ORIGINAL ARTICLE

"A Story and a Ring": Audience Judgments about Engagement Proposals

David Schweingruber · Alicia D. Cast · Sine Anahita

Abstract Previous research found that engagement proposals are constructed using a traditional proposal script because it sends a message about the strength of the relationship. This paper examined whether others do indeed evaluate relationship strength on the basis of a proposal's conformity to a traditional script. We asked 2,174 U.S. Midwestern university students to evaluate the relationship strength of a hypothetical couple on the basis of traditional and non-traditional proposal elements. We also examined whether sex, age, and religiosity affected these evaluations. In general, relationships were evaluated as stronger when they conformed to a traditional proposal script. Sex and age did not affect ratings of the relationship. Although religiosity affected some ratings of relationship strength, the overall pattern was inconclusive.

Keywords Engagement · Scripts · Marriage proposal · Goffman

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate how people evaluate others' romantic relationships based on a hypothetical couple's adherence to culturally-accepted scripts. In particular, we examine if the secondary audience, people who hear about an engagement proposal, make certain

D. Schweingruber (✉) · A. D. Cast
Department of Sociology, Iowa State University,
Ames, IA 50011, USA
e-mail: dschwein@iastate.edu

S. Anahita
University of Alaska Fairbanks,
Fairbanks, AK, USA

assumptions about the strength of an engaged couple's relationship based on whether the proposal event followed certain commonly-accepted, traditional elements, such as the man getting down on one knee to propose. We are also interested in how attributes of gender, age, and religiosity affect secondary audience perception of the strength of a couple's relationship based on the proposal's conformity to a traditional proposal script. To examine these questions, we asked 2,174 undergraduate students at a large American Midwestern university to evaluate the relationship strength of a hypothetical couple using proposal script elements identified in previous research as corresponding to traditional and non-traditional elements.

This paper is important for several reasons. First, the wedding industry is a multi-million dollar industry, reflecting the increasing importance of cultural rituals surrounding marriage. Weddings have typically been the focus of research on marriage as a cultural ritual despite the fact that other important rituals, such as the engagement proposal, also play a role in the transition from single to married life. Our paper contributes to research in this area by focusing on the engagement proposal as an important part of this overall transition. Second, previous research finds that couples are conscious of the messages that their proposal sends to others, their secondary audiences (Schweingruber et al. 2004). The present paper is thus important because it directs attention to the secondary audience to explore if the messages engaged couples *think* they are sending are being received in the way they intended. A third reason why this paper is important is because it makes queries about the links among gender, religiosity, and age and how these attributes affect secondary audience perceptions of the strength of couples' relationships. It is possible that different groups use different standards to evaluate engagement proposal performances.

Sociologists have long noted the importance of ritual in the maintenance and construction of self and society. According to Goffman (1967), one of the reasons that rituals are so important is that they are a mechanism by which individuals can present a particular self to the world and simultaneously demonstrate their commitment to the integrity of those with whom they interact. For example, the traditional American engagement proposal is a ritual that not only serves a purpose in the mate selection process but also allows men and women to present gendered selves in the situation. Within a heterosexual couple, the man is expected to initiate the ritual, suggesting his leadership in the relationship, and he adorns his fiancée with an expensive piece of jewelry, suggesting that his role is to be a provider. The woman's role is complementary: she is to wait for the man to propose, suggesting her passivity, and then she is to wear the engagement ring to display that she is "taken."

In an earlier qualitative study of the meanings that individuals associate with the engagement process, we found that couples downplayed the gendered ideological meanings of the ritual. Instead, they highlighted the importance of the proposal for the presentation of the couple as a legitimately engaged couple (Schweingruber et al. 2004). Specifically, couples told us they followed traditional scripts for the engagement ritual because it indicated to each other and to a secondary audience of family, friends, and casual acquaintances that, among other things, they were indeed engaged and would be getting married. Participants suggested that failing to properly follow the ritual's components would cast doubt on the reality or quality of their relationship. As one woman told us:

> Nobody would take us too seriously if we started planning a wedding and there hadn't been some official engagement process. [We needed] a story and a ring.... Because... if I would have said, "Mom, I'm getting married on this day," she would have been like, "Well, where's the ring? Where's the proposal? ... I'm not gonna start any of this until we have that."

Participants in our earlier study suggested that the details of their proposals sent messages to others about the status and quality of their relationship. They presumed that others would evaluate the legitimacy of their engagement and the strength of the relationship based on whether it conformed to cultural scripts (Laner and Ventrone 2000; Simon and Gagnon 2003; Rose and Frieze 1989) for a traditional proposal. Therefore, for this paper, we investigated whether their presumption was correct: do others evaluate the strength of a couple's relationship on the basis of the performance's conformity to a traditional proposal script? Furthermore, does the sex, age, or religiosity of secondary audience members affect how they evaluate the strength of a couple's relationship?

Weddings and Capitalism

There is a small but growing body of literature on romantic rituals, most of which focuses on weddings. Engagement proposals, the focus of this paper, have received much less attention. Much of the scholarship on weddings and engagements has taken a critical stance, viewing them as supporting capitalism, hegemonic heterosexuality, and patriarchy. Currie (1993) suggested that "it is quite likely that this view of wedding customs as 'irrational' accounts for the lack of research interest in weddings" (p. 404).

The dominant approach in this critical body of research focuses on the power of capitalism and its aligned media to promote particular images of romance, images that are quite gendered. There have been a number of interesting studies of what Ingraham (1999) calls the "wedding–industrial complex." These include studies of particular industries, such as the jewelry industry (Howard 2003) and advertising (Otnes and Scott 1996), and how non-Western wedding industries adopt Anglo–American traditions (Goldstein-Gidoni 2000), as well as more general overviews of wedding production, sales and consumption (Ingraham 1999; Otnes and Pleck 2003). Other studies have examined how media accounts of romance depict and transmit pro-consumption and/or anti-feminist messages (e.g., Carpenter 1998; Engstrom 2003; Ingraham 1999).

These critical studies, which typically examine advertisements and other cultural texts, are limited in that they pay little or no attention to how individuals negotiate this wedding complex and make decisions within it. For example, Otnes and Pleck (2003) claim that "except on the lowest rungs of the socioeconomic ladder, the decision to plan and execute elaborate weddings is rarely questioned" (p. 3). However, they provided little evidence of this; their work simply assumed the power of the wedding industry to influence individuals. Another line of research approached this industry with an interactionist perspective, showing how bridal workers (Corrado 2002) and wedding photographers (Lewis 1997, 1998) skillfully interacted with mostly white, working class and middle class American consumers to shape wedding rituals.

Multiple Sources of Romantic Rituals

Research on people's expectations and decisions regarding romance demonstrates the importance of multiple sources of influence, including, but not limited to, mass media. In their study of the romantic schemata of young people aged 8–17, Bachen and Illouz (1996) found that "By far, the mass media were named as more frequent sources of love stories than interpersonal sources" (p. 292). Their analysis of these American young people's accounts of typical and ideal romantic situations revealed "the salience of consumer

values" (p. 303). Bachen and Illouz (1996) also found, however, that media images of romance were supplemented by romantic images from personal or parental sources, which grew more important for the older, high school youth in their study. This second discourse of romance focused more on communication, sharing and partnership than on consumption.

