

CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN YOUTH MAGAZINES: THE MACEDONIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

In this MA thesis I deal with critical analysis of two monthly youth magazines in the contemporary Macedonian cultural context, namely *TAA се само обична не* (*SHE – anything but ordinary*) aimed at adolescent girls and *TOJ маику свет* (*HE – in the male's world*) aimed at adolescent boys. My main concern is to explore how gender and sexuality are represented within the pages of these magazines and how such representations reflect and reinforce the values of the society in which they exist. I argue that *TAA* and *TOJ* construct gendered worlds for their readers by promoting traditional models of masculine and feminine behavior and setting heterosexuality as a compulsory form of sexual orientation. Moreover, I argue that these magazines are embedded into the global consumerist culture and they introduce the readers to the world of consumerism. The central research questions of this thesis are as follows: How are masculinity and femininity represented in *TAA* and *TOJ*? What are the values these magazines promote and support? How do *TAA* and *TOJ* fit into the wider economic and socio-cultural context?

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Introduction

In response to a wide body of criticism concerning the ideological force of magazines and their role in perpetuating gender stereotypes, in this MA thesis I deal with critical analysis of youth magazines in the contemporary Macedonian cultural context. I look at two monthly youth magazines, namely *TAA*¹ *се само обична не* (*SHE – anything but ordinary*) aimed at adolescent girls and *TOJ* *маику свет* (*HE – in the male's world*) aimed at adolescent boys. My main concern is to explore how gender and sexuality are represented within the pages of these magazines and how such representations reflect and reinforce the values of the society in which they exist. I argue that these magazines construct gender stereotypes by promoting traditional models of masculine and feminine behavior. Furthermore, I argue that these magazines set heterosexuality the only 'authentic' form of sexual orientation and play an important role in introducing the readers to the world of consumerism. In that sense, I argue that *TAA* and *TOJ* are embedded into the global consumerist culture. The questions that lead me through my research are as follows: How are masculinity and femininity represented in *TAA* and *TOJ*? What are the values these magazines promote and support? In what way *TAA* and *TOJ* fit into the wider economic and socio-cultural context?

The reason I chose *TAA* and *TOJ* for analysis is their success as the most popular youth magazines among girls and boys in Macedonia with a monthly circulation of around 10 000 issues each. *TAA* was the first Macedonian youth magazine aimed at girls and ever since its inception in April 1995 it has been continuously published once a month. *TOJ*, on the other hand, appeared on the market in April 2004 as the male counterpart of *TAA*, but did not meet the

¹ The titles will appear in the original language

expected success, therefore it ceased to exist only recently i.e. in the year of 2011². Moreover, I believe that two magazines existing within the same publishing house and addressing boys and girls respectively is a fruitful source for analyzing gender and sexuality representations.

My thesis is divided in four chapters. In the first one I set the stage for my research, discussing its methodological and theoretical framework. At this point I also introduce some of the existing scholarship on the role of magazines, summing up what has been said on the topic and how my thesis is going to speak to the existing literature. In the second chapter I conduct a qualitative content analysis of the magazines, referring to the topics of romance and sex as my primary frame for reference. I examine each magazine and highlight the differences and similarities in the way these magazines discuss topics related to romance and sex. My aim in this chapter is to describe how gender and sexuality are represented within both magazines and how these representations speak to each other. This chapter also serves as a foundation for further analyses. In the third chapter I analyze how the representations of gender and sexuality in *TAA* and *TOJ* resonate with the dominant values of the Macedonian society. I argue that these magazines construct gender stereotypes by promoting normative feminine and masculine behaviors and positing compulsory heterosexuality. At this point, I also establish the link between these magazines and the national context, while in the forth chapter I focus on the relation of *TAA* and *TOJ* with the global context, arguing that these magazines are consumerist objects that push the readers into the world of consumerism. In the concluding chapter I sum up my major findings and discuss the limitations of my research thus suggesting how my research can be developed further.

