future studies should use more coders to improve interrater reliability and applicability.

On the topic of coders, the majority of measures did not yield a high interrater reliability, meaning that the two coders did not rate the characters statistically similar for most of the measures. While counted measures, Total Number of Sex Acts and Substance Use yielded statistically significant correlations, as well as Wealth, Sexual Experience, and Passivity, the other measures did not. This is likely due to a few methodological issues, namely, the lack of coders and novelty of the coding scheme used. Enlisting more coders to rate the novels would create a stronger average, meaning a more normal distribution of the mean.

Revising the coding scheme and way that the measures are operationalized would also increase the validity of this study and therefore make the interrater reliability correlations stronger. Upon reflection, many of the measures were too ambiguous to yield consistent results. For example, it was difficult to code for Wealth when careers and income of the characters fluctuated throughout the timeline of the novel. Professionalism, for another example, became difficult when the characters were students, con (wo)men, or strippers. While these characters were dedicating significant time to their work, is that what it means to be professional? Better operationalization of outcome measures, as well as inclusion of new ones and exclusion of irrelevant ones would greatly enhance this study.

The measure, *Is it Rape?* was included to assess whether or not the present outcome measures were actually representative of lack of consent, but this measure was ultimately inconclusive due to the lack of response. Finding more specific ways to define the variables of interest, in addition to inclusion of more variables pertaining to consent and rape would increase external validity of the study.

While Sexual Consent levels were assessed, the way that consent was characterized is problematic. In hindsight, each instance of explicit consent for each sex scene, rather than a holistic rating of consent upon finishing each book, would be more suitable. This would provide researchers with a more concise understanding of the presence or absence of consent. In general, more research on how to operationalize "consent" should be conducted and implemented in the future. Extensive research of rape and/or sexual violence in real-world relationships would likely be beneficial to better understanding what consent (or the absence of it) looks like. As described in the Introduction, there are specific conditions of what sort of "rape" scene elicits a positive sexual affect, or a rape fantasy. Similarly, what rape looks like in relationships, as well as what

consent looks like in relationships, must be assessed before we can better understand the directionality of this literature, the creation of rape fantasy, and ultimately, the construction of rape culture in contemporary society.

Lastly, placing the lesbian characters into categories of "masculine" and "feminine" for the sake of continuity in statistical analyses is problematic. The researcher is interested in how *authors* are fitting these characters into the heterosexual Western Sexual Script, therefore it is a bit counterintuitive for the researcher to do this. Despite this limitation, the way that the lesbian characters were divided into "male" or "female" was based upon the author's characterization of their personalities in light of the Western Sexual Script, meaning that the division was indeed based on empirical evidence.

Future Studies

Considering the findings in light of the limitations discussed, this study delves deeper into a burning question: what is the relationship between erotic desire and media consumption? Pornography, virtual reality, "sex dolls," dating apps, and artificial intelligence are all on the brink of revolutionizing the way people think about and participate in sex, (*Wall Street Journal*, 2015). While this study just barely taps into the real-world effects of erotic fiction, the growing accessibility and technological advancement of such innovations should be studied closely to prepare us for their psychological effects. Future studies should focus on how to characterize consent, the relationship between sexual violence and sexual media, the effect of author/creator gender on characterization of consent, and how legal definitions of rape and/or sexual assault are represented in the media. Lesbian representation in the media and the discussion surrounding lesbian sexual violence should be further examined as well. The present study has opened a

series of questions, but they require more than one experimenter to even begin unraveling such answers. An ideal future study would have more coders, more books in each category, more specific operationalization of the outcome measures regarding gender typicality and an extensive research review of consent in real-life relationships to better operationalize presence or absence of consent. While no study can explicitly prove a claim, all of these methodological improvements could be feasibly be implemented to potentially yield a significant contribution to the fields of sexuality, consent, and the effects of the media.