Research on adolescent dating and pre-dating (e.g., "going with") romantic practices (e.g., Hatcher 1995; Merten 1996; Simon et al. 1992) has pointed toward the importance of family and peer influence on individuals' understandings of romantic rituals. Peer culture may resist attempts by teachers to define romantic rituals, as demonstrated by Bright's (1997) study of Valentine's Day celebrations in Canadian schools. This research highlights the embeddedness of romantic relationships in the larger social scene. Besides research on Valentine's Day, however, the research on adolescent dating has not focused on romantic rituals. This may be because romantic rituals among school children (e.g., giving/receiving a class ring) have not been considered as culturally significant as weddings.

Research on the romantic relationships of adults has also pointed toward the importance of personal experience and interpersonal influence. Individuals develop images of romance and marriage that, to a greater or lesser extent, reflect their understanding of what is expected of them. Swidler (2001) argued that the two major American discourses of love represent two of the structural realities that people experience in marriage. The "mythic" view of love is grounded in the relationship of marriage, while the "realistic" view is grounded in marriage as an institution. People are able to use the "movie image" of love in their relationships while remaining skeptical about it. Laumann et al. (1994) argued that social scripts exert their social influence through relationship stakeholders. Their massive National Health and Social Life Survey found that most people were introduced to their future spouses by a friend or family member and the "screening process" gets more serious as relationships progress toward marriage. Research on romantic and sexual scripts (Reed and Weinberg 1984; Simon and Gagnon 2003) has also suggested the importance of social norms and interpersonal influence on people's romantic behavior.

Research examining romantic rituals using interviews with wedding participants suggests that wedding participants are influenced by and use media products to plan their weddings, but that they are also influenced by friends and family. Currie (1993) reported that among her Canadian respondents, "almost without exception, participants used books and magazines to find out how to plan their wedding" (p. 411), but also that much of the planning was "driven by the need to include appropriate relatives"

(p. 407). Boden (2003), in her study of couples wedding experiences in the UK, concluded that "the wedding industry's rhetoric is one influence on brides and grooms who regard themselves as being able to have the event they want, an event appropriate and relevant to them.… In short, wedding consumerism provides an avenue for couples to think through and enact what the whole occasion means to them" (p. 157). Couples not only wanted to include others in their ceremonies but they also recognized the important role that others play in the ceremony and in their relationship. Braithwaite and Baxter (1995), who interviewed mostly white American couples who had participated in vow renewal ceremonies, have pointed out the significance of the fact that these ceremonies are performed in front of an audience, which was a source of legitimation for the renewal ceremony. Couples believed that the ceremonies were a celebration not just of the couple but of "the larger social fabric composed of family and friends" (p. 185) and that these people should be included in and honored by the ceremony. This inclusion ensured the construction of a ceremony that was in line with cultural expectations and acknowledged and legitimized the relationship within a larger social network.

Survey research on weddings has also shown how couples take into account the expectations of the couple's social network. Kalmijn (2004) proposed two functions of the wedding ceremony. The first is to help reduce the uncertainty of the transition to marriage. The wedding ritual reduces uncertainty by ratifying the couple's decision before their social network. The second function is to confirm the couple's role transition through following social norms. "These norms can be internalized by the marriage candidates themselves, but they are also expressed by friends, parents, the community, and the church. The existence of social norms implies that positive or negative sanctions are given, and the wedding day is an important occasion for sanctioning behavior" (p. 584). Using data from the Households in the Netherlands survey, Kalmijn found support for several of the hypotheses derived from these functions. Younger couples had more elaborate ceremonies (operationalized as whether the wedding is held in a church and the size of the party afterwards), while cohabiting couples and those having a second wedding had less elaborate ceremonies. These findings support Kalmijn's contention that when the transition to the married state is less radical, less emphasis is placed on the social components of the wedding. Also, couples had more elaborate weddings if their parents were perceived as supportive of the institution of marriage, if their friends were supportive of the institution of marriage (measured by whether they married without first cohabiting) and if they had farming backgrounds. This supports Kalmijn's claim that wedding ceremonies "are a way to obtain approval for

the entry into normatively prescribed roles" (p. 592). Control variables positively associated with having a lavish wedding included church membership, participants' own supportive attitude toward marriage, and couple's own and their parents' high socioeconomic status. In another survey study, Whyte (1990), who studied Detroit area residents, found that more elaborate ceremonies (measured with a seven-item scale) were associated with higher socioeconomic status and with religiosity. He found no age effect.

So while one line of research on romance has emphasized the way weddings support capitalism, patriarchy, and hegemonic heterosexuality, other research has presented an image of a process that is ultimately made meaningful to individuals through their interactions with others. That is, while the larger systems within the culture may shape individuals' understandings of love and romance, the enactment of these cultural understandings of love and romance are made meaningful to individuals via their expression to others, either between the couple or between the couple and others close to the couple. Taking a one-sided approach to romantic rituals that focuses on the hegemony of capitalism and patriarchy without considering how people draw upon media images and make them meaningful through interaction with others (Simon et al. 1992) results in an image of the individual actor as "cultural dope" (Garfinkel 1967).

Gender, Age, and Religiosity's Effects on Romance Attitudes

Romance and sexuality are profoundly gendered institutions as are individual's attitudes, scripts and behaviors regarding them (e.g., Best 2000; Kimmel 2005; Rose and Frieze 1989; Thompson 1995; Widerman 2005). The wedding ceremony and wedding industry are both organized around ideas about gender (Ingraham 1999). It is not surprising, then, that previous studies of college students have found gender effects regarding romantic experience and expectations. However, these gender effects are complex and cannot be easily reduced to the main effect of sex category. For example, gender differences were observed in a study of 473 young adults and adolescents who were asked about their experiences in and beliefs about romantic relationships (Montgomery 2005). Males in Montgomery's study indicated a greater likelihood to believe in love at first sight, and also reported having been in love more times than the females in the study. Montgomery also discovered significant age differences, with older participants idealizing romantic love less than younger participants, while also reporting more romantic experiences such as dating and being in love. In contrast, a study by Regan et al. (2004) of ethnically diverse college students at a large American university in the west

documented that more women than men reported having ever been in love or having been kissed, although the vast majority of both men and women in their study reported having engaged in these romantic activities. This study also noted age effects centering on the age at which participants first kissed, first fell in love, and first engaged in sexual intercourse. Some of these age effects also interacted with participants' ethnicity. Interestingly, the study by Regan et al. did not find a significant age difference regarding when participants fell in love for the first time. Undergraduates at a large university in the American Southeast were significantly divided by gender when asked about their attitudes about their future wedding (Knox et al. 2003). Many more women than men said they preferred to have a formal wedding, and they were willing to invest more time than men in planning and preparing. The authors of this study found no age effect, nor any effect for year in college. Bryant (2003) also noted gender differences among undergraduates, surmising that men college students have more traditional attitudes about gender than women students. However, this study found an age effect, as traditional gender attitudes declined as students matriculated.

