PRESENTATIONS OF SEXUALITY, ROMANCE, AND THE OPPOSITE SEX IN FEMALE-ORIENTED MAGAZINES

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INTRODUCTION

Magazines are just one form of popular culture that people begin to consume as children and continue to enjoy throughout their lives. However, many people are concerned about exposure to sexual ideas through the media. According to a content analysis by McCleneghan (2003), women’s magazine covers from the year 2001 used the word “sex” in more than 45 percent of the headlines. Sex was implied in more than 62 percent of headlines. Findings by Schalet (2004) suggest that parents in the United States have a great deal of anxiety concerning adolescent sexuality. Thus one might wonder if magazines targeting adolescents focus on sex as frequently as women’s magazines or if other issues concerning the opposite-sex are presented more often. Present literature on female-oriented magazines does not include an analysis on the presentation of sexuality and romance aimed at women in different stages of life (women, teen, and preteen).

In this study I examined magazines targeting three age groups. This research project investigated whether an age-specific pattern emerges concerning the sexual, romantic, and opposite sex topics in magazines geared toward pre-adolescent, teen, and adult women. As much of the research only analyzes one age group or does not include preteen magazines, this study adds to the literature by examining the content of magazines aimed at different age groups.
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature demonstrates that articles concerning sexuality, romance, and relations with the opposite sex change as the target audience of magazines changes. However, most current research only focuses on one age group per study. No published studies have compared preteen, teen, and adult magazines. A comparison of preteen, teen, and adult magazines provides an analysis of how these issues are presented differently depending on age, thus reflecting cultural norms regarding age-specific sexual scripts and gender appropriate behavior. This study seeks to address this gap in the literature through its examination of the prevalence of articles concerning sexuality, romance, and members of the opposite sex in preteen, teen, and adult female magazines.

USES OF MAGAZINES

According to the literature, young girls use female-oriented magazines to guide their progression into womanhood (Finders 1996; Kaplan and Cole 2003; Kim and Ward 2004). In her ethnographic study of Midwestern junior high students, Finders (1996) discovered that the more “popular” adolescent girls in her study used the content in teen magazines to assess their progress as they transition to adulthood. They also used these guidelines to judge their peers’ progression. According to Finders’ study, the release of a new issue created an important social event where the girls invited each other to their houses to read the magazines and see how they were progressing. Since increased awareness of sexuality is part of the transition into womanhood, extending the findings of Finders’ study suggests that magazines that target female adults are likely to contain content more sexual than those aimed at teens or preteens.
A study by Brown, White, and Nikopoulou (1993) found that adolescents’ reactions to different forms of media vary based on their physical maturity and level of sexual experience. The authors developed three categories describing the ways in which young women use and interpret the media around them: disinterested, intrigued, and resisting. The disinterested girls had the lowest level of sexual experience and were the least physically mature. These adolescent girls were more likely to use the media because it was fun rather than as a learning tool for sexual relationships. Some of the girls in this group were interested in male celebrities but believed sex was dangerous. The adolescent girls in the intrigued category were similar to the girls from Finders (1996) study. They were interested in sexual media content and some were very intent on learning “the rules, rituals, and skills of the ‘emotional labor’ of romance and relationships” (1993:184). For these young women, the media provided a model of the romantic ideal and was one of the best sources for sexual advice and content. Girls in the resisting group were the most physically mature and were more likely to have engaged in more intimate levels of sexual relationships. These girls still used the media for clues on how to navigate romantic relationships, but were slightly disenchanted due to their own experiences not living up the fantasy portrayed in the media. They were also more likely to be skeptical of what they read or saw in the media but still believed it held some valuable information about sex, love, romance, and relationships.

While research by Brown, White, and Nikopoulou (1993) shows that young women use the media in different ways, it supports the idea that nearly all adolescent girls are exposed to sexuality and romance in the media and many pay attention to it.
This is particularly true for the girls in the intrigued group which use media as a way to learn about sexuality and the rules of romance. Because of this use of media, it is important to learn what the media are saying about these topics and how they are portrayed to women at different ages.

Studies have also shown that magazine consumption differs by the race and ethnicity of the reader. Kaplan and Cole (2003) reported that magazines were an important part of progression into womanhood but how the magazines were viewed by adolescents differed by race. They found that while white girls used the magazines to learn about boys, Latina girls were more concerned with unexpected pregnancies and physical abuse, and black girls were very cautious about relationships with the opposite sex. Because of these concerns, minority girls used the magazines in a much different way than the white girls. While the white girls were learning about boys, the minority girls were more interested in the products and clothing presented. Since most readers of the top teen and women’s magazines are middle class white girls, this research suggests that the magazines may place an emphasis on boys. This, in turn, suggests that topics of romance and sexuality may be prevalent in such magazines.

In addition to racial and ethnic differences, other research suggests that the utilization of the magazines varies with the age of the reader. Kim and Ward’s (2004) study established that how magazines are used differs by the age group the magazine targets. Those females who frequently read teen-oriented magazines had a much different view of sexuality than those who read adult-oriented magazines. According to their findings, the young women who read teen-oriented magazines, such as Seventeen
and YM, are more likely to believe that women should be submissive when attracting men. In contrast, those who read women’s magazines, such as Cosmopolitan and Allure, were more likely to see sex as fun and were supportive of women taking charge in sexual relationships. These findings suggest that there are differences in the way sexuality and romance are portrayed in magazines aimed at different age groups. Do magazines aimed at teens portray sexual activity as something young women should be submissive to while emphasizing dominance on the part of the man? This study also suggests that women’s magazines may be sending a contradictory message about sexuality, telling women to have fun with sexual activities and take charge of their own sexual lives. A study analyzing magazine contents is needed to understand what women at different stages of life are being told about sexuality, romance and the opposite sex.

