Parents, teachers, and media: agents of biased socialization

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Chapter 3

Sexual Double Standards?
How Parents Talk to Their Child About Adolescents Who Date and Kiss

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Abstract

According to the sexual double standard (SDS), men are praised for engaging in sexual activity, while women are penalized. However, research findings on the perpetuated existence of the SDS are inconsistent. Informed by cognitive social learning theory and sexual script theory, we aimed to shed light on the existence of the SDS within a relevant social setting. Within parent-child dyads, we examined parents' responses to vignettes describing adolescents who engage in multiple successive relationships and kissing strangers. Participating fathers and mothers came from 199 Dutch families. Through thematic content analysis, five themes emerged: normative sexual development, promiscuity and impulsivity, dependent and romantic creatures, social penalties and praises, and ambiguous and unclear answers. The most common scripts involved normalization of the adolescents' behavior, for boys and girls alike. The findings confirm endorsement of the SDS in some parents' responses by referring to common sexual scripts and gendered expectations or by instilling social penalties and praise. Girls were positioned as less agentic and more romantic than boys were, especially by parents who spoke to their daughters. Some parents called girls a slut, while boys were regularly labeled as players. We advise additional research into the transmission of the SDS and other sexual scripts, using more diverse samples.

Keywords: adolescents; script theory; parent-child communication; social learning theory; sexuality-related attitudes

“If you look back in history
It's a common double standard of society
The guy gets all the glory, the more he can score
While the girl can do the same and yet you call her a whore
I don't understand why it's okay
The guy can get away with it, the girl gets named”
(Christina Aguilera & Lil’ Kim, 2002)

In the song ‘Can’t hold us down’, Christina Aguilera and Lil’ Kim draw attention to how men gain status by having multiple sexual partners, while women receive backlash for the same behavior. As they point out, men being allowed more sexual freedom than women is a common conception. In research this phenomenon is part of the so-called (hetero)sexual double standard (SDS) (Reid et al., 2011; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). The SDS has many adverse effects. Endorsement of the SDS is associated with less sexual pleasure for both men and women (Laan et al. , 2021; Sanchez et al., 2012). By adhering to the traditional roles prescribed by the SDS, the ability to engage in authentic and rewarding sexual behavior is harmed. The SDS pressures men to hook up with (multiple) women, to prove that they are ‘real men’ (Currier, 2013). Men who do not adhere to the SDS risk homophobic victimization (Hird & Jackson, 2001; Pascoe, 2007). Women and girls especially experience adverse effects of the SDS. The possibility of being shamed for sexual behavior can, for instance, have negative effects on their mental and physical health (Goblet et al., 2021), and decrease condom use (Lefkowitz et al., 2014). According to the SDS, women and girls are less sexual and more vulnerable than men and boys (Endendijk et al., 2020), which leads to less access to health care services and information (World Health Organization, 2002), and less sexual autonomy (Emmerink et al., 2018). Because of these adverse effects, it is important to investigate contemporary sexual scripts of the SDS. Nonmarital and casual sex have become more acceptable for both men and women over time, especially

in countries with higher levels of gender equality (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Endendijk et al., 2020). According to some recent studies, the SDS is no longer present (Kettrey, 2016), or has even reversed in certain contexts (Hensums et al., 2022; Kreager et al., 2016; Papp et al., 2015). Simultaneously, evidence for the SDS is still being found across cultural contexts (e.g., Endendijk et al., 2022; Hendrickx et al., 2022; Wesson, 2022; Wu et al., 2021). The inconsistencies in findings may be clarified by the use of a theory-based approach, and by improving methodologies (Zaikman & Marks, 2017).

We aim to investigate whether the SDS is endorsed by parents of adolescent children, through a thematic content analysis of reactions to vignettes concerning behaviors relevant to the SDS.

Defining the SDS

A first possible explanation for inconsistencies in SDS research, is that the concept is sometimes oversimplified (Zaikman & Marks, 2017). The SDS was first introduced and defined by Reiss (1956, 1964) within the context of premarital sex. According to Reiss, the SDS entails that premarital sex is wrong for women and permissible for men. In contemporary research, the SDS is often defined as men being rewarded for sexual behavior, while women are penalized (Zaikman & Marks, 2017). A broader range of sexual behaviors has since been studied, including one night stands, threesomes, (Bordini & Sperb, 2013), casual sex (Fjær et al., 2015; Kettrey, 2016; Reid et al., 2011), dating at a young age (Axinn et al., 2011), and kissing/making-out (Farvid et al., 2017). Rewards and penalties for sexual behavior have been measured with constructs like popularity among peers (Kreager et al., 2016; Kreager & Staff, 2009), ratings of traits like dominance, likeability, intelligence, and success (Marks et al., 2019; Marks & Fraley, 2007; Young et al., 2016), and social rejection (G. Smith et al., 2008). In qualitative studies among students, men stated that hookups gave them a better reputation and made them more popular (Currier, 2013), men with multiple partners were called ‘players’, and hooking up was competitive:

having more sexual partners meant winning (Fjær et al., 2015). Being a 'player' can be seen as a way to gain social, masculine, heterosexual status (Wilkins, 2012). Conversely, female students engaging in the same behavior were at risk of being called a 'slut', which was something they feared and avoided (Currier, 2013; Fjær et al., 2015), indicating its low status.

However, defining the SDS as men being rewarded for sex and women being penalized is an oversimplification (Tolman et al., 2015; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). The SDS also concerns the gendered expectations of societal roles, behaviors, and characteristics for men and women in relation to sexuality (Axinn et al., 2011; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). Especially important in these expectations is sexual agency. Men are expected to be sexually agentic, which entails being dominant, powerful, and assertive, and the initiator of sex (Endendijk et al., 2020; Muehlenhard & McCoy, 1991). When men do not adhere to these expectations, a common penalty is being referred to with derogatory terms like 'fag' or 'wuss' (Pascoe, 2007). Conversely, women are expected to be passive, submissive, and reactive (De Meyer et al., 2017; Endendijk et al., 2020; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). This corresponds to the idea of women as "naturally" romantic beings (Elliott, 2010; Farvid & Braun, 2014), while men supposedly only want sex and are uninterested in relationships (Pascoe, 2007; Schalet, 2011). While male sexuality is seen as incessant, dominant, and uncontrollable, female sexuality is framed by gatekeeping sex (Aubrey et al., 2020; Hird & Jackson, 2001; Tolman et al., 2015) which means that women are supposed to refuse and deter men (Aubrey et al., 2020; Bay-Cheng, 2015; Tolman et al., 2015). Giving permission too easily, or only because a man wants it, can lead to being called a slut (Armstrong et al., 2014; Bay-Cheng, 2015), while not giving enough permission may lead to being called a prude, which is negative too (Dajches et al., 2021; Tolman et al., 2015). So, while society generally expects men to be sexually active, and penalizes those who are not, women are expected to navigate a thin line between being too active and not being active enough (Currier, 2013).

The SDS can thus be defined as follows: the differential expectations, treatment, and evaluations of (heterosexual) men and women based on their sexual behavior.

