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## A Cross-Cultural Content-Analytic Comparison of the Hookup Culture in U.S. and Dutch Teen Girl Magazines

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*This quantitative content analysis investigated the hookup culture in U.S. and Dutch teen girl magazines. Using Hofstede's cultural dimension of masculinity/femininity, the hookup culture (i.e., the relational context of sex, emotional context of sex, specific sexual activities, and contraceptives) was examined in 2,496 stories from all 2006 through 2008 issues of the three most popular U.S. (i.e., Seventeen, CosmoGirl! U.S. edition, and Teen) and Dutch teen girl magazines (i.e., Fancy, CosmoGirl! Netherlands edition, and Girlz!). Regarding the relational context of sex, stories about casual sex occurred more often in U.S. magazines, and Dutch magazines focused more on committed sex. Dutch magazines also emphasized sex within the emotional context of love more often than did U.S. magazines. In terms of sexual activities, coital sex was mentioned more often in U.S. coverage, while petting was mentioned more frequently in Dutch coverage. Condoms were covered more positively in U.S. magazines than in Dutch magazines. Overall, the hookup culture seems to be more visible in U.S. magazines for the occurrence of casual sex and lack of love stories, whereas it does not emerge in Dutch magazines due to the presence of committed sex and love-related articles.*

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 have sex for the first time within a committed romantic relationship (e.g., Elo, King, & Furstenburg, 1999). However, the most recent research reveals that first sexual encounters are becoming more casual, with boys being more likely than girls to have their first sexual experiences with acquaintances or with girls that they are “just dating” (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2008). In terms of subsequent sexual relations, more than three-fifths of sexually active U.S. teens eventually engage in sex within a more casual context, where relational bonding and love are not necessarily present (Manning, Longmore, & Giordano, 2005). These casual sexual relations can range anywhere from a one-time encounter to an ongoing sexual relationship with a friend (Wentland & Reissing, 2011). In fact, a substantial portion of casual sexual relations are occurring in the context of

friendships (Manning et al., 2006; Owen & Fincham, 2011).

In response to this profound change in U.S. young people's sexual relations, several scholars as of late have pointed to the emergence of a “hookup culture” in the United States (e.g., Bogle, 2008; Heldman & Wade, 2010; Stinson, 2010). In a hookup culture, the predominant form of engaging in sexual relations is the hookup—that is, the act of having sex with a partner on casual terms and outside of a committed romantic relationship (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 U.S. young people today marks the move from hooking up as a subcultural practice to hooking up as today's sexual mainstream culture in the United States (Bogle, 2008; Heldman & Wade, 2010; Stinson, 2010).

One reason often cited for the emergence of a hookup 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. While there remains an ongoing debate as to whether media

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is a reflection of society or if media shapes society, 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 whether 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 limited only to college students and young adults; it also occurs among teenagers (e.g., Grello et al., 2006; Levinson, Jaccard, & Beamer, 1995; Manning et al., 2005; Manning et al., 2006). Therefore, to fill this research gap, the first goal of this study was to analyze the extent to which a hookup culture is present within teen magazines.

A second shortcoming in research on the hookup culture is that it is focused almost exclusively within a Western cultural context, specifically that of the United States. As a result, much of the reasoning in the literature is influenced by a U.S. approach to sexuality (Bogle, 2008; Heldman & Wade, 2010; Stinson, 2010) and is not culturally sensitive or culturally aware. 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 United States 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” (Dogon & Pelassy, 1984, p. 5). Most important, cross-cultural research not only helps establish differences between cultures but also helps explain them through the substantive factors in which cultures differ (Przeworski & Teune, 1970). Thus, the second goal of this study was to investigate teen magazine coverage of the hookup culture from a cross-national comparative perspective, as findings from the United States may not be generalizable to other Western countries.

To address these two goals, we focused the present study on how U.S. and Dutch teen girl magazines cover issues related to casual sex. As will be outlined later, the United States and the Netherlands lend themselves well to a meaningful cross-cultural comparison. These two countries are both postindustrialized Western countries that 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, 2011a). 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 do (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., American Psychological Association, 2007; Berne & Huberman, 2000; Daves, 1995; Durham, 1996, 1998; Garner, Sterk, & Adams, 1998). We focused 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 hookup culture as well (Heldman & Wade, 2010). Consequently, a content analysis of teen girl magazines may inform research about the emergence of a hookup culture. Throughout this present study, we use the term *hookup culture* as an analytical concept and do not imply that (young) people who engage in casual sex are wrong morally or otherwise.

