Adolescent sexual socialization & teen magazines: a cross-national study between the United States and the Netherlands
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CHAPTER 3

‘No Strings Attached?’ A Cross-Cultural Content Analytic Comparison of the Hook-Up Culture in US and Dutch Teen Girl Magazines

Abstract

Through a quantitative content analysis, this study investigates the presence of a hook-up culture – that is, casual sexual encounters with ‘no strings attached’ – in US and Dutch teen girl magazines. Using Hofstede’s cultural dimension of masculinity/femininity, the hook-up culture (i.e., the relational context of sex, emotional context of sex, specific sexual activities, and occurrence and tone of contraceptives) was examined in 2496 stories from all issues of the three most popular US (i.e., Seventeen, CosmoGirl! United States edition, and Teen) and Dutch teen magazines (i.e., Fancy, CosmoGirl! Netherlands edition, and Girlz) from the years 2006-2008. With regard to the relational context of sex, stories about casual sex occurred more often in the US magazines, and the Dutch magazines focused more on committed sex. The Dutch teen girl magazines also emphasized sex within the emotional context of love more often than the US magazines. In terms of sexual activities, coital sex was mentioned more often in the US coverage, while petting was mentioned more frequently in the Dutch magazines. Contraceptives such as condoms were covered more positively in the US magazines than the Dutch magazines. Overall, using Hofstede’s dimension of masculinity/femininity, the hook-up culture seems to be more visible in the US teen girl magazines for the occurrence of casual sex and lack of love stories, whereas a hook-up culture does not emerge in the Dutch magazines due to the presence of committed sex and love-related articles.

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The exploration of romantic relationships is an important developmental component of adolescence (e.g., Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2006; Sullivan, 1953). During this time, most young people engage in their first sexual experiences (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003). Previous research has indicated that three-fourths of teenagers in the United States (US) have sex for the first time within a committed romantic relationship (e.g., Elo, King, & Furstenburg, 1999). Nevertheless, recent research reveals that more than three-fifths of sexually active US teens eventually engage in sex within a more casual context, where relational bonding and love are not necessarily present (Manning, Longmore, & Giordano, 2005). In response to this profound change in US young people’s sexual relations, several scholars as of late have pointed to the emergence of a ‘hook-up culture’ in the US (e.g., Bogle, 2008; Heldman & Wade, 2010; Stinson, 2010). In a hook-up culture, the predominant form of engaging in sexual relations is the hook-up – that is, casual sexual encounters with ‘no strings attached’ (Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006; Stinson, 2010). While hooking-up as a relational form of sex among young people is not new (Armstrong, England, & Fogarty, 2009; Bogle, 2008; Heldman & Wade, 2010), scholars tend to agree that the increasingly normative character of casual sex among US young people today marks the move from hooking up as a sub-cultural practice to hooking-up as the sexual mainstream culture of today in the US (Bogle, 2008; Heldman & Wade, 2010; Stinson, 2010).

One reason that is often cited for the emergence of a hook-up culture is the portrayal of sexual relations in the media (Heldman & Wade, 2010; Mansson & Lofgren-Martenson, 2007). For instance, Mansson and Lofgren-Martenson (2007) have suggested that young people may learn a particular script from sexual media content in which a committed relationship and emotional bonding are no longer necessary prerequisites to sex. Against this backdrop, it is striking that we have little up-to-date knowledge about the frequency with which casual sex is featured in the media. In fact, few studies have investigated if casual sex is portrayed in the media, and more specifically in media that are targeted to teenagers such as teen magazines. This lack of research is surprising considering that casual sex is not only limited to college students and young adults, because it also occurs among teenagers (e.g., Grello et al., 2006; Levinson, Jaccard, & Beamer, 1995; Manning et al., 2005; Manning et al., 2006). Therefore, the first goal of this study is to fill this research gap by analyzing the extent to which a hook-up culture is present within teen magazines.

A second shortcoming in research on the hook-up culture is that it focuses almost exclusively within a Western cultural context, specifically that of the US. As a result, much of the reasoning in the literature is influenced by a US approach to sexuality (Bogle, 2008; Heldman & Wade, 2010; Stinson, 2010). However, it has been previously acknowledged that anything related to sex and sexuality is affected by cultural factors (Ford & Beach, 1951; Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Consequently, findings that have been established in the US may not apply to another country, even if it is another Western country. Therefore, cross-
cultural research is considered an “essential antidote to naive universalism” (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990, p. 308) and an important “escape from ethnocentrism” (Dogan & Pelassy, 1984, p. 5). Most importantly, cross-cultural research not only helps establish differences between cultures, but it also helps explain them through substantive factors in which cultures differ (Przeworski & Teune, 1970). Thus, it is the second goal of this study to investigate the teen magazine coverage of a hook-up culture from a cross-national comparative perspective, as findings from the US may not be generalizable to other Western countries.