Religiosity is another attribute that influences attitudes toward romance (e.g, Laumann et al. 1994). As mentioned above, Kalmijn (2004) and Whyte (1990) both found that religiosity was associated with having a more elaborate wedding ceremony. Another survey study, with a sample of nearly 5,700 33-year olds in the UK, found that traditional attitudes towards marriage were positively correlated to participants' religiosity (Flouri and Buchanan 2001). This study also uncovered gender effects, with their male participants' traditional attitudes towards marriage being more likely to be predicted by the presence of children in the home, while for women, it was the presence of a partner in the home that predicted whether they held traditional ideas about marriage.

Engagement Proposal Research

In an earlier study, we interviewed members of 18 engaged couples about their engagement proposals in order to explore the meanings of proposal elements for them as well as the planning process for the event (Schweingruber et al. 2004). This earlier study, like the present one, was set in a midsized Midwestern university town. Most of our earlier participants were white. Although we interviewed lesbian and gay couples, our earlier study focused on our heterosexual participants. We did not ask about participants' religiosity; however, most stated that they planned to incorporate Christian religious elements in their wedding ceremony.

The participants in this earlier study described several key elements of the engagement proposal. First, the man was expected to be the proposer. Although the woman may

give him implicit or even explicit instructions on the proposal and knows it is coming at some future moment, he was supposed to surprise her in its time, place and manner. He was expected to make the proposal a special and highly romantic event. If the woman proposed, her proposal may be treated as a joke as a way of managing the social anxiety that occurs when the culturally expected script is not followed. Second, the man was expected to present the woman with a diamond ring. The absence of a diamond ring may cast doubt on whether the proposal was genuine. Not presenting a diamond engagement ring, or giving another type of ring, even if the woman wants it, may cause confusion among the secondary audience. Third, the man was expected to get down on one knee. However, even though this element of the proposal was nearly ubiquitous among our participants, they did not attribute the importance to this element they attributed to the previous two elements. Fourth, the man was expected to ask permission to marry the woman from her father or both of her parents. Unlike the other elements, which were found in almost every proposal in our study, only 60% of the couples included this element. Those who included this element viewed it as a romantic extension to the proposal, a way to include a woman's parents in the engagement process, and/ or a nod to traditionalism.

In our earlier paper, we claim that our participants downplayed the gendered messages of the proposal. Instead, they indicated that their performance of these traditional elements of the proposal was meant both for each other and for a secondary audience of family and friends. They believed that a poorly executed engagement proposal, or one that does not follow the culturally-appropriate, traditional proposal script, may send negative or confusing information to their secondary audience that would lead to a negative evaluation of the couple and their suitability for marriage.

In this paper, we further investigated this issue. Specifically, we asked if the secondary audience of an engagement proposal—people who are not present at the proposal but who hear about it from one or both members of the couple—make judgments about the strength of the couple's relationship based on whether the proposal followed the traditional script by including these traditional elements: (1) the man was the proposer, not the woman; (2) the man got down on one knee while proposing; (3) the man presented the woman with a diamond ring when he proposed; (4) the man gave the woman an especially large diamond ring; (5) the couple picked out the ring together; (6) the man asked permission from the woman's father; and (7) the proposal took place during a memorable occasion as opposed to a routine date. (See Table 1.) In addition to asking participants to judge the strength of a relationship based on whether the proposal included the seven elements of a traditional proposal, we also asked if participants' gender,

age, or religiosity affected their evaluation. As discussed, these attributes have interacted in complex ways in previous studies, and we hypothesized that they would do so in our study as well.

Before explaining our hypotheses, it is important to note how we use the concept of "traditionality." When asked why they used many elements of the engagement proposal, the respondents in our earlier study often told us that they were "traditional," which they saw as a positive attribute. By referring to the engagement script we developed from that research, or any of its elements, as traditional, we are not making any claims about their history or origin, which may be more recent than our respondents realized.

Hypotheses

As discussed previously, the enactment of rituals using culturally approved scripts enables individuals to present a particular view of self to the social world. Because individuals construct their rituals from cultural resources (Swidler 1986; cf. Becker 1982; Stewart 1998), we used a dramaturgical understanding of the ritual process of becoming engaged. Erving Goffman (1959) used the metaphor of theater to conceptualize social interaction. He argued that people act to provide information to an audience and make a "moral demand" upon this audience to honor the performance. Any performance sends interconnected messages about three things: the performer, the situation, and the performance team. A poor performance can relay negative impressions of these three things. When a man proposes to his girlfriend, then, he attempts to send multiple messages, including that he is a worthy fiancé, that an engagement proposal is taking place, and that the couple should marry. The performance team consists of both members of the couple because the woman often works with the man backstage to plan the proposal and then works with him to present the ritual artifacts (e.g. the engagement ring and the story of the proposal) to the secondary audience (Schweingruber et al. 2004). A poor performance may cast doubt on the quality of the couple's relationship and the appropriateness of their marriage. The participants in our earlier study indicated that deviations from the traditional script had the potential to be negatively evaluated by the secondary audience. They believed that a poorly executed engagement proposal, or one that does not follow a culturally-appropriate script, may send negative or confusing information to their secondary audience that would lead to a negative evaluation of the strength of the couple's relationship and their suitability for marriage. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H1: Individuals would perceive relationships as stronger when engagements conformed to traditional proposal

Table 1 Means and standard deviations of traditional proposal elements and non-traditional proposal elements.

Proposal elements	Mean	Standard deviation
1) **Traditional: The man asked the woman to marry him.**[a]	4.08*	.94
Non-traditional: (average of two items below)	3.40	.94
The woman asked the man to marry her.	3.54	1.06
The couple decided to get married without either one asking the other.	3.27	1.21
2) **Traditional: The man got down on one knee while proposing.**	3.78*	.92
Non-traditional: The man did not get down on one knee while proposing.	3.26	.77
3) **Traditional: The man gave the woman a diamond ring when he proposed.**	3.72*	.89
Non-Traditional: (average of three items below)	3.11	.73
The man gave the woman a sapphire or ruby ring when he proposed.	3.25	.82
The man gave the woman a plain band with no jewel when he proposed.	3.23	.86
The man didn't give the woman a ring when he proposed.	2.84	.93
4) **Traditional: The man gave the woman an especially large diamond ring when he proposed.**	3.39	.86
Non-Traditional: The man gave the woman an especially small diamond ring when he proposed.	3.39	.79
5) **Traditional: The couple picked out the ring together.**	4.03*	.91
Non-Traditional: The man picked out the ring himself.	3.79	.90
6) **Traditional: The man asked permission from the woman's father.**	4.20*	.93
Non-Traditional: (average of three items below)	3.66	.70
The man asked permission from the woman's father and mother.	4.19	.98
The man didn't ask permission from anyone.	3.20	.85
The woman asked permission from the man's father and mother.	3.58	1.02
7) **Traditional: The proposal took place during a memorable occasion**	3.92*	.93
Non-Traditional: The proposal took place during a routine date.	3.43	.89

*Paired *t*-tests comparing traditional proposal element with non-traditional proposal element; $p<.0125$.