### The Hookup Culture and Its Coverage

There is a general consensus that the emergence of a hookup culture, at least in the United States, 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 noncommitted (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 hookup culture: the specific sexual activities involved when hooking up and the use of contraceptives (or lack thereof). As described in the next sections, these four indicators have been studied to some extent in teen magazines—but primarily in coverage in the United States.

#### Relational Context of Sex

In a hookup 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 that none should 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 U.S. 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, 2011a, 2011b); 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 U.S. "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 U.S. 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 in 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-related stories over the years that Carpenter (1998) identified in her study suggests 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 hookup 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 hookups 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 that 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 (2005b) 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 teen magazine coverage of sex. However, these findings are from the 1990s and early 2000s. The hookup

culture is said to have emerged in the late 1990s and into the 2000s—essentially, within the past 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 hookup culture.

### Sexual Activities

Most of the existing research on adolescent sexuality has focused on sexual intercourse; however, adolescents engage in many other physically intimate behaviors such as kissing, intimate touching, and oral sex more often than they have intercourse (see Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003; Hensel, Fortenberry, & Orr, 2008). Over the years, the normative sexual activities that young people engage in, especially within a hookup 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 United States 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 as popular (Lindberg Duberstein, Jones, & Santelli, 2008) or even slightly more popular than coital sex among U.S. teenagers (e.g., Gindi, Ghanem, & Erbeling, 2008; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2006), perhaps because many U.S. 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 U.S. 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, 2011a; Tolman, 2002). Overall, these findings suggest that young people in the United States today may be partaking in a more diverse spectrum of sexual activities than in previous years.

A recent content analysis of U.S. 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 U.S. teen girl magazines and how said coverage would compare to that of another country.

## Contraceptives

The hookup culture involves more unplanned sexual encounters than planned sex (Heldman & Wade, 2010). These unplanned encounters are less likely to involve protection in the form of contraceptives (MacDonald & Hynie, 2008), but there has been some indication that condom use is higher in hookups than in committed relationships. The latest National Survey of Family Growth (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011) data shows that U.S. boys are using condoms at first intercourse at higher rates than ever before. This, however, does not mean that condom use continues within subsequent encounters. They seem to be used more often during initial sexual encounters but less after multiple encounters. In recent years, sex within a hookup culture points to a decreased use of condoms. For instance, in friends with benefits relationships, due to the established friendship, condom use is usually lower than other casual sex relationships (VanderDrift, Lehmler, & Kelly, 2010). Decreased condom use is especially true for oral and anal sex (Fielder & Carey, 2010; Leichter, 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 U.S. 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 U.S. content analyses suggest a strong focus on abstinence instead (Clarke, 2009; Jackson, 2005a). 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, 2005a). 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, 2005a). These results suggest a rather low visibility of contraceptives in the coverage of teen girl magazines, at least within the United States. 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 United States and the Netherlands

As just outlined, the few content analyses of the various aspects of the hookup culture in teen magazines

have nearly all been conducted in the United States (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., 2011a, 2011b). This scarcity of research not only limits our knowledge of cultural variations in the depiction of different aspects of the hookup culture but 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 U.S. content analyses on the hookup culture. More important, we lack a theoretically evocative set of explanations to make sense of U.S. coverage.

A country that lends itself to a meaningful comparison with the United States 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) showed that the United States and the Netherlands were similar on four of these five dimensions but differed on the masculinity/femininity dimension, with the United States 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 United States and the Netherlands differ, it is also most likely to be the key determinant for any general differences between the United States 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 U.S. and Dutch teen magazine coverage in terms of a hookup culture—that is, the relational context of sex, emotional context of sex, specific sexual activities, and occurrence and tone toward contraceptives.