Persistence and transmission of the SDS

The gendered differential expectations, treatment, and evaluations that make up the SDS can be explained by social cognitive learning theory. According to this theory, individuals learn by observing and imitating behavior of others, as well as by observing the social reinforcement and restrictions that follow from behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). When the SDS is endorsed by important socialization agents, like the media, peers, and parents, adolescents are likely to be socialized into the endorsement and perpetuation of the SDS (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Bussey & Bandura, 1999; C. Connell & Elliott, 2009; Kreager et al., 2016; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). The normative social construction of sexual behaviors is further explained by sexual script theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1984; Wiederman, 2015). Sexual scripts are (metaphorical) scripts that inform individuals on the meaning and appropriateness of sexual behavior and sexual roles. Sexual scripts exist on three levels: cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic. The three levels of sexual scripts are dynamically interrelated and constantly co-act in behavior and social interaction. Cultural sexual scripts are the most abstract scripts. They are often conveyed by institutions like the media, government, religion, and schools. By legalizing and stimulating certain sexual behaviors, and by forbidding and warning against others, cultural scripts set the stage for what sexual behaviors are praised and what sexual behaviors are punished (Wiederman, 2015). For instance, media like television programs often communicate the SDS through scripts of men being fixated on sex, sexually dominant, and uncontrollable, and gaining status from sexual relationships (Aubrey et al., 2020; Dajches et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2007). Conversely, women are positioned as responsible for deferring men, and they risk social penalties when they have sex in the wrong way.

Interpersonal scripts are the ways in which individuals adapt and divert from cultural scenarios in concrete situations. According to sexual script theory, people will only apply cultural scripts when they are convinced that this will yield a socially acceptable and positive outcome (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). For instance, while parents are aware of the cultural scripts, they may modify or completely divert from these scripts when discussing sexual behavior with their offspring. They could do this by encouraging their daughters to ward off suiters because "boys only want one thing", or by applauding women on television who initiate pleasurable sexual encounters. Intrapsychic scripts are scripts at the most personal level, involving the way in which an individual (re)organizes cultural and interpersonal scripts and relates those to personal wishes and desires (Simon & Gagnon, 1984). These scripts include fantasies, feelings of arousal, memories, and mental rehearsals (Wiederman, 2015). For example, an adolescent girl's fantasies about and desire to have casual sex.

Thus, sexual scripts can cover many gendered sexual expectations. Therefore, investigating these scripts is important to clarify to what extent the SDS still exists within relevant social settings, gain understanding into what scripts are part of the SDS, and to explain research inconsistencies. To further resolve inconsistencies, it is important to discuss the ways in which research methodologies can be improved.

Study design aspects when investigating the SDS

Besides a clear definition and a theory-based approach, inconsistencies in SDS may be remedied by improving methodology (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Endendijk et al., 2020; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). We will discuss three methodological aspects that can explain inconsistent results: the instruments used, the sexual behavior that is studied, and the cultural context. The issues raised in relation to this aspect are used to determine our research aim and design.

First, instrument choice is important when investigating the SDS. In quantitative research, Likert-type scales are used often. These consist of statements related to the SDS, for which participants have to indicate their level of (dis)agreement. Examples of these statements are "Girls should act in a more reserved way concerning sex than boys" (Emmerink et al., 2017, p. 1707) and "I kind of admire a guy who was had sex with a lot of girls" (Muehlenhard & Quackenbush, 2013, p. 200). In other quantitative studies, participants are presented with a description of a person who engages in sexual behavior and are then instructed to rate the person on concepts like intelligence, dominance, and success (Marks & Fraley, 2007; Young et al., 2016). Using these types of instruments means that specific sexual scripts are selected a priori, and tested deductively, which ignores possible shifts in perception and makes discovery of new scripts impossible (Elliott, 2010; Simon & Gagnon, 2003). This approach may result in an operationalization of the SDS that is too narrow, and therefore could lead to under-detection. Another problem with some instruments is that they cannot distinguish between an egalitarian view and a reversed SDS, because they only include items that confirm the SDS (e.g.: "It is up to the man to initiate sex."), and no items in the opposite direction (e.g.: "It is up to the woman to initiate sex.") (Caron et al., 1993; Emmerink et al., 2017; Endendijk et al., 2020). Also, Likert-style instruments are of an explicit nature, meaning that participants are quite conscious of what is being measured, which may elicit social desirable answers (Endendijk et al., 2020). Social desirability is especially problematic when investigating attitudes towards controversial and sensitive topics like gendered sexual attitudes (Axinn et al., 2011). Because gender attitudes have generally become more egalitarian (Endendijk et al., 2022; Liben, 2016), participants may find that endorsing the SDS is controversial, increasing their inclination to give social desirable answers (Axinn et al., 2011). Meta-analysis has revealed that in studies using these types of scales the SDS is generally not found (Endendijk et al., 2020). Instruments that measure SDS endorsement (relatively) implicitly can be

more useful. Implicit instruments elicit responses that are more automized, involve less conscious decision-making, and less awareness of what is being measured. These implicit instruments are found to be a better predictor of behavior and are less prone to social desirability (Endendijk et al., 2020). Quantitative research is commonly conducted outside of relevant interpersonal social contexts, like questionnaires conducted among university students (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Endendijk et al., 2020; Kreager et al., 2016), which may underestimate the endorsement of the SDS (Marks & Fraley, 2007). For example, while one might desire to hold men and women to the same standards and will indicate that when asked to respond to an explicit statement, one may endorse a double standard in conversation with their pastor, partner or child (Kreager et al., 2016; Kreager & Staff, 2009; Wiederman, 2015). Thus, research on the SDS can be enriched and informed by the use of more implicit instruments and a more qualitative approach (Bordini & Sperb, 2013), specifically in finding changes to sexual scripts and possibly detecting new scripts.

Second, the cultural context affects the endorsement of the SDS. Evidence suggests that there is lower endorsement in countries with a higher level of gender equality (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Bosson et al., 2022; Endendijk et al., 2020). As most studies on the SDS are conducted in the U.S., research in other countries can contribute to gaining a better understanding of the SDS (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Endendijk et al., 2020; for examples of research in other countries see De Meyer et al., 2017; Hendrickx et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2021). We will investigate the SDS in the context of Dutch (the parents of) adolescents. In the past, some researchers have compared how adolescents and parents discuss and negotiate sexuality in the U.S. and the Netherlands (Schalet, 2000, 2010, 2011; Wouters, 2013). In these studies, Dutch parents are described as more lenient and approving of developing sexuality, compared to their U. S. counterparts. Dutch parents were also more likely to describe adolescents' sexuality and romantic relationships as normal and

something that adolescents can (learn to) self-regulate than U.S. parents. More recent meta-reviews of parental sex education and sex communication indicate that U.S. parents remain more conservative than European parents, although direct comparisons have not been made in recent years (Ashcraft & Murray, 2017; Flores & Barroso, 2017; Noorman et al., 2022).

Third, it is important to focus on sexual behaviors that are particularly relevant to the era and studied population, as inconsistent evidence for the SDS may be due to a focus on sexual behaviors that are not fitting with participants' life phase (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Kreager et al., 2016). According to large-scale research among Dutch adolescents the median age for initial sexual behaviors has been rising over the past decades (De Graaf et al., 2017). The median age for first 'French' kissing increased from 13.5 years in 2005 to 14.4 years in 2012 and to 15.4 years in 2017. For sexual intercourse, the median age increased from 17.1 years in 2005 and 2012 to 18.0 years in 2017 (De Graaf et al., 2005, 2012, 2017). More recent data is not (yet) available, but as a later sexual debut is for instance associated with social media use, it can be expected that the increase in median age for partnered sexual behavior will persist (De Graaf et al., 2022). Romantic relationships are common from childhood onward, and adolescents find relational aspects of their developing sexuality more important than physical aspects (Boelhouwer et al., 2014). Studying sexual behavior like romantic relationships and kissing is therefore appropriate when investigating the SDS in the context of (parents of) adolescents (Kreager et al., 2016).