² *TOJ*'s failure to succeed will be addressed at length in chapter 4

Chapter 1: The role of magazines in general

There is a wide body of scholarship in cultural studies and feminist media research concerning the role and the influence of magazines, some of which is of great relevance for my thesis. The fundamental debate in this field of research is concerned with the status of audience research versus textual analysis. At the heart of this debate is the question whether the readers are passive consumers of media messages or actively involved in the production of meaning. Authors such as Angela McRobbie, Janice Winship, Janice McCabe, Majorie Ferguson, have been primarily concerned with textual features of magazines in order to explore their underlying ideology and the their role in promoting gender stereotypes. Audience research, as conducted by Joke Herms and Dawn Currie, is a more recent approach in the field aimed at investigating how the audience interpret and experience in their real life the messages they receive. While my thesis is primarily concerned with textual features of the magazines, I still find all the studies conducted by the abovementioned authors relevant for my thesis since they reveal important insights into genre of female magazine.

McRobbie is best known for her semiological analysis of the British teen magazine *Jackie* in which she explores the power of patriarchal ideology, “an ideology which deals with the construction of teenage femininity” (McRobbie, 1977, p. 67). According to her, “each magazine [...] has its own conventions and its own style. But within these conventions and through them a concerted effort is nevertheless made to win and shape the consent of the readers to a particular set of value” (p.68). She also points out that it is of crucial importance for the magazine to find a target group and ascribe certain ideological meaning to it. For instance, *Jackie*, as a youth magazine targeting female readership, is primarily concerned with promoting

a feminine culture for its readers. In this feminine culture promoted by *Jackie*, “romantic individualism [is] the ethos *par excellence* of the teenage girl”, says McRobbie (p.114). She concludes that “as a vehicle for meanings [...], *Jackie*’s influence should not be underestimated” (p.115). Informed by her analysis, I will also analyze how *TAA* and *TOJ* as “powerful ideological forces” ascribe a particular set of values to their readers. In that sense, I will be looking at each magazine separately so as to see what these magazines find relevant to place before their male and female audience and in what way they construct feminine and masculine culture for their readers.

Similar study is conducted by Janice Winship (1987) who analyzes the changing profile of women and youth magazines throughout the years and argues that “magazines are very specifically associated with femininity and women’s [girl’s] culture” (p.5). She also acknowledges an ideological force presented in a form of a commonsense knowledge which “tend to render certain aspects of life as natural, sometimes as biologically natural, but also as just what seems normal or proper” (p.21). One such aspect is gender, which, as Winship points out, is profoundly influential in people’s experiences of growing up. She argues that these magazines offer help and hope for survival to their reader by giving practical advice and entertaining them simultaneously. Tracing the development of magazines in relation to the changing social position of women, Winship concludes that by the 1980’s women’s magazines are still not devoid of traditional representation of femininity besides the feminist attempts to discredit such stereotypes.

Both McRobbie and Winship arrive at similar conclusions concerning the stereotypical association of beauty, fashion, love and romance with the feminine persona, as well as the role of advisors magazines take when addressing their female readers, thus influencing and shaping the

way they think, act or feel in their day-to-day lives. Nevertheless, none of them asserts that readers are cultural dupes of the messages they receive from the magazines. What they both acknowledge is that magazines addressing females are constructing a feminine culture for their readers and both of them argue that such magazines are embedded in the experience of the consumerist culture. “Not only are they sold as commodities, but they also encourage further consumption and a powerful ideological force”, writes McRobbie (p.74). Similarly, I will also be looking at how readers are being encouraged to develop their potential as consumers.

Another scholar who analyses the role of youth magazines is Janice McCabe. She conducts a comparative content analysis of the health advice columns in “mainstream” teen magazines and “alternative” teen magazines arguing that the mainstream advice columns present norms and standards for the readers through their focus on medical authority, medical language, normality especially in regards to sexual issues, while the advice in the latter is less “medicalized”, thus advocating multiple explanations and multiple authorities. She also argues that “girls are cultural producers in addition to being consumers of health and medical knowledge” (McCabe, 2005, p. 154).

In a similar fashion, Marjorie Ferguson (1983) conducts a content analysis of the most widely read British magazines in order to explore their social influence, or more specifically, how these magazines create and maintain what she calls a ‘cult of femininity’. However, her approach differs in a way that she also looks at the editors, the publishing houses, the production routines and concludes that:

The editors of women’s magazines act as gate-keepers of the female world. They decide what will be placed before their followers and what not. They decide the when, if and how of any changes to the feminine agenda (p.188).