One specific factor that Hofstede (1998) outlined in the masculinity/femininity dimension was the distinction between sex and love in the United States 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 United States 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 United States and the Netherlands approach adolescent sexual socialization differently with regard to sex and love, we expected the teen magazine coverage of the relational and emotional contexts of sex to differ in these two countries. Thus, we hypothesized the following:

- H1. Sex within a casual relational context will be mentioned more often in U.S. teen girl magazines than in Dutch teen girl magazines, and sex within a committed relational context will be mentioned more often in Dutch teen girl magazines than in U.S. teen girl magazines.
- H2. Sex within the emotional context of love will be mentioned more often in Dutch teen girl magazines than in U.S. teen girl magazines.

Another specific factor in which the United States 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 United States, 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 United States and comprehensive sex education programs do exist in some states, the greater part of U.S. curricula do not address sexual activities and sex-related issues as openly as other countries do, especially in comparison to feminine societies such as the Netherlands (Schalet, 2000). Most sex education programs in the United States teach adolescents that no sex is safe sex, and that the longer one abstains from sex, the better (Luker, 2006). Moreover, many U.S. 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; most teach teenagers that sex is a normal part of life and should be an enjoyable experience (de Graaf, Meijer, Poelman, & Vanwesenbeeck, 2005; Drenth & Slob, 1997; Schalet, 2000, 2010). Moreover, most Dutch youth are encouraged by parents, schools, and health care providers to use contraception (de Graaf et al., 2005). In the Netherlands, there is a positive tone toward using contraceptives, thus making condoms and birth control pills easily available and affordable (Braeken, 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 expected the teen girl magazine coverage of sexual activities and contraceptives to mirror these approaches. Specifically, we hypothesized:

- H3. Specific sexual activities such as petting, oral sex, anal sex, and coital sex will be mentioned more often in Dutch teen girl magazines than in U.S. teen girl magazines.
- H4a. Contraceptives (i.e., birth control pills and condoms) will be mentioned more often in Dutch teen girl magazines than in U.S. teen girl magazines.
- H4b. Contraceptives (i.e., birth control pills and condoms) will be mentioned with a positive tone more often in Dutch teen girl magazines than in U.S. teen girl magazines.

## Method

### Sample

We conducted a quantitative content analysis of the U.S. teen girl magazines *Seventeen*, *CosmoGirl!* (United States edition), and *Teen*, as well as the Dutch teen girl magazines *Fancy*, *CosmoGirl!* (Netherlands edition), and *Girlz!* These six magazines were chosen because they are the three most popular teen girl magazines in the United States and the Netherlands and therefore serve as a point of orientation for other teen girl magazines in both countries (Carpenter, 1998, 2001). We opted for magazines from 2006, 2007, and 2008 because we wanted to obtain a comprehensive picture of the most up-to-date coverage of sex. At the time of data collection, 2008 was the last full year publication available.

The unit of analysis was a feature story. A feature story is a nonfiction story that intends to inform or amuse the reader through standard articles, interviews, quotes, sidebars, fillers, or question-and-answer pieces (Q&As). To qualify as a feature story, a nonfiction story had to be presented as one semantic unit by paying attention to content, colors, a frame around the story, and separate headlines. A total of 2,496 feature stories passed the initial screening for coding. Of these, 753 feature stories were from the U.S. teen girl magazines and

1,743 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 related to sex because the aim of this study was to investigate content pertaining to a hookup culture. Of the 753 U.S. and 1,743 Dutch feature stories, 162 (21.5%) U.S. stories and 465 (26.7%) Dutch stories were related to sex.

### Procedure

The codebook used for this study was an extension of a codebook used in a previous content analysis of U.S. teen girl magazines (Joshi, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2010). To make sure the items and answer categories were culturally relevant and applicable to both the U.S. and Dutch teen magazines, all items in the codebook were pretested with a subsample of articles from the U.S. and Dutch magazines. Pretesting was completed by a native American-English speaker and a native Dutch speaker.

Three native American-English speakers served as coders for the U.S. teen magazines, and five native Dutch speakers served as coders for the Dutch teen magazines. We accepted only native speakers as coders because the idiosyncratic meanings attached to sex in each language may be difficult for nonnative speakers to identify and understand. The coders were trained by the principal investigator and a research assistant. Before coder training started, the coder trainers did an inter *trainer* reliability test. This step is crucial in cross-national comparative content analyses to preclude artifacts in the coding as a result of the trainers' idiosyncratic understanding of the codebook (Peter & Lauf, 2002). The intertrainer reliability test showed a very high agreement between the trainers. The average intertrainer reliability for the codebook was 95.2% (Cohen's Kappa = .87).

