PREFACE

Many people don’t know this, but my curiosity regarding adolescent sexuality in the United States (US) and the Netherlands began well before I started my Ph.D. in the Spring of 2008. It began a few years before that, in the Fall of 2004, during my first year of my Master’s program at Wake Forest University. That semester I enrolled in a Health Communication course, and one of the topics we discussed was adolescent sexual health in the US compared to other Western developed nations. Through a video produced by Youth Incentives and the Rutgers Nisso Groep, I learned that the US ranked as having the highest teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease rates of all Western developed countries, while the Netherlands ranked as having some of the lowest teen rates – in fact, as one of the top three countries with the lowest rates. That video left a big impression on me that day, with all sorts of questions about how adolescent sexuality is approached in the US versus the Netherlands for such a stark difference to exist between these two nations. I had no idea that my curiosity would subsequently take me on the trajectory that it did: researching sexual behaviors and norms among US college students for my Master’s thesis; investigating the same among Dutch university students as a Fulbright Scholar; and ultimately leading me to pursue a Ph.D. at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research to study a topic that I am genuinely interested in. It’s funny how something so small as one video in one course on one day can be the beginning to years of research, an international move to the Netherlands, and the pursuit of a Ph.D. Yet that was where it all began, and where I found my inspiration for the last few years. And so I’m reminded: Inspiration is just about everywhere – as long as you’re looking for it.

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