Both McCabe and Ferguson provide a relevant methodological framework for my thesis as I will also look at the content of both magazines so as to see what the editors of these magazines find relevant to place before their audience, whether boys or girls, and how the two versions differ in that respect. One drawback of such an approach is that it does not take into account the role of the audience as cultural producers who are also involved in shaping the content of magazines, since in order to be successful, there must be a devoted readership interested in buying these magazines; otherwise they would not exist on the market for such a long time.

While the abovementioned studies have been primarily concerned with underlying ideologies and gender constructions within magazine texts, hence are based on speculations, the experience of the audience has not been left uninvestigated. Audience research includes works by Joke Hermes and Dawn Currie who also conduct content analysis, in combination with ethnographic research so as to gain a more profound understanding of the role of magazines in real life. Hermes (1995) explores women's magazines through the eyes of their readers by interviewing a number of people who read magazines. Her aim is to examine how readers actually make sense of such media texts in their everyday existence and she finds that:

Women's magazines are a genre that helps pass empty time, that are easily put aside when other things need to be done and that sometimes offer stories or information that may strengthen the reader for a while (back cover).

Nevertheless, Hermes does not discredit textual analysis since she finds it useful for the overall cultural critique. Taking a similar approach, Dawn Currie (2001) employs content analysis and interviews in order to investigate young girls' development of gendered identities, as well as the status of youth magazines in this process. Her main concern is to determine how adolescent girls interpret the content of the magazines they read and how such magazines link girls' desires to cultural representation of femininity. She finds that girls enjoy reading advice columns the most,

as these give them useful advice which, according to her, reinforces what she calls the ‘teenzines’ of the readers. The result of her analysis suggest that “while it is certainly possible for readers to reject the constructions offered by commercial texts, no matter how incredulous it may seem to cultural critics, magazine constructions were accorded truth value by many girls in this study” (p.277). Moreover, she argues that magazines are venues of female pleasure and resistance and encourage the consumption of consumerist goods.

The genre of male magazines seems to be quite different from their female counterparts and settle either for entertainment or information, notes Winship (p.13). McRobbie also observes that there are no male equivalents to female magazines:

Male magazines tend to be based on particular leisure pursuits or hobbies, motorcycling, fishing, cars or even pornography. There is no consistent attempt to link interests with age, nor is there a sense of natural or inevitable progression from one to another complementary to the life-cycle (p.69).

While the genre of male magazines has not been as explored as that of female magazines, there are some important studies worth mentioning. For instance Maddy Coy and Miranda AH Horvath (2010) analyze British lifestyle magazines aimed at young men in order to explore the implications of these magazines towards women and sexual aggression. They argue that such magazines “serve as a powerful tool in the mainstreaming of sexist images and ideals [...] that affect readers’ perceptions of, and attitudes towards, women, sex and sexuality” (p.145). They also argue that these magazines strongly resemble pornography in terms of representing women as sexual objects; however, they also point out that, due to their mainstream position nowadays, such magazines may have different implications for their readers.

Leremie D. Taylor (2005) also notices the prominence of articles concerning sex while analyzing American lifestyle magazines aimed at young male readership. He conducts a content analysis in order to explore what are boys taught about sex for such magazines are fruitful sources where young men can get informed about that particular issue. The most common topics about sex, as he observes, include sexual skills and techniques, reproductive issues, sexual health, even strategies for manipulating women to obtain sexual compliance. He concludes that male readers are taught “what women want how to improve [their] sex life and unorthodox sexual positions and behaviors” (p.161). Moreover, he points out that the articles concerning ‘what women want’ are in fact teaching young men the way to grant a reward for themselves. In that sense, he speculates that such portrayals “may function to activate stereotypes about women as sex objects” (p.162). A year later (2006), Taylor conducts another research, only this time he looks at the other side, i.e. the readers so as to explore what the actual impact of reading such magazines is. Surveying a number of college undergraduate men who read these magazines Taylor concludes that there is no relationship between reading magazines and endorsement of intolerant sexual attitudes.