Coder training took place separately for each country team and occurred over the course of two days. Each team was trained for a total of seven hours. All categories of the codebook were explained and exemplified with five magazine articles. After the training was completed, the coders were asked to code five additional articles alone at home. The results were subsequently checked by the trainers to see whether coders sufficiently understood the codebook and to clarify potential misunderstandings of the categories.

Subsequently, an intercoder reliability test was conducted, separately for the U.S. and Dutch groups, with 10 randomly sampled stories from the U.S. or Dutch magazines. To make sure the coders' understanding had not changed during the course of the coding, we conducted an intracoder reliability test four weeks after the intercoder reliability test. In that test, the coders were asked to code the stories used in the intercoder

reliability test for a second time. The intercoder and intracoder reliabilities were generally very good.

*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 intracoder reliabilities were 100% (Cohen's kappa = 1.0) for both the U.S. 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 intracoder reliabilities were 100% (Cohen's kappa = 1.0) for both the U.S. 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 intercoder reliability was 100% (Cohen's kappa = 1.0) for the U.S. group. The average intercoder reliability was 95.2% (Cohen's Kappa = .87) for the Dutch group. The average intracoder reliabilities were 100% (Cohen's kappa = 1.0) for both the U.S. 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 intercoder reliabilities were 100% (Cohen's kappa = 1.0) for both the U.S. and Dutch groups. The average intracoder reliabilities were 100% (Cohen's kappa = 1.0) for the U.S. 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 intracoder reliabilities were 100% (Cohen's kappa = 1.0) for the U.S. and Dutch groups.

**Results**

Because our data were of the nominal level, chi-square analyses were conducted to test for country differences between the U.S. and Dutch magazines for the relational context of sex, emotional context of sex, specific sexual activities, and contraceptives. Of the 2,496 feature stories, 627 (25.1%) stories were about sex. Of these, 162 (26%) of the sex-related stories were from the U.S. teen girl magazines and 465 (74%) were from the Dutch teen girl magazines. There were more sex-related stories in the Dutch coverage than the U.S. 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 following percentages refer to this subsample of sex-related stories. Table 1 indicates the country differences by showing both the absolute figures and pertinent percentages.

Hypothesis 1 stated that sex within a casual relational context would be mentioned more often in the U.S. 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 U.S. teen girl magazines. As Table 1 shows, casual sex was mentioned in 33.3% of the U.S. sex-related stories and in 16.8% of the Dutch stories about sex. Conversely, committed sex was mentioned in 15.4% of the U.S. stories about sex and 40.2% of the Dutch sex stories. This difference was significant,  $\chi^2(2, N=627) = 39.42$ , Cramér's  $V(\phi_c) = .279$ ,  $p < .001$ . 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 U.S. magazines. Table 1 shows that love was mentioned in 16% of the U.S. stories about sex and 28.4% of the Dutch sex stories. This difference was significant,  $\chi^2(1, N=627) = 10.25$ ,  $\phi_c = .129$ ,  $p < .01$ . 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 U.S. magazines. As shown in Table 1, petting was mentioned in 16% of the U.S. stories that dealt with sex and 29.9% of the Dutch stories about sex. A significant difference between the U.S. and Dutch stories was found for petting,  $\chi^2(1, N=627) = 11.59$ ,  $\phi_c = .137$ ,  $p < .01$ . Oral sex was referred to in 11.7% of the U.S. sex-related stories and 9% of the Dutch sex-related stories. This difference was not significant,  $\chi^2(1, N=627) = 0.821$ ,  $\phi_c = .037$ , n.s. Anal sex occurred in 3.7% of the U.S. stories about sex and 1.1% of the Dutch stories about sex. This difference was not significant,  $\chi^2(1, N=627) = 4.61$ ,  $\phi_c = .087$ , n.s. Finally, coital sex occurred in 71% of the U.S. stories that dealt with sex and 54% of the Dutch stories about sex. This difference was significant,  $\chi^2(1, N=627) = 15.69$ ,  $\phi_c = .160$ ,  $p < .001$ . 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 U.S. magazines. Birth control pills were mentioned in 13% of the U.S. stories about sex and 19.1% of the Dutch sex-related stories. This difference was not