To address these two shortcomings in the existing literature, we focus the present study on how US and Dutch teen girl magazines cover issues related to casual sex. As will be outlined later, the US and the Netherlands lend themselves well to a meaningful cross-cultural comparison. These two countries are both post-industrialized Western countries which are similar in many respects (Hofstede, 1998, 2001), but differ substantially in how sex in general and adolescent sexuality in particular are approached (Hofstede, 1998; Schalet, 2000, 2011). We content analyze teen magazines for several reasons. First, almost six out of every ten teenagers read teen magazines, making them one of the most popular media consumed by teenagers today (Nielsen Report, 2009; Roberts & Foehr, 2004). Second, teen magazines are known to address sexual issues more directly and in-depth than other media (Ward, 2003). Third, because the content in teen magazines is specifically targeted at a teenage audience, they are acknowledged as having an important influence on their sexual socialization (e.g., APA, 2007; Berne & Huberman, 2000; Daves, 1995; Durham, 1996, 1998; Garner, Sterk, & Adams, 1998). We focus on teen girl magazines not only for their popularity, but also because previous research has indicated that profound changes in young people’s sexuality can be attributed to changes in female sexual behavior (Kim & Ward, 2004; Robinson, Ziss, Ganza, Katz, & Robinson, 1991; Scott, 1998). Some scholars have suggested that this may apply to the hook-up culture as well (Heldman & Wade, 2010). Consequently, a content analysis of teen girl magazines may inform research about the emergence of a hook-up culture. Throughout this present study, we use the term ‘hook-up culture’ as an analytical concept and do not imply that (young) people who engage in casual sex are morally or otherwise wrong.

The Hook-Up Culture and its Coverage

There is a general consensus that the emergence of a hook-up culture, at least in the US, can be described by changes along two indicators, namely the relational context of sex and the emotional context of sex (Bogle, 2008; Heldman & Wade, 2010; Stinson, 2010). The relational context of sex refers to whether sex takes place within a committed or non-committed (i.e., casual) relationship. The emotional context of sex refers to whether affection and love are present or absent when people engage in sex. In addition to these two indicators, Heldman and Wade (2010) have recently added two more indicators to the description of a hook-up culture: the specific sexual activities involved when hooking-up, and the use of contraceptives (or lack thereof). As described below, these four indicators
have been studied to some extent in teen magazines – but primarily in the coverage of the US.

**Relational context of sex.** In a hook-up culture, the dominant relational context of sex is of a casual nature. Casual sexual encounters involve people engaging in oral sex, anal sex, or coital sex with someone they are not dating or in a romantic relationship with. Moreover, there is an understanding that no commitment is involved and should not be expected from either partner (Fielder & Carey, 2010; Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Fincham, 2010). Casual sex can take place as a one-time occurrence or can occur multiple times with the same partner, but the premise of no commitment remains intact (Heldman & Wade, 2010).

Past content analyses of US and Dutch teen magazines have focused on sex-related topics such as virginity, pregnancy, prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sexual danger, and sexual pleasure (Carpenter 2001; Hust, Brown, & L’Engle, 2008; Joshi, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2011, in press); however, very few studies to date have analyzed content about the relational context of sex (i.e., casual and committed sex) within teen magazines. A content analysis by Taylor (2005) on US ‘lad magazines’ found that the most common relational context of sex in these magazines was serious dating relationships but the next most common was sex with strangers (i.e., a form of casual sex). Similarly, Carpenter (1998) investigated the relational context of sex within the US teen girl magazine Seventeen from the years 1974 to 1994 and found that committed sex generally occurred more frequently than casual sex; however, there was a steady increase of casual sex stories from 1974 to 1994. Casual sex did not occur at all in the sex-related stories from 1974, occurred in 3.4% of the stories mentioning sex in 1984, and was identified in 13% of the sex stories from 1994 (Carpenter, 1998). This rise in casual sex stories over the years which Carpenter (1998) identifies in her study suggests that teen girl magazines from today may depict even more casual sex stories than previous years.

**Emotional context of sex.** Regarding the emotional context of sex, love is typically not present between sexual partners in a hook-up culture. Accordingly, nine out of ten young people report that their main motivation for hooking-up is physical pleasure (Garcia & Reiber, 2008). However, other research has found that the potential of forming a committed relationship and an emotional bond over time with a casual sex partner may also be a reason to engage in casual sex (Armstrong et al., 2009; Bogle, 2008). Thus, while most hook-ups are thought of as ‘no strings attached’ encounters, they may turn into another way of starting a committed loving relationship (Heldman & Wade, 2010).

The emotional context of sex (i.e., the presence or absence of love) has rarely been explored in content analyses of teen magazines. Carpenter’s (1998) study is one of the only content analyses to date which has investigated the topic of love. In Seventeen magazine, from 1974 to 1994, sex depended on the presence of love. For instance, one article from the February 1994 issue of Seventeen claimed that “all kinds of sexual activity are more enjoyable when you’re in a loving, trusting, committed relationship” (Carpenter, 1998, p. 64). Similarly, a content analysis by Jackson (2005a) of letters written to an advice column
of a teen magazine between the years of 1997 and 2002, found that sex within a love relationship was consistently promoted in the coverage. These findings suggest that love is an important aspect of the teen magazine coverage of sex. However, these findings are from the 1990’s and early 2000’s. The hook-up culture is said to have emerged in the late 1990’s and into the 2000’s – essentially, within the last decade (Heldman & Wade, 2010). Therefore, we do not know whether, and to what extent, love or the emotional context of sex appears in the most recent teen magazine coverage, especially given the emergence of a hook-up culture.