Conclusion

While the present study yielded results that support the proposed hypotheses, the discussed limitations should provide readers with considerations for future research and therefore solidification of claims.

Using the Western Sexual Script as a guideline in this study was useful for capturing the "big picture" of gender typicality presentation in the media, but more nuanced and recent models of gender roles should be studied as well. While the Western Sexual Script is pervasive in contemporary culture, society's views regarding sexuality and gender *are* in fact evolving from the 1970s and research should follow suit. Looking at models tailored to non-heterosexual relationships would contribute to the existing literature of this field.

While patterns of gender typicality were present in the lesbian erotic novels, the two main characters of each lesbian novel did not different significantly on measured characteristics, on average. It is intuitive that lesbians would not fit into the heteronormative Western Sexual Script, but further exploration of creating a lesbian-appropriate script is necessary. This, however,

cannot arise without better representation of lesbian and bisexual women in the media, void of fetishization by men.

      Sexuality, gender, and fantasy, while taboo topics in the near past, are now being assessed through a scientific lens, as they should. Many believe that fantasy exists in isolation, but it is important for the psychological and physical health of society to better understand its potential real-life consequences and manifestations.

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Appendix A - Book List

One with you by Sylvia Day

Hottest Mess by Julie Kenner

50 Shades of Grey: As Told by Christian by E.L. James

Kept by James Scott

Seduce Me by Megan Clark

The Muse by Meghan O'Brien

Tipping the Velvet by Sarah Waters

Conquest by Ronica Black

All the Wrong Places by Karin Kallmaker

Appendix B - Coding Scheme

CODE FOR EACH CHARACTER ON 1-7 SCALE BASED ON:

WEALTH:

Definition: access to material resources, income.

Criteria: Salary, family money, unspecified resources, apparent disposable income

Implications:

High - The character has a high paying job; and/or money from their family; and/or an

unidentified source of wealth; and/or a seemingly disposable income. Generally appears to have

a source of money.

Low - The character does not have a high paying job; and/or money from their family; and/or an

unidentified source of wealth; and/or a seemingly disposable income. Does not generally appear

to have a source of money.

SEXUAL EXPERIENCE:

Definition: multiple sexual partners, kinks, fetishes, intensity of sexual acts

Criteria: Multiple sexual partners, "virginity"/lack thereof, kinkiness/lack thereof, fetishes/lack

thereof, numerous sexual acts explored (oral, penetrative, anal, etc)

Implications:

High - The character has had many sexual partners in his/her life, and/or has many sexual

partners currently; and/or the character has has many kinks/fetishes (including but not limited to:

BDSM, hard media fetish - leather, etc, or soft media fetish - silk, pillows, etc); and/or the character is comfortable with numerous sex acts (oral, anal, penetrative, etc).

Low - The character has had little to no sexual partners in his/life; and/or the character has little to no sexual partners currently; and/or the character is a virgin; and/or the character has no preference of fetishes/kinks; the partner is uncomfortable with numerous sexual acts (i.e., sticks to penetrative, missionary, "vanilla" sex).

DOMINANCE:

Definition: Control asserted over someone/other people, "alpha" male/female

Criteria: Controlling a partner, controlling a friend, physical dominance, sexual dominance, power over a body of people (work, leadership roles, etc)

Implications:

High - The character has control over a partner (i.e. dominant in bed, demanding at home, makes decisions for partner) and/or friend (i.e. makes decisions for friend, dismisses friends' ideas) and/or body of people (i.e. has high influence job such as CEO or upper-level management); and/or exerting physical dominance over someone. Generally could be characterized as a "control freak."

Low - The character does not have control over a partner (i.e. does not attempt to influence their actions, does not attempt to exert sexual dominance in bed) and/or friend and/or body of people (i.e. low control job where one is not expected to make decisions for others); and/or does not exert physical dominance over someone.