Adolescence and parents as socializing agents

Adolescence is particularly interesting when investigating the SDS, because it is when individuals explore, develop and refine their sexual scripts (Martinez et al., 2021; Simon & Gagnon, 1984, 1986; Wiederman, 2015; World Health Organization, 2002). While there has been an increase of research into the SDS among adolescents over the past decade (see for

instance, De Meyer et al., 2017; Emmerink et al., 2018; Endendijk et al., 2022; Hendrickx et al., 2022; Hensums et al., 2022), it is a relatively understudied life phase (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Endendijk et al., 2020; Kreager et al., 2016). Parents are important socializing agents to their (adolescent) children in general and of gender norms and sexual scripts specifically (Bandura & Walters, 1963; C. Connell & Elliott, 2009; Kågesten et al., 2016; Martinez et al., 2021). Additionally, while a significant body of work exists on the sexual socialization of children by their parents (see for instance Astle et al., 2022; Astle & Anders, 2022; C. Connell & Elliott, 2009; Elliott, 2010; Evans et al., 2020; Holman & Koenig Kellas, 2018; Schaafsma, 2022; Scull et al., 2021; Solebello & Elliott, 2011; E. K. Wilson & Koo, 2010), few studies focus on parents as socializing agents of the SDS specifically (but see Axinn et al., 2011; Miller, 2012). As sexual scripts change throughout the lifecycle, and in relation to which societal roles people have (Simon & Gagnon, 1984, 1986), investigating parents of adolescents is worthwhile.

Many parents provide at least some explicit lessons on sexuality (Astle & Anders, 2022; Scull et al., 2021), and all parents provide their children with implicit lessons on sexuality in various ways, for instance by setting rules for dating (Endendijk et al., 2022), and by communicating certain expectations, beliefs, and attitudes indirectly for instance by displaying discomfort when children mention sexual topics, or by making assumptions about the sexual orientation of children (Astle & Anders, 2022; Solebello & Elliott, 2011). During communication about sex, parents focus mostly on topics related to risks, like sexually transmitted diseases, and (unwanted) pregnancies (Evans et al., 2020; Schaafsma, 2022; Scull et al., 2021; E. K. Wilson & Koo, 2010). Positive topics, like pleasure, desire, and romantic relationships are discussed less (Astle & Anders, 2022; Evans et al., 2020).

Parents have been found to show several facets of the SDS in sexual communication. Regarding sexual behavior, like consuming sexual content media and dating at a young age, parents are more lenient and

approving towards their sons than towards their daughters (Axinn et al., 2011; C. Connell & Elliott, 2009; Endendijk et al., 2022; Kuhle et al., 2015; E. K. Wilson & Koo, 2010). Parents position their daughters as less sexually agentic than their sons, with daughters being more safeguarded than sons (Elliott, 2010; Kuhle et al., 2015; Solebello & Elliott, 2011). This difference relates to daughters being seen as more vulnerable than sons; parents are more concerned about harmful sexual consequences for them (E. K. Wilson & Koo, 2010). This perception of vulnerability may explain why parents are generally found to talk more about sex with their daughters than their sons (Evans et al., 2020; Schaafsma, 2022; E. K. Wilson & Koo, 2010).

Fathers and mothers differ in their sexual communication. In general, mothers feel more comfortable and report higher levels of self-efficacy in sexual communication with their children (Scull et al., 2021). Fathers generally communicate less about sexuality with their offspring and cover a smaller range of topics than mothers (Astle et al., 2022; Evans et al., 2020; Schaafsma, 2022; Scull et al., 2021). They have been found to be more permissive of sexual behaviors for their children than mothers (Axinn et al., 2011; Smit et al., 2022). Some studies show that men endorse the SDS slightly more than women (Petersen & Hyde, 2010), while others show no difference between men and women in endorsement (Endendijk et al., 2020). Further research is therefore warranted.

Research aim

In this study we focus on the Dutch cultural context to explore contemporary sexual scripts regarding the SDS. We investigate the social context of parents talking to their adolescent child. We use vignettes describing sexual behaviors, embedded in a larger list of vignettes concerning various situations (e.g. failing a class, being rejected by a friend). This way, participants are less likely to be aware of the research aim. Moreover, it can be easier for parents and adolescents to talk about

sexual behavior indirectly. For instance, when discussing sexuality, parents and their adolescents regularly talk about others (Afifi et al., 2008). When talking about sexual behaviors of others, parents communicate expectations, beliefs, and attitudes (Astle & Anders, 2022). Talking about (hypothetical) others can therefore give novel insights into the SDS, as has been shown in research among young adult women (Fjær et al., 2015).

We aim to investigate what sexual scripts are communicated by Dutch parents regarding sexual behaviors of adolescents. To investigate whether the SDS is present within these scripts, we examine differences between reactions concerning girls and boys. Furthermore, we investigate differences between reactions given to daughters and sons, and between reactions given by fathers and mothers.

Methods

Sample

This study is part of the longitudinal project Girls in Science, which examines adolescents' gender socialization in the family and school context. This study reports on data from the first wave of the project. Families with opposite-sex parents from the Western part of the Netherlands with at least two children were recruited through municipal records. Exclusion criteria were severe physical or mental disabilities of a family member, divorced/separated families, single-parent families, families with a non-biological parent, and parents raised outside the Netherlands. Families were eligible for participation when their eldest child was approximately 17 years old and their second-born child was approximately 15 years old. Based on municipal records, 5463 families were eligible and sent an invitation for the research project via mail. In total, 1075 families responded, out of which 328 families indicated willingness to participate. In total, 73 families were excluded and 56 families were unable to participate due to scheduling issues or illness. A

total of 199 families (each consisting of a father, a mother and a second-born adolescent) participated. In each family, the second-born adolescent (mean age 15.45 years, *SD* = 0.33; 123 female) conducted a structured interview with each of their parents separately. Fathers were on average 50.87 years old (*SD* = 4.40) and mothers 48.53 (*SD* = 3.49). Most parents were highly educated, 72% of mothers and 73% of fathers obtained a bachelor degree or higher. Most families (70%) had a gross annual income exceeding €60.000.

Procedure

Families were visited at home by trained (under)graduate students. During these visits, families completed various tasks, including the structured interview. Several tasks were filmed. After giving instructions, the researcher left the room. Each participating family member received a gift certificate of €20. We obtained informed consent from each participating family member. Ethics approval was granted by the host Institution.

Instrument

To recreate a relevant dyadic social interaction, namely a parent responding to their child, the adolescent conducted a scripted interview with each parent separately. The adolescent was given a booklet containing 19 short vignettes, each followed by a question. Each vignette described a hypothetical named individual in a situation that adolescents might encounter, like social rejection, failing a class, participating in sports, and experiencing same-sex attraction. The adolescent was instructed to read out the vignettes and accompanying questions (one question per vignette) to their parent in the presented order and to not reply to the questions themselves, nor to react to their parents' answers. Parents were instructed to give one-sentence answers, and adolescents were instructed to continue swiftly to the next vignette after each answer due to time restraints. This was done to elicit implicit attitudes. However,

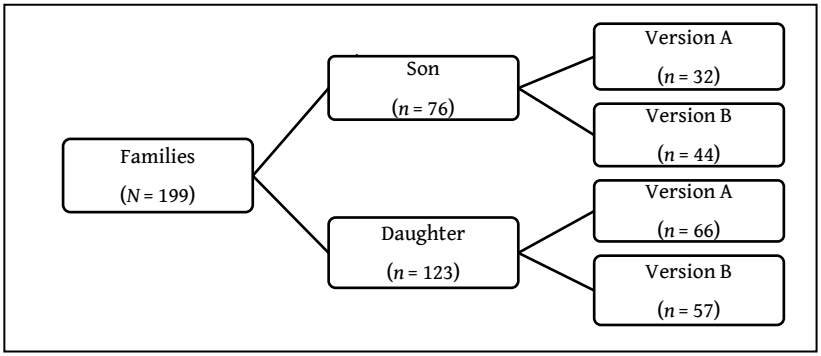
some parents gave longer answers. It was explained to the parent-adolescent dyads that the vignettes concerned adolescents of the same age as the adolescent participating in the task. In this study, we focused on two one-sentence vignettes with accompanying questions that concerned romantic relationships and kissing:

1. Thijs is in a relationship with his sixth girlfriend. What type of person do you think Thijs is?
2. Lieke kissed someone she doesn't know while going out. What type of person do you think Lieke is?