**Sexual activities.** Over the years, the normative sexual activities that young people engage in, especially within a hook-up culture, have seemed to change. Consequently, the scope of what constitutes sex seems to be undergoing a transformation (Heldman & Wade, 2010). In recent years, less than half (47%) of high school students in the US reported having coital sex, whereas more than half (55%) of 15 to 19 year olds reported having oral sex (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006). Oral sex is notably becoming more popular than coital sex among US teenagers (e.g., Gindi, Ghanem, & Erbelding, 2008; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006; Lindberg Duberstein, Jones, & Santelli, 2008), perhaps because many US young people believe that oral sex is more acceptable than coital sex, is less of a threat to their values and beliefs (Halpern-Felsher, Cornell, Kropp, & Tschann, 2005), and is often not considered to be ‘real’ sex (Heldman & Wade, 2010). In addition, 10% of US teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 have engaged in anal sex (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006). All the while, young people seem to still be engaging in softer forms of sexual activity such as petting or intimate touching (Heldman & Wade, 2010). This is expected, especially because sexual intimacy among teenagers is considered a progressive experience (Schalet, 2000, 2011; Tolman, 2002). Overall, these findings suggest that young people in the US today may be partaking in a more diverse spectrum of sexual activities than previous years.

A recent content analysis of US teen and women’s magazines seems to mirror the trend of decreased coital sex and increased oral sex, with oral sex not being thought of as sex. The investigation revealed that oral sex is considered a “popular pastime” among teenagers and is believed to be a type of abstinence (Clarke, 2009, p. 423). Based on these changing norms among young people, a broader range of sexual activities – from petting to coital sex – may be expected to occur in the current coverage of teen girl magazines. Nevertheless, much remains unknown with regard to the coverage of specific sexual activities within US teen girl magazines, and how said coverage would compare to that of another country.

**Contraceptives.** The hook-up culture involves more unplanned sexual encounters than planned sex (Heldman & Wade, 2010). As a result, these unplanned encounters are less likely to involve protection in the form of contraceptives (MacDonald & Hynie, 2008). While it has been noted that US young people have been using condoms more frequently during coital sex (Roberts, 2005), in recent years, sex within a hook-up culture seems to point to a decreased use of condoms – especially for oral and anal sex (Fielder & Carey, 2010; Leichliter, Chandra, Liddon, Fenton, & Aral, 2007; Lewis, Granato, Blayney,
Lostutter, & Kilmer, 2011). There is also some evidence that high rates of unprotected oral and anal sex have led to an increase in STIs (MacDonald & Hynie, 2008). Moreover, researchers and the general public have expressed concern that unprotected coital sex in casual encounters may place US teens at a higher risk for unplanned pregnancy (e.g., Ford, Sohn, & Lepowski, 2001; Ott, Adler, Millstein, Tschann, & Ellen, 2002), especially if they are not using birth control pills.

In terms of magazine content related to contraceptives, condoms and birth control pills have hardly been directly addressed in teen magazines. The few existing US content analyses suggest a strong focus on abstinence instead (Clarke, 2009; Jackson, 2005b). If contraceptives are mentioned, it is usually with a negative tone or as an afterthought to the dangers of becoming pregnant or contracting a STI (Clarke, 2009; Jackson, 2005b). More specifically, the potential risks of a condom breaking or ‘the pill’ being ineffective seem to be recurring themes in the content of teen magazines (Clarke, 2009; Jackson, 2005b). These results suggest a rather low visibility of contraceptives in the coverage of teen girl magazines, at least within the US. Furthermore, when contraceptives are covered, it is usually with a somewhat negative slant by focusing on the ineffectiveness of condoms and the pill.

**Hofstede’s Dimension of Masculinity/Femininity and the US and the Netherlands**

The few content analyses, outlined above, of the various aspects of the hook-up culture in teen magazines have nearly all been conducted in the US (for exceptions, see Jackson 2005a, 2005b). Moreover, very few studies exist on how different countries cover sex-related information in teen magazines (for exceptions, see Carpenter, 2001; Joshi et al., 2011, in press). This scarcity of research not only limits our knowledge of cultural variations in the depiction of different aspects of the hook-up culture, but it also impairs our understanding of which cultural factors may underlie such variations. Consequently, we are currently unable to put into perspective the findings from existing US content analyses on the hook-up culture. More importantly, we lack a theoretically evocative set of explanations to make sense of the US coverage.