**Table 1.** *Hook-Up Culture in U.S. and Dutch Teen Girl Magazines*

Stories	U.S. Magazines		Dutch Magazines	
	Ratio	Percentage	Ratio	Percentage
Relational context of sex				
Casual	54/162	(33.3%)***	78/465	(16.8%)***
Committed	25/162	(15.4%)***	187/465	(40.2%)***
Emotional context of sex				
Love	26/162	(16.0%)**	132/465	(28.4%)**
Sexual activity				
Petting	26/162	(16.0%)**	139/465	(29.9%)**
Oral sex	19/162	(11.7%)	42/465	(9.0%)
Anal sex	6/162	(3.7%)	5/465	(1.1%)
Coital sex	115/162	(71.0%)***	251/465	(54.0%)***
Contraceptive occurrence				
Birth control pills	21/162	(13.0%)	89/465	(19.1%)
Condoms	41/162	(25.3%)	127/465	(27.3%)
Contraceptives, positive tone				
Birth control pills	17/18	(94.4%)	49/57	(86.0%)
Condoms	32/34	(94.1%)**	68/91	(74.7%)**

*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 U.S. and Dutch teen girl magazines for each of the indicators.

\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 627) = 1.40$ ,  $\phi_c = .048$ , n.s. Condoms were mentioned in 25.3% of the U.S. sex-related stories and 27.3% of the Dutch sex-related stories. This difference was also not significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 627) = 0.186$ ,  $\phi_c = .017$ , n.s. Thus contraceptives were mentioned equally often in the U.S. 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 U.S. teen girl magazines. Of the 21 U.S. stories and 89 Dutch stories about birth control pills, only 18 of the U.S. stories and 57 of the Dutch stories mentioned the tone toward birth control pills. Out of the 41 U.S. stories and 127 Dutch stories that mentioned condoms, 34 U.S. stories and 91 Dutch stories included the tone toward condoms. As shown in Table 1, 94.4% of the U.S. and 86% of the Dutch stories mentioned birth control pills positively. This difference was not significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 75) = 2.06$ ,  $\phi_c = .182$ , n.s. In contrast to our expectations, condoms were mentioned with a positive tone more often in the U.S. stories (94.1%) than in the Dutch stories (74.7%). This difference was significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 125) = 6.88$ ,  $\phi_c = .250$ ,  $p < .01$ . 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 hookup culture (e.g., Bogle, 2008; Heldman & Wade, 2010; Stinson, 2010). Without disregarding the importance of committed sexual relationships among today's young people (Elo et al., 1999), this study tried to fill two gaps in existing research on the hookup culture. First, although portrayals of sex in the media have often been related to the emergence of a hookup culture (e.g., Heldman & Wade, 2010), little is known about how sexual relations are depicted in the media—and notably in media that are targeted at adolescents such as teen magazines. Second, the concept of a hookup culture and relevant research has a strong U.S. focus, and a broader, cross-cultural comparative perspective has been missing. As a result, researchers have been unable to put the existing U.S. research into perspective and lack a deeper understanding of the cultural factors that may be associated with media depictions of a hookup culture.

Against this backdrop, our study focused on how U.S. and Dutch teen girl magazines depicted the four indicators along which the hookup 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 hookup culture are present in teen girl magazines. Moreover, our findings suggest that differences in the teen magazine coverage of the U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. magazines. These findings merge with Hofstede's (1998) distinction between masculine and feminine societies and Amy Schalet's (2011b) findings from interviews with U.S. and Dutch parents and teens. 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 among people but is also partially reflected in the coverage of the relational and emotional contexts of sex 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.

Our study shows that, in terms of the relational and emotional contexts of sex, the tendency of a hookup culture—at least with respect to casual sexual relations and the lack of love in sexual encounters—may also be visible in U.S. teen girl magazines. 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 U.S. teen girl magazines in the 2000s. However, it is important to note that while in the U.S. magazine coverage casual sex occurred more often than committed sex, the majority of the sex-related stories did not specify the relational context of sex. Future researchers should therefore be careful in not overstating the emergence of a hookup culture in U.S. teen girl magazines based on our findings. In this context, it may also be important

to have a closer look at how the development of relationships are depicted. It may be that casual sex is portrayed as a starting point for more committed relationships.