**MAGAZINE THEMES**

Existing literature on the themes in teen and women’s magazines indicate that sexuality, romance, and relations concerning the opposite sex are the most common topics discussed in articles (Carpenter 1998; Duffy and Gotcher 1996; Durham 1996; Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner 1991; Peirce 1993). In her study, Carpenter (1998) found that popular teen magazines, in particular Seventeen, have slowly moved away from an image of women as young sexual objects towards one which depicts women experiencing sexual desires. She also discovered that magazines are now more likely to contain information about homosexuality, oral sex, masturbation, and female desire. Similarly, Duffy and Gotcher’s (1996) analysis of teen magazines indicates that young women are being told how to attract men and how to make themselves look sexy and
attractive. In contrast, another study on teen magazines indicated that articles concerning interpersonal relations are the most common (Evans, Rutberg, Sather and Turner 1991). These studies suggest that articles concerning sexuality and romance exist in teen magazines; however, the findings about content are mixed.

Tolman’s (2002) study on adolescent sexuality demonstrates a contradiction in the way adolescent girls are socialized regarding their sexuality. As shown in her findings, girls are told to be sexy and attract boys while following traditional gender norms that dictate sexual restraint. According to Durham’s (1998) examination of the teen magazines *Seventeen* and *YM*, these themes are presented in popular magazines as well. Durham notes, “The patterns that emerged in the two magazines revealed specific tensions in the constructions of girls’ sexuality that centered around sexual decision making versus sexual signification via costuming, cosmetics, and body image” (1998: 377). Durham states that even the marketing techniques for clothes, make-up, and hairstyles centered on sexuality, emphasizing an importance on looking sexy in order to get or keep a man. However, in articles actually discussing the topic of sex, the editors urged girls to wait until they were ready to have sex and not to feel pressure from men. Similar to Tolman’s overall findings on adolescent sexuality, Durham believes that popular teen magazines reinforce the cultural norms that girls are supposed to attract men while at the same time controlling their sexual desires and being sexually responsible with their bodies.

Research on teen magazines by Garner, Sterk, and Adams (1998) had similar findings. Their study found that teen magazines were often concerned with questions
like, “What are guys like? What do guys want from girls? How should I behave around
guys?” (1998:65). Girls were seen as being in the process of becoming what guys would
want them to be, while guys were seen as controllers of their surroundings. Girls were
taught in the magazines how to train themselves to be sexual objects for men, a finding
that contradicts Carpenter’s (1998) study. However, similar to Tolman (2002) and
Durham’s (1998) findings, even while this socialization through magazines is occurring,
it is helpful if girls still remain and appear innocent. Garner, Sterk, and Adams (1998)
also found that women played two important roles in male lives: sex therapists and
communication teachers. As sex therapists, women are told not only to adapt to the
male-defined sexual definitions and expressions forced upon them, but also to teach men
how to discover and satisfy their sexual needs. While girls who were not sexually active
were encouraged to wait until they were “ready,” those who were already having sex
were given advice on how to deal with problems from premature ejaculation to the fading
sexual desires of their partners. As communication teachers, girls are given the task of
Teaching men how to be emotionally intimate. However, they must do so only by being a
perfect example and never being too pushy, always putting the guy and his problems first.

Similarly, research by Farvid and Braun (2006:300) found that “women were
instructed regularly on how to produce sexual experience that was enjoyable for men.”
Women were encouraged to gratify men’s sexual desires and personify his fantasy. The
authors also found that while women were portrayed as sexually empowered, they were
still represented as needing men to be happy. Research by Ménard and Kleinplatz
(2007:13) concerning depictions of great sex in popular magazines found that, “tips on
how to introduce sexual variety were framed in ways that showcased their appeal to the male partner.” The authors’ findings suggest that while women are told to be sexually empowered by initiating sexual activity, they are only to do so in a manner that is appealing to men. If these sexual and romantic themes are being presented to women at all ages, what scripts are being told that may shape female attitudes and behaviors?

**SEXUAL SCRIPTING**

According to Simon and Gagnon (1986), scripts are an essential part of everyday behavior and activity as they are the guides which tell us how to react in our social world. Scripting appears on three separate levels: cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic. Cultural scenario scripts guide us at the collective life level and give us insight into the types of behaviors appropriate for specific roles. Interpersonal scripting occurs when a cultural scenario script is not enough to guide one through a social interaction. This level of scripting is one that allows the social actor to become “involved in shaping the materials of relevant cultural scenarios into scripts for context-specific behavior” (Simon and Gagnon 1986:99). Intrapsychic scripting is a type of fantasy scripting where one may play out in one’s head different social scenarios possible when a given behavior is acted upon. It is a way to test out possible realities that could occur when one reacts in a given manner. The messages the media portrays about sexuality help to define the cultural scenario scripts in our society. Sexual cultural scenarios “not only specify appropriate objects, aims, and desirable qualities of self-other relations but also instruct in times, places, sequences of gesture and utterance and, among the most important, what the actor and his or her coparticipants (real or imagined) are assumed to be feeling”
Magazines influence sexual behavior through cultural and interpersonal scripting. Thus, studying the messages about sex in media (more specifically magazines) informs us about age specific sexual scripts, in other words culturally agreed upon expectations for sexual behavior among preteens, teen, and women.