PASSIVITY:

Definition: Other people can control you, not playing in active role

Criteria: Lack of control with people, lack of active role in career, lack of active role in sex

Implications:

High - The character experiences his/her partner exerting control over them (sexually, domestically); and/or does not seek out an active role in career (i.e. low control job with little to no expectation to make decisions for others); and/or does not seek out active/dominant role in sex; and/or prefers being dominated by partner sexually. Generally, he/she prefers another person to "take the reins."

Low - The character exerts control over their partners (sexually, domestically); and/or the character seeks out an active role in their career; and/or seeks out and prefers to dominant his/her partner sexually. Generally, he/she is not afraid to be assertive.

PROFESSIONALISM

Definition: Investment in career, seriousness regarding work

Criteria: Amount of investment and time put into job, amount of interest in job, amount of time spent at job, seriousness regarding job, success at job

Implications:

High - The character is very invested in career (i.e. has been working in this field for many years, or has given up other opportunities due to job); and/or spends a lot of time at job (works long

hours, works long weeks, is depicted as clocking many hours in at work); and/or is very serious

about job (i.e. puts job before friends, family, partner, other activities, or has taken risks to keep

job), and/or is very successful at their work (i.e. has a high-ranking position at work, others note

their abilities, is well-known for being good at work, has achieved fame status for

accomplishments)

Low - The character is not invested in career (i.e. does not seem interested in job); and/or does

not spend a lot of time at job (i.e. is not depicted as spending many hours at job, mainly depicted

outside of work); and/or is not very serious about job (i.e. does not put job before other people or

interests); and/or is not very successful at work (i.e. has low-ranking position at work or is

known for being incompetent at work); and/or does not have a job

DOMESTICITY

Definition: Interests/abilities pertain to the home or family life

Criteria: Cooking, cleaning, taking care of children, taking care of family members, taking care

of other people, staying home

Implications:

High - The character likes to cook; and/or is depicted as being a good cook; and/or is depicted as

cooking for others often; and/or is often cleaning/taking care of the house; and/or takes care of

children, family members, or other people (i.e. seen as "caregiver" of the family; and/or spends

time at home. Generally, the character is seen as a "homebody." For female characters, she is

generally seen as a "housewife."

Low - The character does not like to cook; and/or is depicted as being a bad cook; and/or is not depicted as cooking for others often; and/or does not spend time cleaning/taking care of the house; and/or does not take care of children, family members, or other people; and/or does not spend a lot of time at home (i.e. travels, works).

SEXUAL ATTRACTION

Definition: Physical attraction to the other character, intense desire to have sexual relations with the other character

Criteria: Physically attraction, sexual desire, weighs sexual attraction over or equal to emotional attraction to the other character

Implications:

High - The character is extremely physically attracted to the other character (i.e. to their body/physical features); and/or desires to have sex with the other character; and/or weighs sexual attraction over or equal to emotional attraction (i.e. the character does not like the personality of the other character, but still strongly maintains sexual attraction to them despite this); and/or is very sexually attracted to character, but also emotionally attracted to character.

Low - The character is not notably physically attracted to the other character (i.e. is either not attracted to their body/physical features, or does not remark on their body/physical features); and/or does not desire to have sex with the other character (i.e. is happy with emotional relationship, or is simply not attracted to other character); and/or prioritizes sexual attraction below emotional attraction (i.e. values emotional relationship above all else).

EMOTIONAL ATTRACTION

Definition: Mental connection to the other character, attracted to other character's mind, attracted to personality of other character

Criteria: Attraction based on personality/mental state, emotional dependence, personality valued

Implications:

High - The character is attracted to the other character's mind/personality (i.e. regardless of physical attraction, personality persists as important trait); and/or is attracted to the mental connection between the two characters, and/or, is emotionally dependent upon the other character (i.e. relies on other character for support, happiness, friendship, meaning); and/or less concerned with "looks" than personality; and/or is very emotionally attracted to character, but also sexually attracted to character.