Previous research on the hookup culture suggests that it is mainly a U.S. phenomenon. Our results seem to support this assertion when comparing teen girl magazines from the United States to teen girl magazines from the Netherlands. Nevertheless, future research should investigate this finding further, especially among adolescents, to draw conclusions about the occurrence of casual sex among real youth and not just of the young people depicted in the coverage of teen girl magazines. In terms of casual sex and a lack of emotional involvement, teen girl magazines in the United States showed patterns for a hookup culture more than another Western country, notably the Netherlands. However, our analyses covered only a short period of time. Moreover, due to globalization and the popularity of U.S. media, the depiction of sexual relations in Dutch teen magazines could become more casual in time. Future researchers may therefore find it an interesting task to investigate the further development of this process.

Our findings about the visibility of the hookup culture in U.S. 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 hookup culture and its visibility in teen girl magazines as primarily a sociosexual 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 not only through parents (Schalet, 2011b) but also via sex education programs and teen girl magazines. In the United States, 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, 2011a, 2011b). This approach to adolescent sexuality conflicts with what U.S. girls may read in teen girl magazines. In turn, rather ambivalent messages about sex seem to be delivered to adolescent girls in the United States (Joshi et al., 2010). This sexual ambivalence has been noted in how U.S. 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 U.S. coverage. In contrast, coital sex occurred more often in the U.S. 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 U.S. magazines. These findings suggest that sexual activities, such as oral and anal sex, which are often considered typical of a hookup 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 such as petting. For instance, scholars have noted a difference between the meaning of “sex” and “sexual relations” in the United States (Bogle, 2008, p. 27). In addition, researchers have found that U.S. 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; Schalet, 2011b). As a result, it may be that when it comes to the coverage of sex in U.S. 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 United States which differ from those of the Netherlands (Schalet, 2011b).

Contraceptives such as birth control pills and condoms were mentioned equally often in the U.S. 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 U.S. and Dutch magazines address birth control pills positively. Interestingly, condoms were mentioned more positively in the U.S. stories than in the Dutch stories. Although this finding seems to be at odds with what scholars have described as typical of the hookup culture in the United States, 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 hookup 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 U.S. magazine coverage. For the publishers of U.S. 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 hookup 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 U.S. magazines than in the Dutch magazines.

A second, more practical explanation for the more positive tone toward condoms in the U.S. coverage may have to do with the availability of contraceptives in these two countries. In the United States, birth control pills are more expensive and harder to obtain than in the Netherlands (Luker, 2006; Schalet, 2000, 2010, 2011b). As a result, condoms become more important as a means of contraception for U.S. teenagers (Luker, 2006). Teen girl magazines in the United States may be aware of this, and consequently respond to U.S. teenagers' greater dependency on condoms with a more positive tone toward condoms.

### Limitations and Future Research

Our study is the first to investigate the hookup culture within teen girl magazines and from a cross-national perspective, but it has some limitations. First, we investigated only four aspects of hookup 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 hookup culture (Bogle, 2008; Heldman & Wade, 2010; Stinson, 2010), future research may want to consider investigating other factors of the hookup culture, such as the emotional consequences of hookups.

Second, the main goal of this research was to conduct a quantitative content analysis of teen magazines in the United States and the Netherlands; however, in the future, discourse analytic strategies may help uncover *how* teen magazines discuss various topics as opposed to *how often*. For instance, past research suggests that a double standard is still present for girls who engage in casual sexual relations (see Crawford & Popp, 2003; Milhausen & Herold, 2001). It would be fruitful for future research to investigate how this double standard may be represented in U.S. and Dutch teen magazines. Also, some research has indicated that casual sexual relationships may allow women to break away from gender-stereotypical roles within relationships (Manning et al., 2006). Future research could study if and how teen magazines present messages of empowerment and agency in terms of young women engaging in casual

sex. Moreover, in terms of sexual activities, it would be beneficial for future research to uncover how magazines represent noncoital sexual activities, e.g., if these activities are presented as legitimate forms of sexual expression or as an alternative to coital sex.

Third, 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 hookup 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 U.S. 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 hookup 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 hookup culture informs adolescent sexual socialization.

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