Bowleg, Lucas, and Tschann (2004) used the theoretical lens of sexual scripting to study African American women’s relationship and sexual scripts, particularly those concerning condom use. They found three relationship scripts occurred in at least half of their interviews with African American women: men control relationships, women sustain relationships, and infidelity is normative. As for sexual scripts, two were most common: men control sexual activity and women want to use condoms but men control condom use. These scripts were common regardless of whether the women’s income level was higher, similar, or lower than their partners. There was also not much difference in scripts given and the degree of intimacy in the relationship or relationship type (stable or casual). The authors conclude that these types of sexual and relationship scripts which give power to the men lead to a lower level of condom use, despite the fact that most women would prefer to use condoms while engaging in sexual intercourse. With these sexual scripts in place, it may be true that popular magazines aimed at women focus less on contraception and more on sustaining a relationship by pleasing a man or being in charge of emotional intimacy.

Theories of sexual scripting have also been applied to dating. Rose and Frieze (1993) used these ideas to explore common dating scripts found among college undergraduates. Asking participants to write down twenty activities typical of both a
hypothetical and their most recent first date, Rose and Frieze (1993) found that first dates were highly scripted as both activities for hypothetical and actual first dates were extremely similar. They also found that there was strong emphasis of gender typifying among dating scripts where men were to take the proactive role and women the reactive role. Common scripts for men included asking for and planning the date, driving and opening doors, and starting sexual interaction. Women, on the other hand, were to be concerned about their appearance, enjoy the date, allow the man to pick her up and open doors for her, and respond to his sexual advances. The presence of these sexual and dating scripts implies that study of popular media outlets, such as female-oriented magazines, may be important in determining when females start to learn these scripts and how they are presented to them.

This study adds to the literature by analyzing magazine content in female-oriented publications targeted at women in three different junctures of life: preteen, teen, and womanhood. Two magazine titles from each group have been analyzed for themes of sexuality, romance, and the opposite sex. Both the amount of times topics in each theme are present and the ways in which they are presented are analyzed.

METHODS

In order to examine the prevalence of articles related to sexuality and romance presented to women at different points in their lives, I conducted a content analysis of magazine content using each mention of sexual, romantic, opposite sex, or same-sex relationships within articles as my unit of analysis. I chose magazines because they are targeted toward clearly defined consumer age groups.
To conduct my content analysis, I used two magazines from each age group that were more common and, presumably, more popular and well-read by their intended consumers. Table 1: Magazine Categories shows the titles of each magazine (Girls’ Life, J-14, Seventeen, Cosmo Girl!, Cosmopolitan, and Glamour) and their targeted age group. According to Amazon.com (2009), Seventeen, Cosmo! Girl, J-14, and Girls’ Life were all listed in the top ten most popular magazines for teens (there is no “preteen” category in their listings and, therefore, the preteen definition in this study is defined as teen for Amazon) at the time of data collection and analysis. Cosmopolitan and Glamour were both listed under the top ten for women’s fashion and style magazines by Amazon.com (2008) at the time of data collection and analysis. These magazines were chosen over others in these top ten lists due to availability and access. Also, all magazines used for this study are published by either Hearst Corporation or Conde Naste Publications, two of the largest magazine publishers, likely making their availability far reaching throughout the United States.

To obtain data on these magazines, I read through issues of all six magazines and tallied each mention of words in articles concerning sex, romance, the opposite sex, and/or same sex orientation. I used the February through July issues of each magazine published during 2008, with the exception of J-14’s February issue and Girls’ Life’s April/May issue as they were unavailable at the time of coding. These issues were chosen in order to have the most recent data available at the time of analysis. While this
does allow for more relevant analysis, it also limits the study in the amount of magazines analyzed and does not account for seasonal variation in coverage of topics.

**TABLE 1: Magazine Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Teen</th>
<th>Preteen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cosmopolitan</td>
<td>Seventeen</td>
<td>J-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glamour</td>
<td>Cosmo!</td>
<td>Girls'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ANALYTIC STRATEGY**

In order to understand the presentations of sexuality, romance, and the opposite sex in female-oriented magazines I took note of how often and in what context the topics were discussed. While all of the main categories and many of the more specific topics within each category were discussed in all the magazines, it is important to look at how they are addressed for each targeted age group. This process allowed me to examine not only the varying proportions in which each topic was discussed for the different age groups, but also specific patterns regarding how the topics were presented within each group.

**DEPENDENT VARIABLES.** The dependent variables included the following: mentions of opposite sex, romance, and sex. Specifically, words and/or phrases coded as opposite sex include celebrities, cute boys, male opinions, male behavior, Mr. Right/Mr. Wrong, male sexual activity, how to please a man, and how to get a man. Words and/or phrases coded under romance include dating, flirting, relationship, kissing, cheating, crushes, and love. Words and/or phrases tallied under sex include sexual intercourse,
sexual health, being sexy, masturbation, oral sex, hooking up/flings, sexually active, contraception, orgasms, sexual positions, rape, and pornography. Definitions and examples of these appear on Appendix A. Same sex is defined as having a romantic or sexual orientation towards someone of the same sex and was tallied for any mention of same-sex relationships or romantic or sexual activity. Due to the small amount of mention of same-sex relationships, subgroups for this category were not created.