[a] Items in bold are the two items used in analyses.

Note: Participants rated the relationship on a five-point scale: 1 = This suggests the relationship is in trouble; 2 = This suggests that the relationship isn't very strong; 3 = This doesn't suggest anything about the relationship/I'm unsure what it suggests; 4 = This suggests that the relationship is somewhat strong; and 5 = This suggests that the relationship is very strong.

scripts than when they did not conform to traditional proposal scripts.

As we noted above, gender effects on romance found in previous studies are complex. However, we suspect that the gendering of the ritual itself may shape attitudes toward it. Unlike most romantic rituals, the engagement proposal is the "man's moment" because it is the man who is typically in charge of preparing and staging the engagement proposal. For this reason, men may be more concerned than women with the staging of the engagement proposal because it may be connected with perceptions of their masculinity and their worth as men. In addition, research on college students' gender attitudes has shown that male students tend to have more traditional attitudes about gender than female students (Bryant 2003). Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H2: The effect of the traditionality of the engagement proposal on men's judgments of engaged couples' relationship strength would be larger than its effect on women's judgments.

Another attribute that may affect the degree to which individuals evaluate a couple on the basis of an engagement proposal's conformity to a traditional proposal is age. Previous research found that older couples were less likely to have elaborate wedding ceremonies, suggesting that this "traditional" element of the wedding ritual was less important to these couples (Kalmijn (2004). In addition, Bryant's (2003) research found that college students' levels of gender traditionalism declined during college. These findings suggest that those who are older will be less likely to evaluate a couple's relationship as less strong if it does not conform to a traditional proposal script. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H3: The effect of the traditionality of the engagement proposal on younger individuals' judgments of engaged couples' relationship strength would be larger than its effect on older individuals' judgments.

Last, religiosity may affect the degree to which individuals evaluate a relationship's strength on the basis of its conformity to a traditional proposal script. For example,

Kalmijn (2004) and Whyte (1990) both found that religiosity was associated with having a more elaborate wedding ceremony. In addition, many religious institutions promote marriage and many weddings are religious ceremonies. Therefore, we hypothesized that:

H4: The effect of the traditionality of the engagement proposal on more religious individuals' judgments of engaged couples' relationship strength would be larger than its effect on less religious individuals' judgments.

Method

Sample

The sample was comprised of a total of 2,174 participants. Of these participants, 46% were men and 54% were women. The racial distribution of the sample was as follows: 89% white/Anglo, 3% black/African American, 2% Hispanic (Spanish, Mexican, Chicano, Puerto Rican), 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 6% "other." Because all of our study participants were students in introduction to sociology courses at a large Midwestern university, our sample was young: 35% were 18 years of age or younger, 52% were 19 or 20 years of age, 11% were 20–24 years of age, and 2% were 25 years of age or older.

Procedures

A survey was administered in class during three semesters: Spring 2002, Fall 2002, and Spring 2003. Students were asked to complete the questionnaire during class time. If students didn't want their answers used for research purposes, they could specify that their data could be used for class purposes but not research.

Measure

Proposal Elements

The seven elements of the engagement proposal we examined were derived from our earlier study of engaged couples. These elements associated with the traditional engagement proposal script were: (1) the man was expected to be the proposer, (2) the man should get down on one knee when he proposes, (3) the man was expected to present the woman with a diamond ring, (4) the diamond ring should be large, (5) the couple should pick out the ring together, (6) the man should ask permission to marry the

woman from her father or both of her parents, and (7) the proposal should take place during a memorable occasion. Participants in our earlier study indicated that elements #1, #2, #3 and #7 were definitely expected elements of the traditional proposal. Element #6, the man asking permission, was not viewed as a mandatory element, but was seen by most couples as a positive addition to the proposal. The couples in our earlier study gave mixed reports about who shopped for the ring, the subject of element #5. However, in a majority of the couples the woman and man shopped together so we designated this the "traditional" option. These couples also had varying opinions about the size of the ring, the subject of element #4. However, because the size of a ring is connected to its cost and a more expensive ring might suggest greater commitment by the proposer, we included the expectation of a large ring as one of the elements of the traditional script. We then created reasonable non-traditional comparison elements for each of the above elements in the traditional proposal script.

In the present study, participants indicated their perception of the strength of a relationship based on these elements of the traditional proposal script and the corresponding non-traditional proposal script elements. The questionnaire contained the following scenario: "Assume a close heterosexual friend of yours has just announced his or her engagement and told you about the proposal. The following are details about the proposal. For each statement, indicate your evaluation of the engaged couple's relationship." Students were then provided with a list of proposal elements, one traditional and at least one non-traditional, and were asked to indicate their perception of the strength of the relationship based on a particular type of proposal element. For example, students were asked to evaluate the strength of the relationship where the man asked the woman to marry him (a traditional element). Students were then asked to evaluate a relationship where the woman asked the man to marry her (a non-traditional proposal element). The seven traditional proposal script items can be seen in Table 1 with their corresponding non-traditional proposal script items. Means and standard deviations of participants' responses are also included in this table. Response categories ranged from 1 ("this suggests that the relationship is in trouble") to 5 ("this suggests that the relationship is very strong").

Because there was not a consistent number of non-traditional items across the seven proposal elements, when there was more than one non-traditional item an average of the non-traditional items was created to include in the repeated measures analyses. For the first proposal element (whether the man asked the woman or not), the two items "The woman asked the man to marry her" and "The couple decided to get married without either one asking the other"

were averaged; factor loadings were .49 and .49, respectively. Alpha reliability coefficient was .52. For the third proposal element (whether the man gave her a diamond ring or not), the three items "The man gave the woman a sapphire or ruby ring when he proposed," "The man gave the woman a plain band with no jewel when he proposed," and "The man didn't give the woman a ring when he proposed" were averaged; factor loadings were .78, .83, and .55, respectively. Alpha reliability coefficient is .78. Last, for the sixth proposal element (whether the man asked for permission to marry her or not), we averaged responses to the following three items: "the man asked permission from the woman's father and mother;" "the man didn't ask permission from anyone;" and "the woman asked permission from the man's father and mother." Factor loadings were .52, .32, and .61, respectively. Alpha reliability coefficient was .56. While some of these factors loadings are below .40 (a frequently used cut-off point in scale construction), given the small number of items we had available, we made the decision to use all items, even those with low factor loadings.

Sex Category

The sex category of the participant was a dichotomous variable coded 1 ("man") and 2 ("woman").

Age

The age of the participant was measured using a categorical variable that is coded as follows: 1=18 or younger; 2=19–20; 3=21–24; 4=25–30; 5=over 30. As discussed previously, approximately 35% of our sample was 18 years old or younger; approximately 87% of our sample was 20 years old or younger.