A country that lends itself to a meaningful comparison with the US is the Netherlands. Based on Hofstede’s (2001) extensive cross-cultural empirical research, countries can be classified along five dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and long-term/short-term orientation. Hofstede (2001) shows that the US and the Netherlands are similar on four of these five dimensions but differ on the masculinity/femininity dimension, with the US being a masculine society and the Netherlands being a feminine society (Hofstede, 1998). The masculinity/femininity dimension focuses on the extent to which a society stresses achievement or nurturance in a relationship. Societies high in masculinity emphasize acquisition of wealth and differentiated gender roles: “Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 297). By contrast, feminine societies stress caring behaviors and more fluid gender roles that overlap. In a feminine
society, “both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 297). Because the masculinity/femininity dimension is the only dimension where the US and the Netherlands differ, it is also most likely to be the key determinant for any general differences between the US and the Netherlands regarding sexual matters. More specifically, the masculinity/femininity dimension allows for the derivation of specific factors that may explain any differences in the US and Dutch teen magazine coverage in terms of a hook-up culture – that is, the relational context of sex, emotional context of sex, specific sexual activities, and occurrence and tone toward contraceptives.

One specific factor which Hofstede (1998) outlines in the masculinity/femininity dimension is the distinction between sex and love in the US and the Netherlands. This distinction is particularly important in explaining the potential country differences in the coverage of the relational and emotional context of sex. Masculine societies such as the US hold a “wide distinction between sex and love,” and sex can easily be associated with exploitation (Hofstede, 1998, p. 175). As a result, love can be far removed from casual sex, as this type of sex often occurs outside of a romantic relationship. However, in feminine cultures like the Netherlands, there is “little distinction between sex and love,” and sex is seen as a relationship between partners (Hofstede, 1998, p. 175). Love is an essential component of sexual relationships and makes sexuality a ‘normal’ phenomenon for teenagers in the Netherlands (Schalet, 2000, p. 76). Taking into consideration that the US and the Netherlands approach adolescent sexual socialization differently with regards to sex and love, we expect the teen magazine coverage of the relational and emotional contexts of sex to differ in these two countries. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

**H1:** Sex within a casual relational context will be mentioned more often in the US teen girl magazines than the Dutch teen girl magazines, and sex within a committed relational context will be mentioned more often in the Dutch teen girl magazines than the US teen girl magazines.

**H2:** Sex within the emotional context of love will be mentioned more often in the Dutch teen girl magazines than the US teen girl magazines.

Another specific factor in which the US and the Netherlands differ, as outlined in Hofstede’s masculinity/femininity dimension, is sex education programs. This difference is particularly important in explaining potential country differences in the coverage of sexual activities and the use of contraceptives. In masculine societies like the US, there is a strong taboo against discussing sex and sexual issues openly, and information on contraceptives is limited (Hofstede, 1998, p. 175). Although sex education programs vary in different regions of the US, and comprehensive sex education programs do exist in some states, the greater part of the US curricula do not address sexual activities and sex-related issues as openly as other countries, especially in comparison to feminine societies such as the Netherlands (Schalet, 2000). Most sex education programs in the US teach adolescents that no sex is safe
sex, and the longer one abstains from sex, the better (Luker, 2006). Moreover, many US youth are not consistently instructed about contraceptives because of abstinence-only education, and contraceptives – notably birth control pills – are expensive (Schalet, 2000). In contrast, in feminine cultures such as the Netherlands, talking about sex openly is generally accepted, and information about contraceptives is freely available (Hofstede, 1998, p. 175). The majority of Dutch schools have a comprehensive approach to sex and openly discuss sex and sexuality. Although Dutch schools have the freedom to tailor their own sex education curricula, most programs in the Netherlands are similar in terms of their goals and methods, and teach teenagers that sex is a normal part of life and should be an enjoyable experience (Drenth & Slob, 1997; Schalet, 2000, 2010). Moreover, most Dutch youth are encouraged by parents, schools, and healthcare providers to use contraception. In the Netherlands, there is a positive tone towards using contraceptives, thus making condoms and birth control pills easily available and affordable (Bracken, Rademakers, & Reinders, 2002; Schalet, 2000). Taking into consideration that these two countries have different approaches to sex education with different levels of openness to sexual issues as outlined by Hofstede (1998), we expect the teen girl magazine coverage of sexual activities and contraceptives to mirror these approaches. Specifically, we hypothesize:

H3: Specific sexual activities such as petting, oral sex, anal sex, and coital sex will be mentioned more often in the Dutch teen girl magazines than the US teen girl magazines.

H4a: Contraceptives (i.e., birth control pills and condoms) will be mentioned more often in the Dutch teen girl magazines than the US teen girl magazines.

H4b: Contraceptives (i.e., birth control pills and condoms) will be mentioned with a positive tone more often in the Dutch teen girl magazines than the US teen girl magazines.