The vignettes were translated from Dutch by the first author. Thijs (male) and Lieke (female) are common Dutch names. In Vignette 1, the Dutch word *verkering* is used for relationship. This word indicates a romantic relationship, and is sometimes translated as courtship or 'going steady'. *Verkering* is commonly used when describing a romantic relationship between children or adolescents, while (young) adults more commonly use the word *relatie* (literally: relationship). The presented vignettes above represent Version A of the task. Approximately half of the families received Version A, whereas the other half received Version B, in which the gender markers and names were switched (i.e., Lieke had a relationship and Thijs kissed someone while going out (see Figure 3.1)). Fathers and mothers from the same family received the same version of the vignettes. As there were 199 families, in which a father and a mother each answered two questions, there were 796 responses in total. Exactly half of the responses (n = 398) were about a girl, the other half about a boy. Lastly, 492 responses were given to a daughter, and 304 to a son.

Figure 3.1

Number of Participants per Condition of the Task



Note. In Version A Thijs (male), is described as having a relationship and Lieke (female), is described as kissing someone she doesn't know. In Version B, the names and gender markers are switched.

Analytic Process

The videos were transcribed into text files. Notes were added when the adolescent had interrupted or otherwise intervened when the parent answered the question. Answers were then coded using ATLAS.ti (Version 9, 2009). Three of the authors (AK, TV, and LV) were involved in coding, while one author (AV) acted as a methodological advisor. We used a multi-stage approach of content analysis (Hickey & Kipping, 1996; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Memon et al., 2017). To ensure the trustworthiness of our research, the three coders coded parents' answers during multiple rounds of (re-)reading. After each round of coding, all codes were compared, discussed and coding-rules were recorded and refined in a codebook. In the first round, Coder AK and TV first coded 20% and in the second round they coded 40% of the data. In the third round, Coder LV coded the same 40% of data. In the fourth and final round, Coder AK and TV individually coded the entire dataset, and Coder LV a subset of 20%. All codes were compared, remaining disagreements and discrepancies were discussed until agreement was reached. We consulted formal and

informal dictionaries (e.g., websites about sex and relationships aimed at adolescents) to clarify the meaning of certain answers and to identify which words and phrases fit into specific codes. For instance, according to the dictionary, the word reveler is synonymous to libertine, and it is defined as someone who is frivolous, superficial, or loose. All responses that contained words like these, received the code *reveler.* Informal dictionaries indicate that the word *mooiboy* (literally: pretty boy) does not just refer to the way a boy looks, but also that it is synonymous to player, so it received the code *player*. When answers were unclear, videos were checked to see if intonation, irony, and body language could clarify which code to allocate. If an answer remained unclear after reviewing the video, it was coded as unclear (4 out of 796 responses). In total, 52 codes were developed, e.g., *insecure*, *adventurous*, *pleasure*. Codes were grouped into 15 categories, each consisting of one to six codes (for the full list of categories and codes, see Appendix C). This was done by writing all codes on cards and by sorting the cards according to common elements. This aided in further refining the coding rules (for more information see Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, pp. 123–131). For instance, the codes *insecure, can't be alone,* and *craving attention* were grouped into the category *dependent*, which we described as: "The adolescent is described in terms that signal dependence; often with submissive emotions like insecurity, or by describing the adolescent as needy or an attention seeker. The motivation for the behavior (appears to) come(s) from insecurity/neediness." Frequencies for each category were calculated.

In the supplemental materials, we share the (Dutch) codebook, an in-depth description of the coding process, and the anonymized raw data. All reactions presented in this paper were translated to English by the first author. Complete reactions are presented in order to maintain integrity of the data. Each reaction is preceded by the letter M or F, to indicate a mother or father, and a unique participant number. Laughter and interruptions by the child are indicated with square brackets. Following each quotation, we indicate whether this was said to a son or a daughter,

about a boy or a girl, and in reaction to Vignette 1 (sixth relationship) or 2 (kissing a stranger). For example:

F65: Eh Thijs enjoys life. (To son, about boy, V2)

Findings

Following each vignette, parents were asked the question "what kind of person do you think Thijs/Lieke is?" We discuss the categories that arose from parents' responses, which are further sorted into five themes based on their content. For instance, the categories *dependent* and *love* are discussed within the theme *dependent and romantic creatures*, alluding to the gendered expectations of girls being passive, dependent, and naturally romantic. We present the following five themes: 1) normative sexual development, 2) promiscuity and impulsivity, 3) dependent and romantic creatures, 4) social penalties and praises, 5) ambiguous and unclear answers. For each theme, we discuss whether evidence for the SDS or (other) gender differences were present. Total frequencies and percentages are presented in the text, while frequencies and percentages per group (mother/father, daughter/son, Lieke/Thijs) and per vignette are presented in Table 3.1A and Table 3.1B.

Table 3.1A

Frequencies and Percentages of Coded Categories for Vignette 2 (Kissing a Stranger) per Dyad

			Mother (n = 199)								Father (n = 199)							
			Daughter (n = 123)				Son (n = 76)				Daughter (n = 123)				Son (n = 76)			
			Girl		Boy		Girl		Boy		Girl		Boy		Girl		Boy	
Theme	Category	n	57		66		44		32		57		66		44		32	
			n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1	Normalization		3	*5.3*	2	*3.0*	1	*2.3*	2	*6.3*	3	*5.3*	2	*3.0*	1	*2.3*	2	*6.3*
	Age-related		0	*0.0*	2	*3.0*	3	*6.8*	1	*3.1*	0	*0.0*	1	*1.5*	2	*4.5*	0	*0.0*
	Exploration		11	*19.3*	7	*10.6*	5	*11.4*	5	*15.6*	14	*24.6*	6	*9.1*	4	*9.1*	4	*12.5*
	In search of		5	*8.8*	6	*9.1*	7	*15.9*	3	*9.4*	11	*19.3*	13	*19.7*	4	*9.1*	3	*9.4*
	Pleasure		10	*17.5*	7	*10.6*	1	*2.3*	6	*18.8*	2	*3.5*	8	*12.1*	2	*4.5*	5	*15.6*
2	Promiscuity		12	*21.1*	10	*15.2*	7	*15.9*	9	*28.1*	18	*31.6*	13	*19.7*	9	*20.5*	15	*46.9*
	Impulsivity		2	*3.5*	1	*1.5*	1	*2.3*	0	*0.0*	1	*1.8*	0	*0.0*	1	*2.3*	0	*0.0*
3	Dependent		26	*45.6*	6	*9.1*	4	*9.1*	2	*6.3*	12	*21.1*	1	*1.5*	1	*2.3*	1	*3.1*
	Love		9	*15.8*	2	*3.0*	5	*11.4*	3	*9.4*	8	*14.0*	2	*3.0*	4	*9.1*	0	*0.0*
4	Slut		5	*8.8*	1	*1.5*	3	*6.8*	1	*3.1*	6	*10.5*	1	*1.5*	3	*6.8*	0	*0.0*
	Player		2	*3.5*	17	*25.8*	0	*0.0*	9	*28.1*	2	*3.5*	16	*24.2*	1	*2.3*	12	*37.5*
	Positive		6	*10.5*	6	*9.1*	7	*15.9*	6	*18.8*	7	*12.3*	5	*7.6*	6	*13.6*	8	*25.0*
	Negative		1	*1.8*	3	*4.5*	0	*0.0*	1	*3.1*	4	*7.0*	4	*6.1*	0	*0.0*	0	*0.0*
5			9	*15.8*	8	*12.1*	2	*4.5*	3	*9.4*	15	*26.3*	6	*9.1*	2	*4.5*	2	*6.3*