In order to determine the topics within each category, two issues of each magazine were initially reviewed looking for any topics that would potentially fit into the three main categories of opposite sex, romance, and sexuality. These topics were listed and tallied and the most popular ones were selected for the study. After the most common topics were decided upon, all issues were reviewed for each mention of these popular words and topics. In order to validate the coding scheme used for this research, another coder was trained using the definitions in Appendix A. The second coder then analyzed one issue from each magazine title. Intercoder reliability was 81 percent.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES. The independent variable for this content analysis is the targeted age group of each magazine. As stated previously, I chose to analyze magazines from each age group (preteen, teen, and adult) because, to my knowledge, there has been no published research on this topic. If magazines are used as a way to gauge one’s progression into womanhood as the literature suggests (Finders 1996; Kaplan and Cole 2003; Kim and Ward 2004), then a study analyzing the amount of content on certain topics found in each age group’s popular magazines would demonstrate the age specific sexual scripts. Also, looking at the ways in which each
topic is presented to the different age groups will give clues as to the different sexual scripts being displayed to females at different stages of life.

RESULTS

When reviewing the tallies for each general category (opposite sex, romance, sex, and same-sex relationships), it is apparent each of the age group’s magazines discussed these topics to varying degrees. As shown in Table 2, women’s magazines mentioned topics listed under sex most frequently (46.7% of all topics discussed for women were under the sex category), followed by opposite sex (33.0%), romance (19.7%), and same-sex relationships (0.01%), respectively. Teen magazines discussed topics listed under romance most frequently (40.2% of all topics discussed for teens were under the romance category), followed by opposite sex (35.6%), sex (22.3%), and same-sex relationships (1.7%), respectively. Preteen magazines had the highest number of tallies for topics in the opposite sex category (56.8% of all topics discussed for preteen magazines were under the opposite sex category), followed by romance (38.3%), sex (3.2%), and same-sex relationships (1.7%), respectively.
## Table 2: Article Themes by Magazine Age Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>AGE GROUP</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Per</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Per</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposite Sex:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td>Per</td>
<td>Teen</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Celebrities</td>
<td>1187</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>35.6</td>
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<td>Cute boys</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>40.8</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Male opinions</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<td>Male behavior</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. right/Mr. wrong</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male sexual activity</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How to please a man</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<td>How to get a man</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Romance:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td>Per</td>
<td>Teen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dating</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>97</td>
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<td>Flirting</td>
<td>75</td>
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<td>112</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kissing</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>11.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheating</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Crushes</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td>Per</td>
<td>Teen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual intercourse</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual health</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexy</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Masturbation</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral sex</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hooking up/flings</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexually active</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<td>Contraception</td>
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<td>7.5</td>
<td>64</td>
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<td>Orgasms</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Sexual positions</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pornography</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<td>Same-Sex:</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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As shown in Table 2 under the category of opposite sex, women’s magazines were more likely to mention how to please a man, celebrities, male behavior, and male opinions. They were least likely to mention Mr. Right/Mr. Wrong, male sexual activity, how to get a man, and cute boys. In the same category, teen magazines were most likely to mention celebrities, cute boys, and male opinions and were least likely to mention male sexual activity, Mr. Right/Mr. Wrong, and male behavior. Preteen magazines mentioned celebrities and cute boys the most. Male sexual activity was never discussed and how to please a man, male opinions, and Mr. Right/Mr. Wrong were least likely to be mentioned.

HOW TO PLEASE A MAN. While many of the same categories appeared in all three age groups’ magazines, the ways that they were discussed often varied. One glaring example of this is with the “how to please a man” category. When this appeared in women’s magazines it was most often referring to pleasing a man physically or sexually, such as an article in the June issue of Cosmopolitan entitled, “His G-Spot (and 7 Other Hidden Moan Zones)” which gives women tips to “make a guy boil over with erotic excitement” (Murphy 2008:121). The article states:

A guy’s prostate—the walnut-sized gland under his bladder—is the ultimate magic button to push if you want to blow his mind in bed. To tantalize it, partway through oral sex or intercourse, rest two fingers against the swath of skin between his testicles and anus…When you sense he’s close to orgasm, rhythmically press the area (one pulse every second) until he climaxes (Murphy 2008:121).

The article also encourages women to make their sex lives more intense by instructing readers to, “pull your car over to a secluded spot. Recline his seat all the way back, and
hop on top of him” or “after dinner, ask him to take you on the kitchen counter” (Murphy 2008:123).

In teen and preteen magazines this category focused more on doing general things that might make a man happy or to make oneself more appealing to males. For example, an article in the July issue of Seventeen tells young women to appeal to his sense of sight by stating, “all it takes is showing just a little shoulder or a tiny bit of leg to make a really big impact” (Benson 2008:105). This same article encourages girls to wear certain scents, such as vanilla or lavender, that men find attractive. This difference supports Kim and Ward’s (2004) finding that women’s magazines present a more enjoyable attitude towards sex where women are told to take charge and teen magazines present the idea that women are to be a bit more submissive in their attempts to attract men. Women’s magazines focus on pleasing a man by being sexual and taking charge. Teen and preteen magazines encourage readers to appeal to males through presentation of self through scent, dress, and being playful.