Method

Sample

We conducted a quantitative content analysis of the US teen girl magazines Seventeen, CosmoGirl! United States edition, and Teen, and the Dutch teen girl magazines Fancy, CosmoGirl! Netherlands edition, and Girlz! from the years 2006, 2007, and 2008. The unit of analysis was a feature story. A total of 2496 feature stories passed the initial screening for coding. Seven hundred and fifty-three feature stories were from the US teen girl magazines and 1743 feature stories were from the Dutch teen girl magazines. The number of feature stories differed between the magazines of the two countries because of different publication schemes. We analyzed only those stories that were sex-related because the aim of this study was to investigate content pertaining to a hook-up culture. Of the 753 US and 1743 Dutch feature stories, 162 (21.5%) US and 465 (26.7%) Dutch stories were related to sex. For a rationale of why these particular magazines and years were chosen for this study,
as well as a more detailed definition of a feature story, please refer to Chapter 1 or 2.

Procedure

The same coding procedure as explained in Chapters 1 and 2 was used for this study. For a detailed description of the coding procedure, coder training, inter-trainer reliability, and inter- and intra-coder reliability tests for this study, please see Chapter 1 or 2. The inter-coder and intra-coder reliabilities were generally very good (see below).

Relational context of sex. We assessed the relational context of sex by asking, “What type of sex is portrayed in the story?” Categories included “casual sex,” “committed sex,” “other,” and “type of sex not mentioned.” Because the focus of this study was on the specific type of sex that was mentioned in the story, we excluded the category “type of sex not mentioned” from the analysis. The average inter- and intra-coder reliabilities were 100% (Cohen’s kappa = 1.0) for both the US and Dutch groups.

Emotional context of sex. We assessed the emotional context of sex by asking, “In the story, is there an emphasis on love with regards to sex?” Categories to choose from included “yes” and “no.” The average inter- and intra-coder reliabilities were 100% (Cohen’s kappa = 1.0) for both the US and Dutch groups.

Sexual activities. We assessed the presence of sexual activities in the stories by asking, “Are any of the following activities explicitly mentioned: petting (i.e., heavy touching, hand jobs); oral sex; anal sex; and coital sex?” For each activity, categories to choose from included “yes” and “no.” The average inter-coder reliability was 100% (Cohen’s kappa = 1.0) for the US group. The average inter-coder reliability was 95.2% (Cohen’s Kappa = .87) for the Dutch group. The average intra-coder reliabilities were 100% (Cohen’s kappa = 1.0) for both the US and Dutch groups.

Contraceptives. We assessed the occurrence of contraceptives (i.e., birth control pills and condoms) with the questions, “Are birth control pills explicitly mentioned in the story?” and “Are condoms explicitly mentioned in the story?” Categories to choose from included “yes” and “no.” The average inter-coder reliabilities were 100% (Cohen’s kappa = 1.0) for both the US and Dutch groups. The average intra-coder reliabilities were 100% (Cohen’s kappa = 1.0) for the US group and 95.2% (Cohen’s Kappa = .87) for the Dutch group. For the tone toward contraceptives we asked, “In the story, how are birth control pills explicitly mentioned?” and “In the story, how are condoms explicitly mentioned?” Categories included “positively,” “negatively,” “both positively and negatively,” “neither positively nor negatively (i.e., neutrally),” and “not mentioned.” Because the focus of this study was exclusively on positive and negative tones, we excluded the categories “both positively and negatively,” “neither positively nor negatively (i.e., neutrally),” and “not mentioned” from the analysis. The average inter- and intra-coder reliabilities were 100% (Cohen’s kappa = 1.0) for the US and Dutch groups.

Results

Because our data were of the nominal level, chi-square analyses were conducted to test for country differences between the US and Dutch magazines for the relational context
of sex, emotional context of sex, specific sexual activities, and contraceptives. Of the 2496 feature stories, 627 (25.1%) stories were about sex. One hundred and sixty-two (26%) of the 627 sex-related stories were from the US teen girl magazines and 465 (74%) of the 627 sex stories were from the Dutch teen girl magazines. There were more sex-related stories in the Dutch coverage than the US coverage due to the larger number of feature stories in the Dutch magazines. This, however, did not pose a problem in the interpretation of data because we examined the percentages of specific messages within the corpus of data for each country. The percentages described below refer to this subsample of sex-related stories. Table 3.1 indicates the country differences by showing both the absolute figures and pertinent percentages.