Religiosity

The religiosity of the participant was assessed using a single-item question. Students were asked to finish the following statement: "The influence of religion on my life has been" using the following response categories: 1 = none; 2 = minimal; 3 = moderate; 4 = quite high; 5 = very great. Approximately 4% of the sample responded "none"; approximately 19% of the sample responded "minimal"; approximately 40% of the sample responded "moderate"; approximately 23% of the sample responded "quite high"; and approximately 14% of the sample responded "very great."

Analysis

Our analyses were conducted in two stages. First, to compare participants' evaluations of relationships that conform to a traditional proposal script to participants' evaluations of relationships that do not conform to a traditional proposal script we conducted simple, paired t-tests. (As seen in Table 1, if there was more than one non-traditional item within a proposal element, we average participants' response to those items.) In the second stage of our analysis, we utilized a repeated measures ANOVA design (traditional and non-traditional) with the strength of the relationship as the dependent variable. We conducted separate analyses to investigate our three between-subjects factors: sex category, age, and religiosity.

Because we were conducting four analyses on our dependent variable, we applied a Bonferroni adjustment to our alpha and utilized an alpha of .0125 (.05/4) to determine statistical significance.

Results

Perceived Strength of the Relationship and "Traditionality" of the Proposal

Results from paired samples t-test analyses are presented in Table 1. In H1 we suggested that participants would evaluate relationships that conformed to a traditional proposal script as stronger than relationships that did not conform to a traditional proposal script. As discussed below, the results presented in Table 1 provided partial support for this hypothesis.

The first element of a traditional proposal that we examined was that the *man is to ask the woman to marry him*. As seen in Table 1, relationships in which the proposal was traditional (the man asks the woman) were perceived to be stronger than those relationships that did not conform to this element of the traditional proposal script ($t_{(2173)}=29.84$, $p<.0125$). The second element of the traditional proposal was that *the man was to propose on bended knee* to his beloved. Participants perceived relationships in which the man got down on bended knee to propose as stronger than those relationships where the man did not get down on bended knee ($t_{(2173)}=27.09$, $p<.0125$).

The third element of the traditional proposal that we examined was the *presentation of a diamond ring*. Participants perceived relationships as stronger when a diamond ring was presented during the proposal rather than another kind of ring or no ring at all ($t_{(2173)}=29.81$, $p<.0125$). We also examined whether the *size of the diamond* affected how participants evaluated the strength of the relationship; this was the fourth element of the traditional proposal script. Inconsistent with our expectations, participants did not perceive the strength of the relationship differently based on the size of the diamond ($t_{(2173)}=.42$, $p>.0125$).

We also examined whether the couple shopping for the ring together affected how participants evaluated the couples' relationship. Consistent with our expectation, participants evaluated relationships as stronger when the couple picked out the ring together as opposed to the man picking out the ring by himself ($t_{(2173)}$=12.66, p<.0125).

We then examined the sixth element of the traditional proposal: *the man asking permission from the woman's father*. Participants evaluated relationships as stronger when relationships conformed to the traditional proposal script compared to those relationships that did not conform to this ideal ($t_{(2173)}$=.35.01, p<.0125). The seventh and final element of the traditional proposal script that we examined involved the context of the proposal itself. Ideally, a *special occasion* should be planned for the proposal and therefore we expected that relationships would be perceived to be stronger when the proposal was a special event as opposed to a routine date. The results in Table 1 confirmed that participants perceived the relationship to be stronger when the proposal took place at a special event rather than a routine date ($t_{(2173)}$=23.12, p<.0125).

Sex Category, Age, and Religiosity Comparisons

Recall that we hypothesized that men, those who are younger and those who are more religious would be more affected by the traditionality of the engaged couple's relationship strength (than women, those who are older, and those who are less religious, respectively) when making judgments about the strength of the couple's relationship (H2, H3, H4).

We first examined the effects of the participants' sex category on perceptions of relationship strength when a proposal conformed to a traditional versus non-traditional script (H2) using a repeated measures ANOVA design (traditional and non-traditional) with the strength of the relationship as our dependent variable and sex category as a between-subjects factor. Before providing the interaction effects, which will actually test the hypothesis, we provide the main effects for traditionality and for sex category on evaluation of relationship strength.

Results indicated that there was a significant main effect for traditionality of the proposal for six out of the seven proposal elements: man asked the woman to marry him vs. man did not ask woman to marry him ($F_{(1,2172)}$=885.30, p<.0125); man got down on one knee vs. man did not get down on one knee ($F_{(1,2172)}$=734.97, p<.0125); diamond ring vs. non-diamond ring or no ring at all ($F_{(1,2172)}$= 886.31, p<.0125); couple picked out ring vs. man picked out ring ($F_{(1,2172)}$=163.82, p<.0125); man asked permission from (only) the woman's father vs. non-traditional alternative ($F_{(1,2172)}$=1210.120, p<.0125); memorable occasion vs. routine date ($F_{(1,2172)}$=532.91, p<.0125). There

were no significant main effects for traditionality for the proposal element having to do with the size of the diamond ($F_{(1,2172)}$=.15, p>.0125). This is consistent with our earlier analysis using *t*-tests.

Results indicated that there were significant main effects for sex category for two of the seven proposal elements: man asked permission from (only) the woman's father vs. non-traditional alternative ($F_{(1,2172)}$=30.70, p<.0125) and couple picked out ring vs. man picked out ring ($F_{(1,2172)}$= 23.32, p<.0125). Main effects for sex category were insignificant for the remaining five proposal elements: man asked the woman to marry him vs. man did not ask woman to marry him ($F_{(1,2172)}$=4.30, p>.0125); man got down on one knee vs. man did not get down on one knee ($F_{(1,2172)}$=.76, p>.0125); diamond ring vs. non-diamond ring or no ring at all ($F_{(1,2172)}$=2.18, p>.0125); memorable occasion vs. routine date ($F_{(1,2172)}$=4.42, p>.0125), and big diamond vs. small diamond ($F_{(1,2172)}$=.00, p>.0125).

Support for H2, however, would be found in significant interaction effects in our model. In terms of interaction effects, results indicated that men's and women's ratings of the strength of the relationship in response to the traditionality (traditional vs. non-traditional) of the script were not significantly different. This was the case for all seven proposal elements: man asked the woman to marry him vs. man did not ask woman to marry him ($F_{(1,2172)}$= .00, p>.0125); man got down on one knee vs. man did not get down on one knee ($F_{(1,2172)}$=1.63, p>.0125); diamond ring vs. non-diamond ring or no ring at all ($F_{(1,2172)}$=.42, p>.0125); large diamond vs. small diamond ($F_{(1,2172)}$=.20, p>.0125); couple picked out ring vs. man picked out ring ($F_{(1,2172)}$=5.11, p>.0125); man asked permission from (only) the woman's father vs. non-traditional alternative ($F_{(1,2172)}$=5.36, p>.0125); memorable occasion vs. routine date ($F_{(1,2172)}$=.20, p>.0125). Thus, H2 was not supported.