CELEBRITIES. Another difference among the topics within the opposite sex category is the discussion of celebrities. While this topic was discussed in all three age groups’ magazines, the ways in which it was addressed is quite different. The teen and especially preteen magazines were more likely to gush about the details of male celebrities’ lives, love interests, favorite things, or how cute they are. Examples include articles titled, “Jonas Brothers: Handsome & Wholesome” or “Nat & Alex Wolff: Wild and Crazy Kids” (J-14 2008). Women’s magazines mention male celebrities in general articles about Hollywood or in articles profiling male celebrities is in upcoming movies.
or albums. The April issue of *Cosmopolitan* mentions male celebrities when presenting the topic of out-of-wedlock babies in Hollywood stating, “plenty of couples seem content to skip the nuptials altogether—consider Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt, Naomi Watts and Liev Schreiber, and Halle Berry and Gabriel Aubry” (Gilbert 2008:52). Often, the first attraction young girls have is to a celebrity, perhaps because it is safer emotionally as they are still learning about themselves, what kinds of boys they are supposed to be attracted to, and what emotions are to go along with these attractions. Preteen girls’ magazines may be more likely to present so many articles on male celebrities because the first feelings one has towards the opposite sex can be so intense. Taking into account Finders (1996) findings, the difference between women’s magazines focus on general celebrities in contrast to preteen magazines profiling attractive young celebrities could occur because preteen girls are using magazines as a guide for their progression into womanhood. Young girls may use the magazines to tell them what an attractive male is supposed to look or be like. Women have progressed past this point, so while attractive male celebrities are still discussed, the focus may be different because mature women are more likely to be in actual relationships.

**MALE BEHAVIOR.** While some topics within the opposite sex category differ in presentation between the selected age groups’ magazines, other topics are discussed in similar ways in each age group. For example, while women’s magazines are more likely to have discussions about interpreting male behavior, when these issues are addressed in teen magazines they are discussed in similar ways. An example from the April 2008 issue of *Cosmopolitan* discussed how to decode a male’s favorite discussion topics, so if
he likes to talk about your last relationship “he may worry that you’re still hung up on a former flame” (Cosmopolitan 2008:74). Another illustration was what it means when he says one thing but means another. For example, “he says: ‘maybe we need a break.’” According to Cosmopolitan, “he means: ‘I think we should end things, but this sounds nicer.’” (Cosmopolitan, April). Teen magazines focus on understanding male behavior are also relationship centered. The April issue of Seventeen advises that, when a male “intentionally hold his gaze a few seconds longer than usual…If he holds your gaze he definitely wants you.” The context of this particular topic may not vary much due to the focus our society has on females being able to understand the opposite sex at all stages of life. As shown by Garner, Sterk, and Adams (1998), women are taught in magazines how to understand men and make themselves fit a male definition of what a girl is supposed to be. Discussing male behavior one way to get these ideas across to young women.

MALE OPINIONS. In addition to interpreting male behavior, male opinions were similarly discussed in women, teen, and preteen magazines. While women’s magazines touched on sexual opinions occasionally, most age groups focused on whether men liked certain female behaviors, fashion trends, or male’s opinions of relationship and dating behaviors. The March issue of J-14 asked guys what they look for in a girl. Answers included, “Someone who’s fun to be around, easy to talk to and doesn’t start any problems that don’t need to be started” (J-14 2008:74), and “If Mom likes a girl, then it’s all good” (J-14 2008:74). Fashion is also commented on. Take, for example, the May 2008 issue of Glamour which asks men to comment on which swimsuit style they
find sexiest. One man states, “stripes would look great on my girlfriend’s body and really complement her wide hips. I love curves on a woman” (Glamour 2008:160). This similarity across age groups is probably due to the ways in which men and women are socialized. As stated earlier Garner, Sterk, and Adams (1998) found that female-oriented magazines teach women how to understand men in order to make themselves into what men want from them. Discussing male opinions, along with male behaviors, is another way to get these ideas across to young women.

ROMANCE

As shown in Table 2, in the category of romance, women’s magazines were more likely to mention dating, relationships, love, and kissing and least likely to discuss cheating, crushes, and flirting. Teen magazines discussed love, dating, flirting, crushes, and relationships the most. They were least likely to mention cheating and kissing. Crushes and love were more likely to be mentioned in preteen magazines. Least likely to be discussed in these magazines were cheating, relationships, flirting, and kissing.

LOVE. The topic of love was talked about much in the same manner for each magazine group. It was either mentioned generally when talking about a man one loved or in articles that offer advice about how to determine whether a relationship included love. The May/June issue of J-14 titles an article, “Is it love?” analyzes the relationship of a famous couple to see if they are in love. The article concludes they are not there yet, but signs indicate they are almost in love such as keeping in touch by, “texting and calling each other,” calling to wish each other happy birthday, spending time together shopping and eating out, and “walking hand-in-hand” (J-14 2008:10). Similarly the April
issue of Glamour has an article titled, “6 Signs He Loves You Madly.” The article suggests he loves you if, “he lets you shine” or “he’s spontaneous” (Glamour 2008:223).

RELATIONSHIPS. Relationships were also mentioned in all age groups, especially teen and women’s magazines. Often relationships were mentioned generally when discussing a couple or how to have a healthy relationship, such as in the April issue of Seventeen where Hayden Panettiere pronounces, “But I’ve figured that the healthiest relationship is where you each have your own life, but they meet at a nice point in the middle” (Seventeen 2008:130). Magazines also discussed relationships when interviewing or casually discussing celebrities. The April issue of Seventeen asked the quoted celebrity who she was currently in a relationship with and the March issue of J-14, when talking about a current celebrity couple stated, “Since their relationship began, nothing’s come between Zac Efron and Vanessa Hudgens” (J-14 2008:20). These and other articles in the analyzed magazines give insight into what a good, healthy relationship should look like. There is a good possibility that many women of all ages use these magazines to find out if their relationships are healthy or normal.