### Table 3.1 Hook-up culture in US and Dutch teen girl magazines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>US magazines</th>
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<th>Dutch magazines</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ratio</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relational Context of Sex</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>54/162</td>
<td>(33.3%)***</td>
<td>78/465</td>
<td>(16.8%)***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Committed</td>
<td>25/162</td>
<td>(15.4%)***</td>
<td>187/465</td>
<td>(40.2%)***</td>
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<td><strong>Emotional Context of Sex</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>26/162</td>
<td>(16.0%)**</td>
<td>132/465</td>
<td>(28.4%)**</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Activity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Petting</td>
<td>26/162</td>
<td>(16.0%)**</td>
<td>139/465</td>
<td>(29.9%)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral sex</td>
<td>19/162</td>
<td>(11.7%)</td>
<td>42/465</td>
<td>(9.0%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anal sex</td>
<td>6/162</td>
<td>(3.7%)</td>
<td>5/465</td>
<td>(1.1%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coital sex</td>
<td>115/162</td>
<td>(71.0%)***</td>
<td>251/465</td>
<td>(54.0%)***</td>
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<td><strong>Contraceptives occurrence</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Birth control pills</td>
<td>21/162</td>
<td>(13.0%)</td>
<td>89/465</td>
<td>(19.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condoms</td>
<td>41/162</td>
<td>(25.3%)</td>
<td>127/465</td>
<td>(27.3%)</td>
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<td><strong>Contraceptives positive tone</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Birth control pills</td>
<td>17/18</td>
<td>(94.4%)</td>
<td>49/57</td>
<td>(86.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condoms</td>
<td>32/34</td>
<td>(94.1%)**</td>
<td>68/91</td>
<td>(74.7%)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** The figures in each cell represent the ratio of relevant stories for a specific indicator to the number of base stories, and the pertinent percentage. The asterisks represent significant differences between US and Dutch teen girl magazines for each of the indicators.

**p < .01. ***p < .001.

Hypothesis 1 stated that sex within a casual relational context would be mentioned more often in the US teen girl magazines than in the Dutch teen girl magazines, and sex within a committed relational sex would be mentioned more often in the Dutch teen girl magazines than in the US teen girl magazines. As Table 3.1 shows, casual sex was mentioned in 33.3% of the US sex-related stories and in 16.8% of the Dutch stories about sex. Conversely, committed sex was mentioned in 15.4% of the US stories about sex and
40.2% of the Dutch sex stories. This difference was significant, $\chi^2(2, N=627) = 39.42$, Cramer’s $V = .279$, $p < .001$. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 posed that sex within the context of love would be mentioned more often in the Dutch magazines than in the US magazines. Table 3.1 shows that love was mentioned in 16% of the US stories about sex and 28.4% of the Dutch sex stories. This difference was significant, $\chi^2(1, N=627) = 10.25$, $\varphi = .129$, $p < .01$. Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that specific sexual activities such as petting, oral sex, anal sex, and coital sex would be mentioned more often in the Dutch magazines than in the US magazines. As shown in Table 3.1, petting was mentioned in 16% of the US stories that dealt with sex and 29.9% of the Dutch stories about sex. A significant difference between the US and Dutch stories was found for petting, $\chi^2(1, N=627) = 11.59$, $\varphi = .137$, $p < .01$. Oral sex was referred to in 11.7% of the US sex-related stories and 9% of the Dutch sex-related stories. This difference was not significant, $\chi^2(1, N=627) = 0.821$, $\varphi = .037$, $ns$. Anal sex occurred in 3.7% of the US stories about sex and 1.1% of the Dutch stories about sex. This difference was not significant, $\chi^2(1, N=627) = 4.61$, $\varphi = .087$, $ns$. Finally, coital sex occurred in 71% of the US stories that dealt with sex and 54% of the Dutch stories about sex. This difference was significant, $\chi^2(1, N=627) = 15.69$, $\varphi = .160$, $p < .001$. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported only for petting.

Hypothesis 4a stated that contraceptives (i.e., birth control pills and condoms) would be mentioned more often in the Dutch teen girl magazines than in the US magazines. Birth control pills were mentioned in 13% of the US stories about sex and 19.1% of the Dutch sex-related stories. This difference was not significant, $\chi^2(1, N=627) = 1.40$, $\varphi = .048$, $ns$. Condoms were mentioned in 25.3% of the US sex-related stories and 27.3% of the Dutch sex-related stories. This difference was also not significant, $\chi^2(1, N=627) = 0.186$, $\varphi = .017$, $ns$. Thus, contraceptives were mentioned equally often in the US and Dutch coverage. Hypothesis 4a was not supported.

Hypothesis 4b posed that contraceptives (i.e., birth control pills and condoms) would be mentioned with a positive tone more often in the Dutch teen girl magazines than in the US teen girl magazines. Of the 21 US stories and 89 Dutch stories about birth control pills, only 18 of the US stories and 57 of the Dutch stories mentioned the tone towards birth control pills. Out of the 41 US stories and 127 Dutch stories that mentioned condoms, 34 US stories and 91 Dutch stories included the tone towards condoms. As shown in Table 3.1, 94.4% of the US and 86% of the Dutch stories mentioned birth control pills positively. This difference was not significant, $\chi^2(1, N=75) = 2.06$, $\varphi = .182$, $ns$. In contrast to our expectations, condoms were mentioned with a positive tone more often in the US stories (94.1%) than in the Dutch stories (74.7%). This difference was significant, $\chi^2(1, N=125) = 6.88$, $\varphi = .250$, $p < .01$. Thus, Hypothesis 4b was not supported.