Note. Vignette 1: "Thijs is in a relationship with his sixth girlfriend. What type of person do you think Thijs is?" Names and gender markers were changed for half of the sample. Themes: 1) normative sexual development, 2) promiscuity and impulsivity, 3) dependent and romantic creatures, 4) social penalties and praises, 5) ambiguous and unclear answers. Percentages are relative to their column. For example: out of 57 mothers who talked to their daughter about a girl, 3 used a normalization script, which equals 5.3 percent.

Table 3.1B

Frequencies and Percentages of Coded Categories for Vignette 2 (Kissing a Stranger) per Dyad

			Mother (n = 199)								Father (n = 199)							
			Daughter (n = 123)				Son (n = 76)				Daughter (n = 123)				Son (n = 76)			
			Girl		Boy		Girl		Boy		Girl		Boy		Girl		Boy	
Theme	Category	n	66		57		32		44		66		57		32		44	
			n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1	Normalization		16	24.2	18	31.6	10	31.3	7	15.9	14	21.2	14	24.6	6	14.0	9	20.5
	Age-related		10	15.2	7	12.3	5	15.6	7	15.9	3	4.5	6	10.5	0	0.0	1	2.3
	Exploration		19	28.8	22	38.6	15	46.9	11	25.0	27	40.9	25	43.9	15	34.9	8	18.2
	In search of		0	0.0	1	1.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.5	2	3.5	1	2.3	0	0.0
	Pleasure		8	12.1	12	21.1	8	25.0	8	18.2	8	12.1	6	10.5	8	18.6	4	9.1
2	Promiscuity		4	6.1	4	7.0	2	6.3	4	9.1	7	10.6	7	12.3	3	7.0	2	4.5
	Impulsivity		8	12.1	7	12.3	3	9.4	2	4.5	8	12.1	6	10.5	6	14.0	3	6.8
3	Dependent		8	12.1	3	5.3	2	6.3	0	0.0	1	1.5	2	3.5	1	2.3	0	0.0
	Love		1	1.5	1	1.8	1	3.1	2	4.5	2	3.0	1	1.8	1	2.3	1	2.3
4	Slut		1	1.5	5	8.8	4	12.5	1	2.3	6	9.1	2	3.5	1	2.3	1	2.3
	Player		0	0.0	2	3.5	0	0.0	1	2.3	0	0.0	3	5.3	1	2.3	1	2.3
	Positive		0	0.0	5	8.8	2	6.3	5	11.4	9	13.6	8	14.0	6	14.0	6	13.6
	Negative		7	10.6	3	5.3	2	6.3	3	6.8	1	1.5	11	19.3	2	4.7	2	4.5
5			21	31.8	6	10.5	9	28.1	2	4.5	8	12.1	7	12.3	5	11.6	4	9.1

Note. Vignette 2: "Lieke kissed someone she doesn't know while going out. What type of person do you think Lieke is?" Names and gender markers were changed for half of the sample. Themes: 1) normative sexual development, 2) promiscuity and impulsivity, 3) dependent and romantic creatures, 4) social penalties and praises, 5) ambiguous and unclear answers. Percentages are relative to their column. For example: out of 66 mothers who talked to their daughter about a girl, 16 used a normalization script, which equals 24.2 percent.

Theme 1: Normative sexual development

The most common theme in the responses of parents related to normative sexual behavior and development (n = 412 out of 796 responses, 52%). Normative in this context means normal, natural, and expected (Tolman & McClelland, 2011; Van De Bongardt et al., 2017; World Health Organization, 2002). Overall, we found no clear evidence for the SDS within these scripts, and only a few gender differences, which we will discuss below.

Normalization

Parents regularly used scripts that indicate normalization of sexual behavior (n = 110, 14%). For instance, parents used the word *gewoon* often. *Gewoon* translates to normal, usual, regular, or common. Additionally, it contains a normative component: it also means acceptable and right (Schalet, 2011). Parents additionally used words like standard, normal, and healthy. In other cases, parents described the situation as something that 'can just happen'.

M260: *Gewoon* a teenager, that can happen. [Laughs] (To daughter, about girl, V2)
F109: Eh, a *gewone*, healthy boy. (To daughter, about boy, V2)

One gendered script stood out. When the vignette concerned a boy, the adolescent was labeled as just 'a boy' in a few cases, without any other adjectives:

F111: That's a boy. (To daughter, about boy, V2)
M127: Well, *gewoon* a boy. (To daughter, about boy, V2)

This seems to imply that kissing a stranger is normal behavior for boys. No parent described the same behavior of girls by stating that the adolescent was 'a girl'. However, generally parents used normalizing scripts for boys and girls equally. Parents used normalizing language

mainly to describe the adolescent who kissed a stranger. In some cases, parents described the adolescent as *gewoon* drunk, implying that being drunk and kissing a stranger is normal behavior.

Another way in which normalcy of the behavior in both of the vignettes was implied, was through relating the behavior to the age of the adolescent. Parents did this by saying that the adolescents in the vignettes were young, and by calling them a *puber*. *Puber* is a Dutch word meaning a teenager or adolescent who is going through puberty. Parents used *puber* to relate the behavior to the adolescent's developmental stage:

> M164: I assume, I imagine that Thijs is still kind of a puber or at least a young adult and yes, sometimes you kiss with someone that you don't exactly know who they are. I have no judgment. (To daughter, about boy, V2)
>
> F81: I assume a young person, a young person who meets someone else, so just a normal boy, yes. (To son, about boy, V2)

Answers containing references to youngness and (being a) *puber* were mainly given in relation to kissing a stranger, and more so by mothers than fathers.

Exploration

The most common category within parents' responses of normalization, were descriptions of the adolescents as curious explorers or adventurers, or as wanting to experiment and investigate (n = 198, 25%). While some parents only used descriptors related to exploration, others explicitly added that the adolescents were finding out what they desire, or that exploration is normal, or good and pleasurable:

> F358: Yes she sometimes tries something out, and she thinks like "I should get enough experiences before I go off with

the real one", that's very sensible of Lieke. (To daughter, about girl, V1)

M122: Eh Thijs is someone who goes out on discovery, and eh is experimenting maybe, but mainly is discovering. He's a very healthy *puber*. (To son, about boy, V2)

Scripts related to exploration were mainly used in relation to the vignette about kissing a stranger. Parents also referenced the process of exploration by describing the adolescents as searching, not (yet) knowing what they like or want. These scripts were often more closely related to sexual and relational preferences and identity.

F114: Thijs he eh, can't really eh, find, and doesn't know what he eh is looking for in a girlfriend. (To daughter, about boy, V1).