We then examined the effects of age on participants' evaluations of relationship strength when proposals conformed to traditional scripts as opposed to non-traditional scripts. Recall that we hypothesized that the effect of the traditionality of engagement proposals on younger individuals' judgments of engaged couples' relationship strength will be larger than its effect on older individuals' judgments (H3). We examined this hypothesis using a repeated measures ANOVA design (traditional and non-traditional) with the strength of the relationship as our dependent variable and age of participant as a between-subjects factor.

Again, before providing the interaction effects, which will actually test the hypothesis, we provide the main effects for traditionality and for age on evaluation of relationship strength. Results indicated that there was a significant main effect for traditionality of the proposal for six out of the seven proposal elements: man asked the woman to marry him vs. man did not ask woman to marry

him ($F_{(1,2172)}=63.37$, $p<.0125$); man got down on one knee vs. man did not get down on one knee ($F_{(1,2172)}=77.03$, $p<.0125$); diamond ring vs. non-diamond ring or no ring at all ($F_{(1,2172)}=72.84$, $p<.0125$); couple picked out ring vs. man picked out ring ($F_{(1,2172)}=22.81$, $p<.0125$); man asked permission from (only) the woman's father vs. non-traditional alternative ($F_{(1,2172)}=111.14$, $p<.0125$); memorable occasion vs. routine date ($F_{(1,2172)}=24.80$, $p<.0125$). There were no significant main effects for traditionality for the proposal element having to do with the size of the diamond ($F_{(1,2172)}=1.79$, $p>.0125$). Again, this is consistent with our earlier analysis using t-tests.

Results also indicated that there were significant main effects for age for two of the seven proposal elements: memorable occasion vs. routine date ($F_{(1,2172)}=4.65$, $p<.0125$) and couple picked out ring vs. man picked out ring ($F_{(1,2172)}=5.68$, $p<.0125$). Main effects for age were insignificant for the remaining five proposal elements: man asked permission from (only) the woman's father vs. non-traditional alternative ($F_{(1,2172)}=2.44$, $p>.0125$); man asked the woman to marry him vs. man did not ask woman to marry him ($F_{(1,2172)}=2.86$, $p>.0125$); man got down on one knee vs. man did not get down on one knee ($F_{(1,2172)}=.68$, $p>.0125$); diamond ring vs. non-diamond ring or no ring at all ($F_{(1,2172)}=.85$, $p>.0125$); and big diamond vs. small diamond ($F_{(1,2172)}=1.74$, $p>.0125$).

Support for H3, however, would be found in significant interaction effects between traditionality of proposal and age. In terms of interaction effects, results indicated that younger individuals' and older individuals' ratings of the strength of the relationship in response to the traditionality of the script were not significantly different. This was the case for all seven proposal elements: man asked the woman to marry him vs. man did not ask woman to marry him ($F_{(4,2169)}=.74$, $p>.0125$); man got down on one knee vs. man did not get down on one knee ($F_{(4,2169)}=1.08$, $p>.0125$); diamond ring vs. non-diamond ring or no ring at all ($F_{(4,2169)}=.36$, $p>.0125$); large diamond vs. small diamond ($F_{(4,2169)}=2.70$, $p>.0125$); couple picked out ring vs. man picked out ring ($F_{(4,2169)}=1.31$, $p>.0125$); man asked permission from (only) the woman's father vs. non-traditional alternative ($F_{(4,2169)}=5.36$, $p>.0125$); memorable occasion vs. routine date ($F_{(4,2169)}=1.00$, $p>.0125$). Thus, H3 was not supported.

Last, we examined the effects of religiosity on participants' evaluations of relationship strength when proposals conformed to traditional scripts as opposed to non-traditional scripts. Recall that we hypothesized that the effect of the traditionality of engagement proposals on more religious individuals' judgments of engaged couples' relationship strength will be larger than its effect on less religious individuals' judgments (H4). We examined this hypothesis using a repeated measures ANOVA design

(traditional and non-traditional) with the strength of the relationship as our dependent variable and religiosity of participant as a between-subjects factor.

Again, before providing the interaction effects, which will actually test the hypothesis, we provide the main effects for traditionality and religiosity on evaluation of relationship strength. Results indicated that there was a significant main effect for traditionality of the proposal for six out of the seven proposal elements: man asked the woman to marry him vs. man did not ask woman to marry him ($F_{(1,2172)}=412.92$, $p<.0125$); man got down on one knee vs. man did not get down on one knee ($F_{(1,2172)}=378.18$, $p<.0125$); diamond ring vs. non-diamond ring or no ring at all ($F_{(1,2172)}=420.23$, $p<.0125$); couple picked out ring vs. man picked out ring ($F_{(1,2172)}=113.11$, $p<.0125$); man asked permission from (only) the woman's father vs. non-traditional alternative ($F_{(1,2172)}=631.16$, $p<.0125$); memorable occasion vs. routine date ($F_{(1,2172)}=318.64$, $p<.0125$). There were no significant main effects for traditionality for the proposal element having to do with the size of the diamond ($F_{(1,2172)}=.06$, $p>.0125$). Again, this is consistent with our earlier analysis using t-tests.

Results also indicated that there were significant main effects for religiosity for three of the seven proposal elements: man asked permission from (only) the woman's father vs. non-traditional alternative ($F_{(1,2172)}=3.46$, $p<.0125$); man asked the woman to marry him vs. man did not ask woman to marry him ($F_{(1,2172)}=4.44$, $p<.0125$); and memorable occasion vs. routine date ($F_{(1,2172)}=4.91$, $p<.0125$). Main effects for religiosity were insignificant for the remaining four proposal elements: man got down on one knee vs. man did not get down on one knee ($F_{(1,2172)}=1.15$, $p>.0125$); diamond ring vs. non-diamond ring or no ring at all ($F_{(1,2172)}=.68$, $p>.0125$); couple picked out ring vs. man picked out ring ($F_{(1,2172)}=3.83$, $p>.0125$) and big diamond vs. small diamond ($F_{(1,2172)}=.99$, $p>.0125$).

Support for H4, however, would be found in significant interaction effects between traditionality of proposal and religiosity. Results revealed that religiosity did not significantly affect participants' rating of relationship strength in response to the traditionality of four out of the seven proposal elements: man got down on one knee vs. man did not get down on one knee ($F_{(1,2172)}=2.13$, $p>.0125$); diamond ring vs. non-diamond ring or no ring at all ($F_{(1,2172)}=2.58$, $p>.0125$); memorable occasion vs. routine date ($F_{(1,2172)}=1.26$, $p<.0125$); and big diamond vs. small diamond ($F_{(1,2172)}=.34$, $p>.0125$).

Religiosity of the participants, however, affected their rating of relationship strength in response to the traditionality of three proposal elements: man asked the woman to marry him vs. man did not ask woman to marry him ($F_{(4, 2169)}=9.49$, $p<.0125$); man asked permission from (only) the woman's father vs. non-traditional alternative ($F_{(4, 2169)}=6.41$, $p<.0125$); and

couple picked out ring vs. man picked out ring ($F_{(1,2172)}=$ 4.05, $p<.0125$). The means and standard deviations for each group on these items can be found in Table 2.