**Discussion**

In the past several years, researchers have started to investigate young people’s increasing tendency to have sex within a casual context. Because casual sex seems to have
become a popular form of engaging in sexual relations among young people, various scholars have described this change as the emergence of a new sexual culture, the so-called ‘hook-up culture’ (e.g., Bogle, 2008; Heldman & Wade, 2010; Stinson, 2010). This study tries to fill two gaps in existing research on the hook-up culture. First, although portrayals of sex in the media have often been related to the emergence of a hook-up culture (e.g., Heldman & Wade, 2010), little is known about how sexual relations are depicted in the media; notably, in media that are targeted at adolescents such as teen magazines. Second, the concept of a hook-up culture and relevant research has a strong US focus, and a broader, cross-cultural comparative perspective has been missing. As a result, researchers have been unable to put the existing US research into perspective, and lack a deeper understanding of the cultural factors that may be associated with media depictions of a hook-up culture.

Against this backdrop, our study focuses on how US and Dutch teen girl magazines depict the four indicators along which the hook-up culture has been conceptualized (Heldman & Wade, 2010) – that is, the relational context of sex, the emotional context of sex, specific sexual activities, and the occurrence and tone of contraceptives. Our results partly point to a cultural contingency of the extent to which the dimensions of the hook-up culture are present in teen girl magazines. Moreover, our findings suggest that differences in the teen magazine coverage of the US and the Netherlands may be related to broader differences between these countries according to Hofstede’s (2001) masculinity/femininity dimension.

Relational and Emotional Context of Sex

Regarding the relational context of sex, stories about casual sex occurred more often in the US teen girl magazines than in the Dutch magazines. At the same time, committed sex was portrayed more often in the Dutch teen girl magazines than in the US magazines. Regarding the emotional context of sex, sex occurred more often within the context of love in the Dutch teen girl magazines than in the US magazines. These findings merge with Hofstede’s (1998) distinction between masculine and feminine societies. In feminine societies such as the Netherlands, sex is strongly tied to committed relationships. Moreover, there is very little distinction between sex and love in feminine societies. In masculine societies, by contrast, a committed relationship is not a necessary prerequisite for having sex, and a clear distinction between sex and love is made (Hofstede, 1998). Our study is the first to show that the masculinity/femininity distinction not only applies to sexual relations amongst people, but is also partially reflected in the coverage of a hook-up culture in magazines that are targeted at teenage girls. Apparently, broader cultural factors have great potential for explaining national differences in adolescent sexuality and should generally be explored in more depth by future researchers.

Against the backdrop of this recently developed concept of a hook-up culture (e.g., Bogle, 2008; Heldman & Wade, 2010; Stinson, 2010), our findings provide several new insights. First, the hook-up culture has predominantly been described and researched among US college students. Our study shows that, in terms of the relational and emotional
contexts of sex, a hook-up culture is also visible in US teen girl magazines, which are typically read by girls several years younger than college students. It is important to note that in the US coverage, the hook-up culture was not only depicted through casual sex being the predominant relational form of sex, but that it also manifested itself through the infrequent occurrence of committed sex and sex within the context of love (see Table 3.1). Second, the hook-up culture is often said to have emerged in the late 1990s or early 2000s (Heldman & Wade, 2010). We do not have data that span both of these decades. However, together with Carpenter’s (1998) study, which showed that casual sex occurred in the coverage of Seventeen magazine at a sizable level in the 1990s, our study points to a further development of this tendency in the coverage of US teen girl magazines in the 2000s. Third, previous research on the hook-up culture suggests that it is mainly a US phenomenon. Our results seem to support this assertion as far as teen girl magazines are concerned. In terms of casual sex and a lack of emotional involvement, teen girl magazines in the US show patterns for a hook-up culture more than another Western country, notably the Netherlands. However, our analyses only covered a short period of time, and the depiction of sexual relations in the Netherlands could also become more casual in due time. Future researchers may therefore find it an interesting task to investigate the further development of these processes.

Our findings about the visibility of the hook-up culture in US teen girl magazines may invite moral evaluations. Given that earlier research has shown the cultural and historical variability of the relational and emotional contexts of sex (e.g., Foucault, 1976/1990; Giddens, 1992; Wouters, 2004), a more useful starting point for academic discussions may be to investigate the emergence of a hook-up culture and its visibility in teen girl magazines as primarily a socio-sexual change. In this context, it may be more interesting to interpret our findings in terms of the overall consistency of sexual messages that young people receive in a given culture. In the Netherlands, sex education programs and parents typically stress that sex is normal and acceptable for teenagers, as long as it is within a committed relationship (Schalet, 2000, 2010). This approach to adolescent sexuality is largely reflected in the coverage of Dutch teen girl magazines. Thus, a consistent message about sex seems to be delivered to teenage girls in the Netherlands via sex education programs and teen girl magazines. In the US, by contrast, the majority of sex education programs, as well as many parents, emphasize the importance of sexual abstinence to teenagers (Luker, 2006; Schalet, 2000, 2011). This approach to adolescent sexuality conflicts with what US girls may read in teen girl magazines. In turn, rather ambivalent messages about sex seem to be delivered to adolescent girls in the US (Joshi, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2010). This sexual ambivalence has been noted in how US girls experience and think about sex (Tolman, 2002) and deserves further attention, preferably from a cross-cultural perspective.