M139: Eh, I think that Lieke is a little bit well searching for validation that she's all right, that she is searching for who she is. (To daughter, about girl, V1)

The kissing-vignette was formulated in such a way that the gender of the stranger with whom the adolescent kissed was unknown. While most parents did not reference sexual orientation, some parents assumed that the adolescent kissed someone of the opposite gender:

F233: Hm, a girl who dares to make a move towards boys and eh and dares to experiment with love. Or with, well, love, that's not really love of course, but eh with eh eh things that have to do with love, with attraction to the other sex. Yes. (To son, about girl, V2)

In only two cases, parents spontaneously addressed the possibility of the adolescent not being heterosexual:

F181: Eh, Lieke likes boys. Well how should I know if she kissed with a *boy*, but Lieke likes kissing. (To son, about girl, V2; emphasis added)

F221: Well Lieke is eh, searching for a steady boyfriend or girlfriend. (To daughter, about girl, V2)

Pleasure

In response to both vignettes, fathers and mothers regularly addressed pleasure and desire (n = 103, 13%). They did this mainly by describing the adolescent as someone who likes or loves activities like kissing, parties, and drinking. In other instances, they described the adolescent as someone who likes or loves (cute) boys or girls.

M71: Eh a eh popular girl who is crazy about boys. (To daughter, about girl, V1)

M76: Someone who likes a party and pleasure. (To son, about girl, V2)

F305: Well, a person who eh likes to be infatuated and to be in a relationship with many many girls. (To daughter, about boy, V1)

Descriptors like pleasure-lover, bon vivant, and party animal were used as well. Responses that received codes related to pleasure were virtually always positive. References to pleasure and desire were made in response to both vignettes, although they were made somewhat more often in response to the adolescent kissing a stranger.

Theme 2: Promiscuity and impulsivity

The term promiscuity is generally used to describe not being restricted to one sexual partner. It also signals being indiscriminate, casual, and careless. Parents regularly used scripts like these (n = 126, 16%), including words like unreliable, capricious, and unstable, or describing the adolescent as someone who gets bored quickly, or who has commitment issues. In some cases, these scripts had negative connotations, while in others they appeared to be neutral:

F62: Eh, a capricious, eh, well someone who doesn't really know what he wants. Who can't commit to someone, yet. (To son, about boy, V1)

M11: I think she easily gets tired of boys [laughs], she likes variation. (To daughter, about girl, V1)

More often, parents used words like reveler, floater, butterfly, and gallivant. These words were also used to describe promiscuous behavior, but suggest being care free rather than careless, and unsure rather than unreliable:

F89: Thijs is, Thijs is a bit of a gallivant, I think. But eh, he does, quite good eh, discover the world. (To daughter, about boy, V1)

M106: A butterfly. [Child: a butterfly?] Yes, she flutters from one to the next, like a happy-go-lucky-person. (To son, about girl, V1)

These descriptions of indiscriminate sexual behavior appear to be generally neutral or positive. Both types of scripts were used mainly to describe the adolescent engaging in successive relationships. Fathers used these scripts more often than mothers, especially when talking to their son about a boy in his sixth relationship. The indiscriminate character of promiscuity also relates to impulsivity, which was a script that was present in some of the responses (n = 49, 6%). Parents sometimes described the adolescents as impulsive or thoughtless, almost exclusively in the context of kissing a stranger. This appeared to be negative in some cases:

F163: I think that eh, in advance Lieke doesn't eh think very well about whether it is the right person for her, and then gets carried away every time. And that maybe, because of that, eh it's a disappointment again and again. (To daughter, about girl, V1)

M312: Yeah that's not very wise to kiss someone you don't know. That's a bit of a rash deed of Lieke. (To daughter, about girl, V2)

However, similar to the descriptors that relate to promiscuity, parents often used words and phrases that have more positive connotations, like being spontaneous and intuitive:

M179: Someone who trusts his gut and takes risks. (To daughter, about boy, V2)
F363: Hm, also an inquisitive person I think. Spontaneous, he thinks, "Well okay it comes on my path so I just do it." (To daughter, about boy, V2)

Fathers and mothers used scripts of impulsivity equally, and to sons and daughters alike. We found no indications for the SDS in scripts related to promiscuity and impulsivity.

Theme 3: Dependent and romantic creatures

Some parents used scripts related to being insecure, needy, wanting attention, having trouble being alone, and/or lacking agency (n = 70, 9%). These scripts fit the gendered expectations often held for women as part of the SDS.

M9: Eh, oops. I think she's a little insecure. And that she doesn't really watch out for herself and only wants to be with someone else. (To daughter, about girl, V1)
M176: Eh maybe someone who doesn't want to be alone, or maybe wants to comply with eh eh wishes, or eh, what her girlfriends do as well. (To daughter, about girl, V1)

These scripts were not used often in general, but they were used more regularly by parents who were talking about a girl to their daughter, especially in the context of the vignette describing successive

relationships. For mothers talking about a girl to their daughter, it was one of the most common scripts. This indicates the endorsement of the SDS by parents, and especially mothers, talking to their daughter.

Parents sometimes used scripts related to love (n = 43, 5%). Especially girls were described as looking for love, or falling in love (*too*) quickly, too early, or too much. These scripts were used more often context of being in the sixth relationship.

F231: Eh, yeah she is, looking for the one, her true boyfriend. (To son, about girl, V1)
M235: Someone who eh falls in love quickly and who needs that, a relationship. (To daughter, about girl, V1)

Theme 4: Social penalties and praises

An important facet of the SDS is formed by the gendered differences between social penalties and praises of sexual behavior (Reiss, 1956; Tolman et al., 2015; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). Through the use of explicit penalties and praises, the SDS became apparent in the answers of some parents (n = 224, 28%). Parents sometimes used words like 'slut' (n = 41, 5%), which is a social penalty and characteristic of the SDS (Bay-Cheng, 2015; Currier, 2013; Endendijk et al., 2022). Some parents used more euphemistic terms for slut, like easy (Armstrong et al., 2014).

F70: Geez, a slut. [laughs] (To daughter, about girl, V1)
M277: She's easy, too clingy. (To son, about girl, V2)

These scripts were used equally across vignettes and not often in general, but they were used slightly more often to describe girls than boys. In a few cases, when parents used words like slut to describe boys, it was accompanied by a caveat, e.g., "A *boy* hussy" (emphasis added). This implies that sluts and hussies are usually girls, and that this boy is an exception. So even when a boy is described as a slut, the SDS is still enforced.

One type of script that was used by parents more often in terms of social penalties and praises, involved words like player (n = 67, 8%). The word player is used to indicate a man who has multiple sexual partners, or juggles brief and sometimes overlapping intimate relationships. For responses concerning boys, this was one of the most common scripts indicating the SDS. While most parents who used this script did not add any further evaluative remarks, others questioned the motivations of the boy in the vignette:

F329: Why did those other five, why did those relationships end? Is it because he didn't find the right one yet because it was all eh, or eh, or is he a player? I don't know. (To daughter, about boy, V1)

M132: Eh, don't know, I can't judge that, I don't know how often he does that. If he does that every time, you would call him a player. (To daughter, about boy, V2)

Some other parents used negative words that are synonymous to player, but that include connotations of consuming or destructing the other, like *vrouwenverslinder* (literally: women devourer), or man-eater. Player scripts were mainly used when discussing the vignette concerning the sixth relationship. On some occasions, parents apparently referred to the SDS when using terms like slut and player:

F376: [Laughs] A player. O no, those are boys. No, I think an insecure girl. (To daughter, about girl, V1)

M148: Well with boys you don't say slut huh, I believe [Laughs]. [Child: Player] Eh. Player, oh. (To son, about boy, V2)

The sexual scripts described in the previous three sections (normative sexual development, promiscuity and impulsivity, dependent and romantic creatures) also contained various social penalties, like being described as unreliable or rash. Likewise, the scripts contained various social praises, including being called an explorer or a free spirit. Parents

sometimes used other scripts that did not fit within the previous themes that indicated either penalty or praise. Parents signaled penalties by using derogatory terms, like loser, pinhead, or fool, or describing the adolescent as inconsiderate:

> F272: Eh eh eh very, eh, a very obnoxious eh little man. (To daughter, about boy, V2).
>
> F348: O. Eh what type of eh? Eh. His sixth girlfriend. I believe he's not really eh a steadfast person. He is a little eh, should see a little more if he can make something eh of it. What type of person? Too eh, not… He has too little care for the other. (To daughter, about boy, V1)

Negative scripts were not used often (n = 44, 6%), but they were used more towards daughters, especially by fathers describing boys. This relates to the gendered expectation of daughters being vulnerable and fathers being tasked to protect them, which is part of the SDS (Kuhle et al., 2015; Solebello & Elliott, 2011). One father quite explicitly referred to this idea:

> F69: A curious person. Unless eh it's you eh who kissed with a eh. Then I think, then I think something different. [Laughs] Then I will beat that guy up. (To daughter, about girl, V2)

Adolescents were praised through the use of positive descriptors (n = 92, 12%). Many positive descriptors were used just once or twice, like sweet, flexible, creative, and confident. *Leuk* (cute, nice, pleasant) and *gezellig* (companionable, enjoyable, cozy) were used slightly more often, with no remarkable gender differences. More regularly adolescents were described as popular or social:

> F220: Sixth girlfriend? Well then Thijs is someone who, eh, by nature exerts attraction on girls, and maybe on people in general. (To son, about boy, V1)
>
> F22: Someone who likes to kiss someone, in any case very social, open. (To son, about girl, V2)

These positive scripts were used equally across vignettes, slightly more by fathers than mothers were. Both parents used slightly more positive descriptors when talking to sons than to daughters, which indicates an indirect form of the SDS.

Theme 5: Ambiguous and unclear answers

Parents regularly gave ambiguous answers or avoided answering altogether in response to both vignettes (*n* = 109, 14%). Parents did this in various ways. Firstly, and most commonly, parents regularly stated that their answer depended on unknown information, and/or shared multiple, often opposing scripts. In the context of the sixth relationship, some parents said that it mattered how long the relationships had lasted or how much time was between them. In the context of kissing a stranger, parents wondered whether this was something that the adolescent did regularly or if it was a single incident. When some parents shared opposing evaluations about girls, they used scripts related to sexual agency, and they did not do this when they spoke about boys:

> M271: Yes, someone who likes to take risks and go to the limit or something, I think. Or she is very insecure, that's also possible. (To son, about girl, V2)
>
> M330: Well that kind of depends. If she did it because she felt like doing it herself, than I think well eh, well that is someone who just eh… Someone she doesn't know? Yes. What type of person is that. Just a girl that wants to have fun. It is about the intention right, did she do it because she wanted to or because he wanted to? (To daughter, about girl, V2)

By second-guessing the agency of girls in this way, parents allude to the SDS. The second way in which answers were unclear, involved parents saying that they did not know or have an answer. Still, in most cases, they added an evaluation:

F24: Eh… phew, what type of person is Thijs, I don't know that. Thijs, Thijs, Thijs is a happy boy. Yeah well how should I know, I can't say that based on a name of someone. (To daughter, about boy, V2)

M110: Enterprising, I think, but eh I don't know actually, find it difficult. (To daughter, about girl, V2)

Lastly, parents indicated that they had no opinion or did not want to judge. Some parents elaborated on this:

M32: Well, this I really find a very hard question, what kind of person that is. Well, I really wouldn't know, there's not a right or wrong answer, it's about my answer and I can't answer this. Eh someone who eh often has different boyfriends or girlfriends, is that a type of person? No, I don't think that's a specific type, he often met the wrong person then. (To daughter, about boy, V1)

M238: A girl that kissed someone she doesn't know when she was going out. I don't think I should put Lieke in a box, if you ask me. I don't think she's 'a type of person'. A girl who goes out and kisses someone she doesn't know. (To son, about girl, V2)

Both parents gave these various kinds of ambiguous answers, more so when they talked about girls than boys, and especially when they were talking to their daughter. The gendered differences in the use of these scripts could be due to the SDS.

Discussion

In this study, we aimed to investigate contemporary sexual interpersonal scripts regarding the SDS within a sample of Dutch parents. Through thematic content analysis, we found five central themes in the sexual scripts used by parents in response to vignettes concerning adolescent sexual behavior: normative sexual development, promiscuity and

impulsivity, dependent and romantic creatures, social penalties and praises, and ambiguous and unclear answers. We will discuss the findings along three points. First, the most commonly used scripts related to normative sexual development and did not contain evidence for the SDS. Second, in the other themes indications of the SDS were present by referring directly or indirectly to gendered sexual scripts. Lastly, there were some remarkable differences between the reactions to the vignette about successive relationships and the vignette about kissing a stranger.

More than half of the responses included at least one script related to normative sexual development, indicating endorsement of adolescent sexuality as normal and right, with (sexual) exploration as a normal component. Other common scripts related to promiscuity and impulsivity. These were regularly phrased neutrally or positively, which could mean that, to some extent, parents see promiscuity and impulsivity in the context of dating and kissing as normal and perhaps age-appropriate too. These scripts did not show evidence of the SDS either. While this fits with how adolescent sexuality is defined by health organizations, researchers, and governmental institutions, this stance has often been found not to be supported by parents in earlier research, where parents appear to see adolescents as either asexual or as uncontrollable and therefore not ready for sex (Elliott, 2010; Kuhle et al., 2015; Schalet, 2011; Solebello & Elliott, 2011; Tolman & McClelland, 2011; World Health Organization, 2002). Additionally, while talking about sex in a positive way is associated with various components of sexual wellbeing, like increased sexual self-efficacy and self-esteem (Astle & Anders, 2022), past studies have found that most parents focus on negative topics (Evans et al., 2020; Schaafsma, 2022; Scull et al., 2021; E. K. Wilson & Koo, 2010). The differences between previous studies and our findings may be related to cultural context. This high level of approval and endorsement of sex-positive scripts can be explained partly by the high levels of gender equality in the Netherlands (Bosson et al., 2022; Endendijk et al., 2020). Most of the aforementioned research was conducted among U.S.

participants. European samples generally show higher levels of sex-positivity than U.S. samples (Noorman et al., 2022). This emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural research.

Endorsement of the SDS occurred in nearly one in four responses. Firstly, parents used scripts containing gendered behavioral expectations. Indirect evidence in the responses of parents can be seen in differences between answers given to daughters and sons. When talking about girls, and especially when talking to daughters, scripts related to dependency and love were often used, alluding to the idea of girls as passive, reactive, and naturally romantic creatures. This is in concordance with earlier studies (Endendijk et al., 2020; Farvid et al., 2017; Schalet, 2011; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). Mothers used these scripts more often than fathers did. Because these gendered scripts are found to apply to women in general (De Meyer et al., 2017; Endendijk et al., 2020; Zaikman & Marks, 2017), these scripts are likely more relevant to mothers than fathers, which can explain their higher usage of these scripts. Some parents used words like 'slut' and 'player', which are very characteristic of the SDS. 'Slut' was more often used to describe girls than boys, and especially 'player' was used far more often to describe boys than girls. In research, 'player' is seen as a term with positive connotations (Currier, 2013; Endendijk et al., 2020; Fjær et al., 2015; Kreager & Staff, 2009; Papp et al., 2015; Staiger, 2005; Tanenbaum, 2000; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). However, some responses indicate that parents used 'player' as a negative script. Some studies have shown that a higher number of sexual partners leads to more negative evaluations, regardless of their gender (Marks & Fraley, 2007). This begs the question whether the script of player is (still) an unequivocal label of status, especially from the mouths of parents. Some research indicates that the term 'player' has decreased in status (Staiger, 2005), but more research is needed to clarify how the meaning of 'player' has changed over the years, and how it differs between social and cultural contexts. Additionally, parents, especially fathers, more often used negative scripts when talking to their daughters, primarily when