As stated previously, women are constantly trying to figure out male behavior and, as Garner, Sterk, and Adams (1998) and Solomon, Rothblum, and Balsam (2005) assert, women are the ones responsible for emotional intimacy. Whether a relationship involves love or is a healthy one is essentially the woman’s concern, no matter the age. Men are just to be men as they are and women are to teach them by example how to have emotional intimacy (Garner et. al 1998). Therefore, magazines at all ages seem to
discuss love and relationship matters in essentially the manner, although the amount of
times mentioned varies by age group.

**SEX**

As shown in Table 2, under the category of sex, women’s magazines were more
likely to discuss being sexy, sexual intercourse, and orgasms. They were least likely to
mention being sexually active, pornography, masturbation, and rape. Teen magazines
mentioned sexual intercourse, sexual health, and being sexy more often. Sexual positions
were never mentioned and rape, orgasms, oral sex, and being sexually active were less
likely to be discussed. Preteen magazines were more likely to discuss hooking up/flings,
and sexual intercourse. Masturbation, oral sex, orgasms, sexual positions, rape, and
pornography were never mentioned. Other categories not mentioned in preteen
magazines often were sexual health and being sexy.

SEXUAL INTERCOURSE. Unlike some of the topics under the romance or
opposite sex categories, sexual intercourse was not discussed in the same manner
throughout the magazines in different age groups. Women’s magazines discussed sexual
pleasure most often with articles that advise about such things as “being a sex genius”
(Benjamin 2008:138) or “little moves that make sex hotter” (Heitman 2008:146). The
February/March 2008 issue of *Girls’ Life* discussed the recent trend of preteen and teen
celebrities having premarital sex and getting pregnant. While it discouraged young girls
from having premarital sex due to the possibility of becoming a mother at a very young
age, it was also realistic about the fact that premarital sex does occur, even with girls in
the preteen age group. Because of this, the article discussed sexual health issues and
contraception in conjunction with its discussion on sexual intercourse. Teen magazines’ discussions of sexual intercourse also tended to center around sexual health, particularly STDs and contraception. The July issue of Seventeen contained an article titled, “Summer Sex Myths” which discussed such myths as, “you can’t get pregnant if you have sex in the water” (Meanley 2008:70). Women’s magazines may be less likely to focus on sexual health or sex myths when compared to its emphasis on being sexy because of the assumption that older women either already know these things or are in more serious and committed relationships than younger women may be. Also, women’s magazines may be assuming that most of the readers are already sexually active and have been for some time while teen and preteen magazines are more cautious as their readers sexual activity levels may vary more.

SAME SEX

As shown in Table 2, all of the age groups mentioned same-sex relationships in at least one issue. Teen magazines mentioned them the most often. This is followed closely by preteen magazines and women’s magazines respectively. When same-sex relationships were mentioned in the preteen and teen magazines, the articles were positive and focused more on understanding homosexuality or one’s own homosexual feelings. An issue of Seventeen had a question and answer article titled, “Could I be gay?” (Meanley 2008). The article answered such questions as, “I kissed a girl at a party once. Am I gay?” and “My friend and I have been hooking up and I really like her. What does it mean?” (Meanley 2008:100). The June/July 2008 issue of Girls’ Life contained an article with a young girl who had realized she was gay and discussed what is was like for
her during her first romantic relationship with a female. Women’s magazines were more likely to mention same-sex relationships in passing when talking about someone’s gay friend and that relationship and were much less focused on awareness and learning about sexual orientation. Same-sex relationships in this manner were presented neutrally. Similar to the topic of sexual intercourse, women’s magazines may assume that many of its readers are heterosexual because of the assumption that by adulthood people are aware of their sexual and romantic preferences and due to the availability of magazines aimed specifically at homosexual adults. In contrast, teens and preteens may still be figuring out their sexuality, thus the magazines are more focused on same-sex relationship awareness. These magazines have a greater need to inform people about sexual and romantic options as many of the readers are still exploring and discovering who they are in these particular areas.

CONCLUSION

In order to complete this study, magazine content aimed toward three different age groups (women, teen, and preteen) were analyzed for themes of sexuality, romance, and the opposite sex. After topics in each theme were tallied, some of the most common topics were explored for how they were presented by magazines in each age group. This study contributes to the literature because it investigates sexuality, romance, and the opposite sex aimed at females at three different stages of life while most of the current literature only focuses on one age group. It allows for the examination of sexual scripts across magazines targeted toward specific age groups. Furthermore, this study includes magazines aimed at preteens, which is mostly ignored in the current literature. The
purpose of this study was to compare preteen, teen, and women’s magazines in order to analyze the manner in which sexuality, romance, and the opposite sex are presented based on the target age of the group being presented to. These findings may reflect the cultural norms regarding sexuality, age, and gender appropriate behavior.