**Sexual Activities and Contraceptives**

In terms of specific sexual activities, petting (i.e., heavy touching, hand jobs) was the only sexual activity that occurred more often in the Dutch coverage than in the US
coverage. In contrast, coital sex occurred more often in the US teen girl magazines than in the Dutch teen girl magazines. The occurrence of oral sex and anal sex content did not differ in the Dutch and US magazines. These findings suggest that sexual activities, such as oral and anal sex, which are often considered typical of a hook-up culture, are hardly visible in the coverage of teen girl magazines. A simple explanation may be that sexual activities such as oral and anal sex might be deemed age-inappropriate by the editors of teen girl magazines in both countries. Country differences in the teen magazine coverage of petting and coital sex elude clear interpretations. One speculation may be that masculine societies consider only coital sex to be ‘real’ sex, whereas feminine societies may have a broader definition of sex which includes softer activities like petting. For instance, scholars have noted a difference between the meaning of “sex” and “sexual relations” in the US (Bogle, 2008, p. 27). In addition, researchers have found that US youth are more likely to believe that only coital sex constitutes ‘real’ sex (Bogart, Cecil, Wagstaff, Pinkerton, & Abramson, 2000; Halpern-Felsher et al., 2005; Sanders & Reinisch, 1999). As a result, it may be that when it comes to the coverage of sex in US teen girl magazines, the focus is on coital sex rather than on other sexual activities because of cultural and generational definitions of sex in the US which differ from those of the Netherlands.

Contraceptives such as birth control pills and condoms were mentioned equally often in the US and Dutch teen girl magazines. One explanation for these unexpected findings could be that, regardless of how both cultures approach adolescent sex, contraceptives occur equally often in the coverage because the risk of becoming pregnant or contracting a STI is still present. Thus, because the magazines choose to cover sex, it is important for them to include content on contraceptives so that their teen readers are educated about how to prevent unwanted pregnancy and STIs.

Almost all of the stories in the US and Dutch magazines address birth control pills positively. Interestingly, condoms were mentioned more positively in the US stories than in the Dutch stories. Although this finding seems to be at odds with what scholars have described as typical of the hook-up culture in the US, it may still be related to it. For instance, while previous research indicates that decreased use of condoms – especially during oral and anal sex – is characteristic of a hook-up culture (Fielder & Carey, 2010; Lewis et al., 2011), magazine publishers may be taking social responsibility by portraying condoms in a positive light. As shown through this study, sex in a casual context occurs relatively frequently in the US magazine coverage. For the publishers of US teen girl magazines, this may be a strong reason to include a positive tone toward condoms, especially because condoms are the only way to prevent both STIs and unwanted pregnancy in casual sexual encounters. Condoms may therefore be more important in, and cater to, a hook-up culture, at least from the point of view of the publishers of teen magazines. While condoms are also mentioned in the Dutch teen girl magazines, the aforementioned reason may be why condoms are mentioned with a positive tone more often in the US magazines than in the Dutch magazines.

A second, more practical explanation for the more positive tone towards condoms in
the US coverage may have to do with the availability of contraceptives in these two countries. In the US, birth control pills are more expensive and harder to obtain than in the Netherlands (Luker, 2006; Schalet, 2000, 2010). As a result, condoms become more important as a means of contraception for US teenagers (Luker, 2006). Teen girl magazines in the US may be aware of this, and consequently respond to US teenagers’ greater dependency on condoms with a more positive tone towards condoms.

Limitations and Future Research

Our study is the first to investigate the hook-up culture within teen girl magazines and from a cross-national perspective, but has some limitations. First, we investigated only four aspects of the hook-up culture. Although existing research indicates that the relational context of sex, emotional context of sex, sexual activities, and contraceptives are four major aspects of the current hook-up culture (Bogle, 2008; Heldman & Wade, 2010; Stinson, 2010), future research may want to consider investigating other factors of the hook-up culture, such as the emotional consequences of hook-ups. Second, although teen magazines are widely read, adolescents are exposed to a plethora of media and sexual content on a daily basis. Future research may consider studying various aspects of the hook-up culture in other media, such as on television and the Internet, to find any (in)consistencies that may exist between teen magazines and the sexual content of other media of a specific country, but also between different countries. In conclusion, our findings of the rather frequent portrayal of casual, relatively unaffectionate sex in US teen girl magazines may invite speculations about how this content affects the readers of these magazines. We caution researchers against premature extrapolations from these findings. Future researchers should carefully test with rigorously chosen experimental or longitudinal survey research whether and how content on the hook-up culture in teen magazines influences the sexual attitudes and behaviors of young people. This study is therefore a strong starting point for prospective investigations on how teen magazine content on the hook-up culture informs adolescent sexual socialization.
References


Chapter 3