Post-hoc Tukey analyses regarding the religiosity × traditionality interaction for the proposal element referring to the man asking the woman to marry him vs. man not asking woman to marry him indicated two significant differences: those indicating that religion had a "very great" influence on their life were significantly more likely to evaluate the strength of a relationship according to the traditionality of the proposal than those who indicated religion had a "quite high" influence on their life ($p<.05$) and those who indicated that religion had a "moderate" influence on their life ($p<.05$).

In regards to the proposal element referring to whether the man asked the father for permission, results indicated a significant difference in response to the traditionality of the proposal for those that indicated a "moderate" influence of religion and those who indicated no religious influence on their life. Those who indicated a moderate influence of religion on their lives evaluated relationships as stronger when the proposal conformed to a traditional script (rather than a non-traditional script) compared to those who indicated no religious influence on their life ($p<.05$).

In regards to the proposal element referring to whether the couple picked out the ring together vs. the man picked out the ring by himself, results indicated a significant difference in response to the traditionality of the proposal

for those that indicated a "moderate" influence of religion and those who indicated a great deal of religious influence on their life. Those who indicated a moderate influence of religion on their life were more likely to evaluate a relationship as stronger when it conformed to a traditional proposal script (rather than a non-traditional script) compared to those who indicated a great deal of religious influence in their life ($p<.05$).

The three elements where religiosity did affect judgments of couple strength were those three that are most clearly connected to gender roles. Those who are more religious are more likely to be positively influenced by the man asking the women to marry him and by the man asking the woman's father's permission than by their non-traditional alternatives. As for the third significant element, involving shopping for the ring, those who are less religious are more likely to be positively influenced by what we have designated the "traditional" option, picking out the ring together. However, this option, while preferred by the engaged couples in our earlier study, actually involves a less gendered division of labor than its alternative, the man picking out the ring himself. So while the overall results for H4 are mixed, the findings do suggest that those who are more religious are more likely to favor engagement rituals where the man takes the lead—by picking out the ring himself, asking the woman's father's permission, and asking the woman to marry him. It is important to note that there was little religious diversity

Table 2 Means (and standard deviations) of judgments of relationship strength for proposal elements with a significant interaction between traditionality of proposal and religiosity.

Religiosity	Traditional	Non-traditional
	Man asked woman to marry him	Couple decided together/woman asked man
None	3.76 (.91)	3.53 (.90)
Minimal	3.98 (.92)	3.45 (.90)
Moderate	4.13 (.93)	3.44 (.92)
Quite High	4.15 (.94)	3.43 (.94)
Very Great	4.06 (1.01)	3.17 (.98)
	Man asked permission from (only) father	Man asked permission from both parents or neither, or woman asked permission
None	3.90 (.95)	3.58 (.66)
Minimal	4.10 (.93)	3.61 (.69)
Moderate	4.23 (.90)	3.71 (.68)
Quite High	4.24 (.94)	3.68 (.71)
Very Great	4.25 (.98)	3.55 (.72)
	Couple picked out ring together	Man picked out ring himself
None	3.95 (.86)	3.52 (.90)
Minimal	4.08 (.88)	3.70 (.86)
Moderate	4.09 (.91)	3.85 (.90)
Quite High	3.99 (.93)	3.81 (.90)
Very Great	3.91 (.93)	3.74 (.95)

Note: Participants rated the relationship on a five-point scale: 1 = This suggests the relationship is in trouble; 2 = This suggests that the relationship isn't very strong; 3 = This doesn't suggest anything about the relationship/I'm unsure what it suggests; 4 = This suggests that the relationship is somewhat strong; and 5 = This suggests that the relationship is very strong.

among the respondents, who were mostly Christians. These findings may not apply to people of other faiths.

Discussion

The results of our study indicated that the participants in our earlier study were correct in believing that the secondary audience makes judgments about their relationship based on the details of their proposal. As stakeholders in the relationship, family and friends may screen potential partners to see whether couples are appropriately matched and the relationship is strong. The engagement proposal is one performance that influences judgments about the match. We found that using traditional proposal elements sends positive messages about the strength of the couple's relationship to the secondary audience. We also found that, in general, both men and women and both older and younger individuals were likely to evaluate relationships based on their conformity to traditional proposal scripts. There was limited but partial support for our hypothesis that those who were more religious (compared to those who are less religious) would be more affected by the traditionality of the proposal when evaluating relationships. The general pattern in our results suggests that there was a great deal of agreement among our participants as to the message that a traditional or non-traditional proposal sends to others as to the strength of the relationship.

We framed this study using Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective. Engagement proposals are performances that send messages about the quality of the proposer and the couple and the suitability of their match. Insights from Goffman's (1974) frame analysis also shed light on the engagement proposal. For Goffman, social action requires participants sharing organizing frames that signal what is going on—"individuals fit their actions to this understanding, and ordinarily find that the ongoing world supports this fitting" (1974, 247). A personal relationship is a special case of this—"a coalition between two players to provide each other with expressions of the existence of a desirable bond" (1974, 462). However, "two-person worlds are vulnerable indeed" (1974, 462). A larger group of actors is needed to sustain the relationship. Members of this larger group also need to be brought into the frame through appropriate signals indicating what is going on. What is at issue is not just whether the couple's engagement will be accepted as legitimate—although this may be an issue—but whether stakeholders will align themselves to support the impending marriage, undermine it, or remain indifferent. Couples, therefore, attempt to send signals that will create support for their relationship among their family and friends.

While research that examines the media constructions of romance tends to ignore the importance of social networks, research on romantic relationships demonstrates their importance. Our research identifies one path of social influence on one important romantic ritual. It does not address the influence of the media on engagement proposals, but it does suggest that media cannot be viewed as the sole source of influence on romantic rituals. There is some evidence that the influence of these networks to some extent undercut media messages. Bachen and Illouz (1996) found that media images of romance were supplemented by romantic images from personal or parental sources, which increased in importance as people gained experience. Similarly, Berns' (2004; Berns and Schweingruber 2007) research on people's understanding of domestic violence found that personal experience allows people to critique and contextualize media messages. People who had experienced domestic violence themselves or knew people with first-hand experience did not uncritically accept standard media accounts of the problem. Given the ubiquity of the engagement proposal, it is unlikely that many people preparing their proposals have not heard friends or family members discuss their own. Some men consult with family or friends before the proposal, further increasing the importance of the social networks and potentially decreasing the importance of media messages. Our finding that the size of ring makes no difference to the secondary audience is more evidence for doubting that efficacy of every media message. One of the diamond industry's best-known messages is the "two-month salary" rule, which states that a man should buy an engagement ring worth two months of his salary. However, the size of the ring made no difference to our participants. In our earlier research, which included detailed discussions of ring purchasing, none of the participants indicated they followed the two-month salary rule.