As most people would expect, women’s magazines were more likely to discuss issues of sexuality than teen or preteen magazines. Particularly women’s magazines addressed sexual acts much more often and were also more likely to discuss the opposite sex in a sexuality-related approach. Women were encouraged to have a take-charge attitude towards sex. This finding coincides with Kim and Ward’s (2004) finding that women who read female-oriented adult magazines were more likely to view sex as fun and were supportive of women taking charge in sexual relationships. When compared with teen and preteen magazines, women’s magazines were not as likely to discuss sexual health issues as often as teen magazines were. Preteen magazines tended to steer clear of most sexuality topics all together, however, the few times they did mention sexual topics they were discussed in much the same manner as in teen magazines, focusing on sexual health issues more than pleasure or fun. This suggests not only that preteen and teens may not be ready for the take-charge attitude presented to women, but also that women should learn about sexual health issues before partaking in sexual acts in that manner. While findings by Carpenter (1998) found that teen magazines were moving away from young women being depicted as sexual objects to discussion of adolescents experiencing sexual desires, the findings of this study coincide more with the studies done by Tolman (2002) and Durham (1998). Teens and preteens are more likely to be told how to attract
men while at the same time controlling their sexual desires and also being sexually responsible for their bodies. While women’s magazines focused on females experiencing their sexual desires, teen and preteen magazines shied away from these themes instead emphasizing that girls should understand men and sexual health issues first and foremost.

Preteen magazines seemed to focus more on the opposite sex, particularly learning about the opposite sex in terms of what boys were attractive, what those attractive boys found pleasing, and generally what it means to be in love or in a relationship. These findings also complement the findings of Tolman (2002) and Durham (1998), placing emphasis on how to attract men. The overall theme of preteen magazines was to learn about boys and what they liked. However, all three categories of magazines discussed topics under the theme of romance very similarly. Love and relationships seem to be presented in very similar ways no matter the age group. Understanding male behavior was also presented in the same manner for all magazines suggesting that knowledge of understanding men and what they like as well as understanding the ways in which relationships and love work should be important to women of all ages. These findings correspond with those of Garner, Sterk, and Adams (1998) who assert that their research findings indicate that it is the responsibility of women to teach men about emotional relationships and sexual activity. Similar to these findings, the magazines of all age groups in this study emphasized females understanding how love and relationships work and the ways in which men think and behave. This suggests that, like those in Garner, Sterk, and Adams (1998) study, women are to be knowledgeable about relationship-related topics and show by example how to act in a
relationship. The finding that so many female-oriented magazines heavily focus on understanding men suggests that women are to put men’s problems first, helping them navigate the sexual and romantic realms of life.

In completion of this study, one may see that certain scripts begin to appear for each female age group. However, the scripts for each group seem to move in a progressive manner. Preteen girls are to begin their interest in the opposite sex, learning what the opposite sex is attracted to and what members of the opposite sex are deemed attractive by society. Preteens should not be sexually active but should begin exploring sexuality by learning about sexual health issues. The sexual scripts presented in teen magazines indicate that while adolescents should still be learning about the opposite sex, it is much more essential to learn how to act and behave in order please and attract them. Sexual health issues are extremely important as it is supposed that teen girls will begin to have sex in their late teens or young adulthood. However, it is also imperative not to have too much of a take-charge attitude, but to be ready to teach a man how to behave in a relationship by being the perfect example. Sexual scripts in the women’s magazines still focus on understanding the opposite sex, but it is now the responsibility of females to take-charge sexually and understand what men like sexually and how to increase erotic enjoyment. As it has been throughout preteen and especially the teen years, it is still the responsibility of the woman to hold up the emotional side of the relationship and continue to teach men how to behave in relationships. Overall, scripts in female-oriented magazines aimed at all age groups seem to focus on the responsibility of women to
manage all areas of the relationship and sexuality realms while still focusing on men’s needs and pleasures.

While this study contributes to the literature by exploring female-targeted magazines at different stages of life, it has some limitations. First, only six months worth of magazines were explored, limiting the amount of information presented to a small portion of the year. It is possible that certain topics are discussed more often during certain times of the year. Also, the lack of accessibility of popular preteen magazines and the fact that one of the preteen magazines is only published every other month resulted in fewer issues available in the six month period for preteen magazines. Additionally some back issues of magazines were unavailable. These two dilemmas cause an incomplete sample from the six month period. This along with the smaller sample size may cause concern for the ability to generalize the findings. More research is needed that covers a longer time span in order to be certain these finding presented here are conclusive. Research covering other forms of media, such as television shows, is needed to see if messages are congruent across media forms.

Findings from this study indicate that magazines present information of sexuality, romance, and the opposite sex to females in a progressive manner throughout the age groups. Females are first introduced to men in preteen magazines, told how to attract men and behave in relationships in teen magazines, and how to please men sexually in women’s magazines. It appears that most of the information presented in these magazines focus on the relationship from the standpoint of how a woman is to take care of a man. Preteens are told which type of man is the right kind to like, teens are told how
to attract that kind of man and teach him about relationships, and women are instructed on the ways to perform sexual activities that men will like. It appears that women’s sexual desires are first and foremost to please their men. While the idea is never overtly stated, it appears that women are still sexual objects for men’s pleasuring. However, they are also in charge of “taming” the man and making him knowledgeable on topics of sexuality and romance.
Appendix A

Opposite Sex

- Celebrities
  - Definition: A famous or well known person, in this case pertaining to those of the male gender
  - Example: Everyone who meets the Jonas Brothers immediately falls for them,
  - Categorical Explanation: Focuses real-life examples and talks about members of the opposite sex.

- Cute Boys
  - Definition: Those of the male gender being described as attractive
  - Example: A cutie gives you butterflies…
  - Categorical Explanation: Discusses what a cute member of the opposite sex looks like or how a member of the opposite sex makes you feel.

- Male Opinions
  - Definition: Views and beliefs held by those of the male gender
  - Example: His point of view: make-or-break dating moments
  - Categorical Explanation: Gives the views of a member of the opposite sex.