describing a boy. This relates to the idea that girls are vulnerable and need protection from their fathers (Kuhle et al., 2015; Solebello & Elliott, 2011). Parents also used slightly more positive scripts when talking to their son than to their daughter, and fathers did more so than mothers. This fits with previous findings of gendered differences between boys' and girls' experiences of sexual communication with their parents, in which girls also received more sex-negative messages than boys (Kuhle et al., 2015; E. K. Wilson & Koo, 2010), and in which fathers were more permissive than mothers (Axinn et al., 2011). Indirect evidence of the SDS can also be seen in the ambiguous and unclear answers that were given. Parents gave more ambiguous and unclear answers when talking about girls, especially when directed to daughters, and mothers did more so than fathers. In some cases, this appeared to stem from doubts about the sexual agency of the girl in the vignette. Other reasons for ambiguous and unclear answers could stem from the idea that girls are more vulnerable and sensitive, resulting in more careful or elaborate formulations. Furthermore, it is possible that talking about sexual behaviors that do not fit gendered expectations of girls led to discomfort, resulting in less clear answers. So, while most parents do not use derogatory labels like 'slut', differential gendered expectations and evaluations may be communicated in much subtler ways, like ambiguity and

Lastly, our findings revealed substantial differences between the two vignettes. In the context of kissing a stranger, parents used scripts of normalization, age-relatedness, exploration, and pleasure far more often than in the context of a sixth relationship. This indicates that kissing a stranger fits within the idea of normative sexual development, in which it is normal and acceptable for an adolescent to kiss a stranger. Parents appeared to be more negative about adolescents who engage in successive relationships. Parents far more often connected the script of player to the vignette about relationships, but they used the script of slut equally across both vignettes. This appears to be in line with previous studies, in which it was found that being a slut is closely related to being easy and giving

guys permission for sex, and less to the actual number sexual partners (Armstrong et al., 2014; Bay-Cheng, 2015; Tolman et al., 2015). Therefore, by allowing a stranger to kiss her a girl can be seen as a slut, but a boy kissing a single stranger does not make him a player.

Strengths, limitations, and research implications

The strength of our study lies firstly in the development and use of a relatively new instrument, which had various advantages. The use of vignettes combined with open-ended questions enabled us to find which sexual scripts are used and which are most salient in Dutch parents' responses to adolescents' sexual behavior. The most salient scripts, those related to normative sexual development, are rarely used in SDS research. The behaviors described in the vignettes are not controversial or extreme, but they have been found to be age appropriate for Dutch adolescents (De Graaf et al., 2017). This increases the ecological validity of the instrument. If we had used more extreme vignettes, we might have provoked more SDS-related scripts. However, finding these scripts in the context of relatively mild and common behaviors, which are seen as appropriate and acceptable by many, shows that the SDS persists at a basal level to some extent.

Vignettes can be seen as a (relatively) implicit instrument, which avoids social desirability and awareness of the research aim (Axinn et al., 2011; Endendijk et al., 2020). Still, parents were aware that they were being filmed, resulting in possible observer effects which can cause social desirability bias in responding even though parents were not aware of the exact research goal. By embedding the vignettes in a larger list of vignettes describing various other situations, and by using different vignettes instead of the same vignette for both genders we aimed to further decrease this awareness. Additionally, by instructing parents to give quick and brief answers, they were less likely to inhibit (unconscious) biased attitudes. However, it is possible that if parents had been given the opportunity to give a longer response, additional scripts would have been

used, and that other evidence of the SDS would have surfaced. Future research could benefit from allowing parents to give a more elaborate answer. More importantly, future research should either involve a broader range of sexual scripts, including scripts of normative sexual development, or it should allow for the discovery of new scripts.

Using a scripted interview setting and focusing solely on parents enabled us to investigate a large number of responses within a relevant social interaction in a relatively large sample of families. However, this is not an authentic naturalistic interaction. The task instructions (e.g., parents were instructed to give one-sentence answers, adolescents were not allowed to respond) contributed to the setting being non-realistic. It is perhaps impossible to investigate authentic social interactions in which parents use interpersonal sexual scripts in their communication with their adolescent child, without interfering or affecting the conversation. This is especially true when the aim is to investigate a larger number of participants. Finding a balance between decreasing awareness of the research aim and approximating an authentic naturalistic setting more closely is important in future improvement on existing methods.

We chose to investigate parents of adolescents, who are important socializing agents (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Bussey & Bandura, 1999; C. Connell & Elliott, 2009; Kreager et al., 2016; Zaikman & Marks, 2017), which rarely has been done before in research focusing on the SDS (Axinn et al., 2011; Miller, 2012). Investigating the SDS within specific social settings is important, as sexual scripts change throughout the lifecycle, and differ across social contexts (Kreager et al., 2016; Kreager & Staff, 2009; Marks & Fraley, 2007; Simon & Gagnon, 1984, 1986; Wiederman, 2015). Adolescence is especially interesting when investigating the SDS, as this is the life phase in which individuals explore, develop, and refine their sexual desires, ideas, roles, and meanings (Martinez et al., 2021; Simon & Gagnon, 1984, 1986; Wiederman, 2015; World Health Organization, 2002).

Another strength of our study lies in the focus on the specific cultural context of the Netherlands, as most studies on the SDS have been focused

on the United States (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Endendijk et al., 2022). However, our sample was rather homogenous, consisting of people who mostly hold privileged social positions. Therefore, our findings can only be generalized to parents with a Dutch ethnic majority background, who have a relatively high socio-economic status, and who are in a heterosexual relationship with the parent of the focus-child. People from lower socio-economic backgrounds have been found to show higher endorsement of the SDS (Armstrong et al., 2014; Kreager & Staff, 2009). Ethnicity has been shown to affect both the content of gendered expectations and the endorsement of the SDS (Bordini & Sperb, 2013; Pascoe, 2007; Reiss, 1964; Staiger, 2005; Wilkins, 2012). Little is known about the endorsement of the SDS by non-heterosexual people. Future research could benefit by expanding the focus on gendered sexual expectations beyond the heteronormative SDS, for instance by using vignettes that explicitly describe non-heterosexual and/or gender nonconforming persons. Including participants from underrepresented and marginalized communities can further our knowledge about sexual scripts and gendered socialization mechanisms, as their experiences, attitudes, and scripts differ from dominant social groups, and they often face more substantial backlash for deviation from gendered expectations (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Liben, 2016).

Conclusion

Even though the parents in this study are part of a demographic that commonly shows low endorsement of the SDS in research, and the behaviors described in the vignettes is not controversial, we found the SDS in (some of) their reactions. This is evidence for the persistence of the SDS, albeit in a subtle way. As the SDS has various adverse outcomes, especially for girls (Emmerink et al., 2018; Goblet et al., 2021; Laan et al., 2021; Lefkowitz et al., 2014; Sanchez et al., 2012; World Health Organization, 2002), this topic remains important for studies on parenting, sexual development, and gender equality. Our study

contributes by exploring which sexual scripts are used by parents when talking to their adolescent child. While the SDS was endorsed by some parents, it was more common for parents to use sexual scripts related to normative sexual development. Additional research into the SDS and other sexual scripts, using a more diverse sample, is necessary.