There are a number of shortcomings of this study. The most obvious is that participants are evaluating the strength of the relationships of hypothetical couples, not couples they actually know. When people evaluate the relationships of couples in their social networks, details about the engagement proposal presumably form just one piece of evidence about the couple, perhaps a small one. For couples who are already considered unconventional, a nontraditional proposal might even support stakeholders' beliefs that they are a good match. Another weakness of having participants respond to statements about hypothetical proposals is that participants may not be aware of their own biases. For instance, participants may underestimate the importance that a large diamond ring might have to them if they saw it on a friend's finger. The survey method also doesn't allow us to evaluate the dramaturgical circumstances by which information about the proposal is

presented. For instance, whether a member of the couple appears excited or disappointed about the proposal when describing it may be more important than details about the proposal itself.

Also, because our sample is relatively homogeneous in terms of age, it is difficult to generalize these findings to individuals of all age groups. While we find that, in general, age does not affect individuals' evaluations of these hypothetical couples, it is possible that one might find more differences among a more age-heterogeneous sample. Furthermore, our sample is primarily white and there may be important racial and ethnic variations that we have been unable to address here.

Future research should examine to what extent the influence of social networks supports or undercuts dominant media messages about romance. Although studies of media messages are valuable, models of media influence need to consider how media constructions are mediated by social interaction. In any case, media-propagated proposal traditions won't be effective in producing alignment among the couple and their stakeholders unless they both accept the same traditions as those that send positive messages about the relationship.

Future research should also examine how couples who choose to not follow the traditional proposal script respond to the secondary audience in order to combat the negative evaluations of their relationship. Do individuals attempt to offer disclaimers and accounts in response to real or anticipated negative judgments of their relationship? If so, how effective are they? The effectiveness of such disclaimers and accounts may alter the interactional support that individuals and couples receive from others. This may be critical for the support and stability of the couple's relationship over the long term. If negative judgments about couples on the basis of their failure to conform to traditional engagement scripts alter relations with others, it is possible that this event occurring so early in the life of a couple may have long-term implications for the well-being of their relations with others and the well-being of their marriage.

References

Bachen, C. M., & Illouz, E. (1996). Imagining romance: Young people's cultural models of romance and love. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, *13*, 279–308.

Becker, H. S. (1982). *Art worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Berns, N. (2004). *Framing the victim: Domestic violence, media and social problems*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

Berns, N., & Schweingruber, D. (2007). "When you're involved," It's just different: Making sense of domestic violence. *Violence Against Women*, *13*, 240–261.

Best, A. (2000). *Prom night: Youth, schools and popular culture*. New York: Routledge.

Boden, S. (2003). *Consumerism, romance and the wedding experience*. New York: Palgrave.

Braithwaite, D. O., & Baxter, L. A. (1995). "I do" again: The relational dialectics of renewing the marriage vow. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *12*, 177–198.

Bright, R. M. (1997). Be my valentine: The social engineering of children's concepts of love and friendship. *Canadian Children*, *22*, 7–15.

Bryant, A. N. (2003). Changes in attitude toward women's roles: Predicting gender-role traditionalism among college students. *Sex Roles*, *48*, 131–142.

Carpenter, L. M. (1998). From girls into women: Scripts for sexuality and romance in *Seventeen* magazine, 1974–1994. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *35*, 158–168.

Corrado, M. (2002). Teaching wedding rules: How bridal workers negotiate control over their customers. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *31*, 33–67.

Currie, D. H. (1993). "Here comes the bride": The making of a "modern traditional" wedding in western culture. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, *24*, 403–421.

Engstrom, E. (2003). Hegemony in reality-based TV programming: The world according to *A Wedding Story*. *Media Report to Women*, *31*, 10–15.

Flouri, E., & Buchanan, A. (2001). What predicts traditional attitudes to marriage. *Children & Society*, *15*, 263–271.

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday-Anchor.

Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. New York: Harper & Row.

Goldstein-Gidoni, O. (2000). The production of tradition and culture in the Japanese wedding enterprise. *Ethnos*, *65*, 33–55.

Hatcher, R. (1995). Boyfriends, girlfriends: Gender and 'race' in children's cultures. *International Play Journal*, *3*, 187–97.

Howard, V. (2003). A "real man's ring": Gender and the invention of tradition. *Journal of Social History*, *36*, 837–56.

Ingraham, C. (1999). *White weddings: Romancing heterosexuality in popular culture*. New York: Routledge.

Kalmijn, M. (2004). Marriage rituals as reinforcers of role transitions: An analysis of weddings in the Netherlands. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *66*, 582–94.

Kimmel, M. S. (2005). *The gender of desire: Essays of male sexuality*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Knox, D., Zusman, M. E., McGinty, K., & Abowitz, D. A. (2003). Weddings: Some data on college student perceptions. *College Student Journal*, *37*, 197–200.

Laner, M. R., & Ventrone, N. A. (2000). Dating scripts revisited. *Journal of Family Issues*, *21*, 488–500.

Laumann, E. O., Gagnon, J. H., Michael, R. T., & Michaels, S. (1994). *The social organization of sexuality: Sexual practices in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lewis, C. (1997). Hegemony in the ideal: Wedding photography, consumerism, and patriarchy. *Women's Studies in Communication*, *20*, 167–187.

Lewis, C. (1998). Working the ritual: Professional wedding photography and the American middle class. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *22*, 72–92.

Merten, D. E. (1996). Going-with: The role of a social form in early romance. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *24*, 462–484.

Montgomery, M. J. (2005). Psychosocial intimacy and identity: From early adolescence to emerging adulthood. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *20*, 346–374.

Otnes, C. C., & Pleck, E. H. (2003). *Cinderella dreams: The affair of the lavish wedding*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Otnes, C. C., & Scott, L. M. (1996). Something old, something new: Exploring the interaction between ritual and advertising. *The Journal of Advertising*, *25*, 33–50.

Reed, D., & Weinberg, M. S. (1984). Premarital coitus: Developing and established sexual scripts. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *47*, 129–138.

Regan, P. C., Durvasula, R., Howell, L., Ureno, O., & Rea, M. (2004). Gender, ethnicity, and the developmental timing of first sexual and romantic experiences. *Social Behavior and Personality*, *32*, 667–676.

Rose, S., & Frieze, I. H. (1989). Young singles' scripts for a first date. *Gender and Society*, *3*, 258–268.

Schweingruber, D., Anahita, S., & Berns, N. (2004). "Popping the question" when the answer is known: The engagement proposal as performance. *Sociological Focus*, *37*, 143–161.

Simon, R. W., Eder, D., & Evans, C. (1992). The development of feeling norms underlying romantic love among adolescent females. *Social Psychological Quarterly*, *55*, 29–46.

Simon, W., & Gagnon, J. H. (2003). Sexual scripts: Origins, influences and changes. *Qualitative Sociology*, *26*, 491–497.

Stewart, R. L. (1998). *Living and acting together: An essay in social psychology*. Dix Hills, NY: General Hall.

Swidler, A. (1986). Culture in action: Symbols and strategies. *American Sociological Review*, *51*, 273–286.

Swidler, A. (2001). *Talk of love: How culture matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Thompson, S. (1995). *Going all the way*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Whyte, M. K. (1990). *Dating, mating, and marriage*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Widerman, M. W. (2005). The gendered nature of sexual scripts. *The Family Journal*, *13*, 296–502.