Low - The character is less attracted to the other character's mind/personality and more attracted to their physical appearance; and/or is attracted to their physical/sexual connection rather than mental connection (i.e. "hate sex" or great sexual chemistry regardless of affinity for each other's personalities); and/or is more concerned with "looks" than personality (i.e. would not be engaging with partner if mental connection existed but sexual connection did not).

CODE FOR COUPLE ON A SCALE OF 1-7:

VIOLENCE: CONSENSUAL AND NONCONSENSUAL

Definition: A level of physical hostility/pain inflicted

Criteria:

Violence: hitting, slapping, punching, tying up, bondage, BDSM, biting, kicking, throwing, scratching, grabbing, choking

Consensual: Character explicitly says "yes" when asked about violent act; and/or asks for violent acts to be made upon them; and/or character stops when "safe word" (preexisting agreed upon term between characters that signals termination of violent act

Non Consensual: Character explicitly says "no" when asked about violent act; and/or character does not stop despite use of "safe word"

Ambiguous Consent: Character does not say no to violent act but does not say yes; and/or character says yes but is under the use of substances; and/or character is asleep when violent act initiated; and/or character is unable to say no due to power relations (i.e. other character will physically hurt them/punish them)

Implications: Code for this based on total sex scenes in the book along a 1-7 scale with these points in mind:

 1 (Explicit Non-Consent of Violence) - 4 (Ambiguous Consent of Violence) - 7 (Explicit Consent of Violence)

CONSENT: EXPLICIT AND EXPLICIT NON-CONSENT

Definition: The permission or lack thereof of one character for another character's sexual advances

Criteria:

Explicit Consent: Character explicitly says "yes" when asked about sexual act; and/or asks for sexual acts to be made upon them

Explicit Non-Consent: Character explicitly says "no" when asked about sexual act; and/or explicitly asks another character to stop act and they do not

Ambiguous Consent: Character does not say no to sexual act but does not say yes; and/or character says yes but is under the use of substances; and/or character is asleep when sexual act initiated; and/or character is unable to say no due to power relations (i.e. other character will physically hurt them/punish them)

Implications: Code for this based on the total sex scenes in the book along a 1-7 scale with these points in mind:

 1 (Explicit Non-Consent of Sexual Acts) - 4 (Ambiguous Consent of Sexual Acts) - 7 (Explicit Consent of Sexual Acts)

IS IT RAPE?

In general, do you feel that non-consensual sex happened between the characters? As a whole, did one character seem to take advantage of the other sexually on multiple occasions?

Please code: 1 (Not Rape) - 4 (Ambiguous) - 7 (Rape).

Also, please code "M" or "F" to indicate whether the female or male seemed to initiate the rape in the heterosexual novels. Use "F1" or "F2" for lesbian novels. Use "N/A" if you felt no rape present.

Keep all sex scenes & the character's relationship in mind.

COUNT NUMBER OF INSTANCES THE FOLLOWING OCCUR:

SUBSTANCE USE

Definition: Number of times one of the two main character engages in a drug substance in the novel

Criteria: Substances include: alcohol (wine, beer, liquor), marijuana, psychedelics (LSD, acid, ecstasy, MDMA, "magic mushrooms), psychotropic drugs (Ambien, Adderall, Ritalin, Vyvanse, Xanax, antidepressants)

Implications: Code for number of instances any of the above drugs are used in the novel at any time - code for occurrence, not strength (i.e. "bottle of wine" is the same number of instances as "glass of wine" for the sake of this study)

TOTAL SEX SCENES:

Definition: Number of times sexual acts occur between the two characters

Criteria: Penetrative sex (penis and vagina), oral sex (fellatio, cunninglus), anal sex, "scissoring," mutual masturbation, touching of each other's genitalia.

Implications: Code for this based on the number of instances that any of the above acts occur from start to finish; if multiple of these acts occur in one passage, count once (for example, if mutual masturbation leads into penetrative sex, this is only one sex scene).