- Male Behavior
  - Definition: Actions done by those the male gender, in this case pertaining particularly to “figuring out” male behavior”
  - Example: What his drink says about him…
  - Categorical Explanation: Describes the actions of a member of the opposite sex in order to “figure him out”

- Mr. Right/Mr. Wrong
  - Definition: A member of the male gender who is viewed as the ideal/imperfect partner
  - Example: Mr. Wrong turned out to be so right…
  - Categorical Explanation: Describes what the perfect or imperfect member of the opposite sex is like.

- Male Sexual Activity
  - Definition: Pertaining to male sex lives
  - Example: Behold, men’s self-pleasuring secrets.
  - Categorical Explanation: Describes sexual activity performed by a member of the opposite sex.
How to Please a Man
- Definition: Pertaining to satisfying a member of the male gender’s wants and/or needs
- Example: These supercreative, supernaughty passion poses will double his pleasure
- Categorical Explanation: Describes a way to give pleasure to a member of the opposite sex.

How to Get a Man
- Definition: Pertaining to obtaining a member of the male gender’s affections, commitment, etc.
- Example: Peach-pink blush and shimmery eye shadow helped Laila look innocent while she played with Matt’s heart.
- Categorical Explanation: Describes a way to obtain a member of the opposite sex.

Romance

Dating
- Definition: To go out socially with
- Example: We both date other people…
- Categorical Explanation: Dating is an act of romance

Flirting
- Definition: To make playfully romantic or sexual overtones
- Example: Being flirty is healthy…
- Categorical Explanation: Flirting is a way to show romantic interest

Relationships
- Definition: A romantic and/or sexual connection, association, or involvement
- Example: All relationships take some effort.
- Categorical Explanation: Relationships are seen as the culmination of romantic feelings.

Kissing
- Definition: To touch with the lips as an expression of affection
- Example: This kiss is so hot…
- Categorical Explanation: Kissing as an expression of affection is a sign of romantic feelings.

Cheating
- Definition: Not being faithful to a partner or lover
- Example: 22% of people in a monogamous relationship have cheated on their current partner.
Categorical Explanation: Cheating is not always an act of sex, often times a person is said to have cheated for kissing or flirting with another person. Also, cheating implies a relationship, which is considered romantic, while sex does not always imply a relationship or romance.

- **Love**
  - Definition: A profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person
  - Example: He said he loved me.
  - Categorical Explanation: Love is a common feeling associated with romantic relationships

- **Crushes**
  - Definition: an intense but usually short-lived infatuation
  - Example: I’ve had a crush on this guy for almost seven years.
  - Categorical Explanation: Crushes are often the first step in romantic relationships.

**Sex**

- **Sexual Intercourse**
  - Definition: Genital contact, in this case the insertion of the penis into the vagina
  - Example: These tips and tricks will forever crank up the heat in your sex life.
  - Categorical Explanation: Sexual intercourse is the act of having sex.

- **Sexual Health**
  - Definition: The condition of the body and mind, in this case pertaining to sex
  - Example: Wash your vulva one a day.
  - Categorical Explanation: Sexual health is an important part of having a sex life.

- **Being Sexy**
  - Definition: To be excitingly appealing
  - Example: The sexiest eyebrows ever…, A wickedly sexy woman knows how to deliciously exploit the power she has over a man.
  - Categorical Explanation: The act of being excitingly appealing creates the thought of sex.

- **Masturbation**
  - Definition: The stimulation or manipulation of one’s own genitals
  - Example: A good-in-bed girl touches herself,
• Categorical Explanation: Masturbation is typically described in the magazines as “sex you have alone;” therefore, it is placed in the sex category.

• Oral Sex
  o Definition: Sexual contact between the mouth and the genitals
  o Example: Partway through oral sex…
  o Categorical Explanation: Oral sex is a type of sexual activity.

• Sexually Active
  o Definition: Having sexual contact with someone other than yourself
  o Example: If you are sexually active…
  o Categorical Explanation: Being sexually active means you are having some form of sex with another person.

• Hooking Up/Flings
  o Definition: A brief sexual or romantic relationship
  o Example: The girlfriend of a coworker I started hooking up with…
  o Categorical Explanation: Hook-up/fling are slang words typically referring to sex.

• Contraception
  o Definition: Birth control by the use of devices, drugs, or surgery
  o Example: The “mini pill” is for women who can’t take estrogen.
  o Categorical Explanation: Contraception is used during sexual acts.

• Orgasms
  o Definition: The physical and emotional sensation experienced at the peak of sexual excitation
  o Example: If you’ve been successful at having orgasms with your man…
  o Categorical Explanation: Orgasms are experienced during sex.

• Sexual Positions
  o Definition: The arrangement of body parts into various forms of sexual intercourse and other sexual acts between people
  o Example: Lie facedown across the width of the hammock, and have your man enter you from behind.
  o Categorical Explanation: Sexual positions are a part of sexual acts.

• Rape
  o Definition: Any act of sexual intercourse that is forced upon a person
  o Example: I was sexually assaulted…they denied me a rape kit
  o Categorical Explanation: While rape is forced, it is still an act of sexual intercourse, thus is placed into the sex category.

• Pornography
o Definition: Sexually explicit pictures, writing, or other material whose primary purpose is to cause sexual arousal

o Example: …surprise him by turning on a racy flick.

o Categorical Explanation: Pornography typically portrays sexual acts and is used to cause sexual arousal.
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