Informed by Taylor’s first research I will also look at the sexual content of *TAA* and *TOJ* so as to see what boys and girls are being taught about sex and how their roles are represented in relation to each other when discussing sexual issues. His second study emphasizes the importance of conducting a two-sided research if one wants to gain a full and profound understanding of not only what is being promoted but also with what effect. However, taking into consideration that my thesis aims at exploring how the representations of gender and sexuality in *TAA* and *TOJ* reflect and reinforce the values of the society in which they exist, I find textual (content) analysis to be sufficient for such a purpose. Similar research is conducted

by Kirsten Wisneski (2007) who examines the role of male magazines in the construction of hegemonic masculinity. She explores how masculinity is represented in the US leading magazine *Maxim* aimed at male readership in order to find out “what story does *Maxim* tell about masculinity” (p.1). Driven thematically by the categories of humor, male bonding and gender relations, she conducts a textual analysis of a year’s worth of *Maxim* issues and concludes that “*Maxim* works to reinforce a rather homogenous and unified masculine identity constructed in relation to – in contrast to – femininity, homosexuality and metrosexuality” (p. 121). Just as the female magazines, *Maxim* also assumes gender and sexuality to be natural/biological categories and its ultimate goal is to be sold and to push its reader into the world of consumerism. Furthermore, she notes that *Maxim* rejects unmasculine traits and non-masculine males, but it offers hope to ‘marginalized’ or ‘failed’ men to achieve real masculinity through competence, heterosexual success and dominance.

All of the abovementioned works reveal relevant tendencies concerning the issue of gender construction and consumerism promotion within magazines that are produced in either British or American context, yet, no such research has been conducted in the Macedonian context so far. Besides looking at how *TAA* and *TOJ* construct gender stereotypes, set heterosexuality as the norm and promote consumerism along the way, I will also seek to explore how these magazines are connected with the Macedonian society. To explain that relationship, I will mainly rely on media theories. Mass media is seen as part of the current social and economic system; hence it contributes to the maintenance of that system. Such contribution is not only found in advertizing sponsor’s goods, but rather in various cultural productions, including magazines, and it serves to confirm the present structure of the society thus leading towards conformism (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 2000, pp. 19, 20). Looking at the content of the magazines I

will analyze what are the values these magazines promote and support and how they resonate with the dominant values of the Macedonian society. I do not suggest that there is something exceptionally different about Macedonian magazines nor do I aim to compare in what way *TAA* and *TOJ* are different from British and American youth magazines, but rather to find out how these magazines, as powerful ideological tools, construct gendered worlds of ideal readers and consumers and how they fit the global consumerist culture. In an ideal case, I would also explore the influence *TAA* and *TOJ* have on their readers, so as to see whether they are truly influential. However, due to time and space constraints, I will focus on textual analysis and investigate what these magazines reveal about the contemporary Macedonian society, or more specifically, Macedonia as a country in transition striving towards certain European standards. In that sense, I also seek to explore the disappearance of the *TOJ* in relation to the wider socio-cultural and economic context.

Chapter 2: Content analyses of TAA and TOJ

2.1 The Method

In order to explore how gender and sexuality are represented within the pages of *TAA* and *TOJ* I am using the method of qualitative content analysis. This method deals with “subjective interpretation of the content of text data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1278). What makes this method suitable for my research is that it does not deal with counts and statistical significance; “instead it uncovers patterns, themes, and categories important to social reality” (Zhang & Wildemuth, p.5). Moreover this method has often been used for “raising the profile of questions about gender representation in the media, and documenting the narrow and restrictive range of stereotypes used to depict women and men” (Gill, 2007, p.44). Another important advantage of this method for my research is that, besides being useful for analyzing gender representation, it is helpful for making inferences about the editors, the readers and even the culture and time in which they are produced (Berelson, 1996, p. 204).

2.2 The Sample

The magazines included for analysis are collected from the years of 2004, 2007, 2010 and 2011. The reason for choosing these years is twofold. First, as already mentioned, *TOJ* appeared on the market in 2004 for the first time and disappeared in 2011, hence the choice of these two years. Second, I have chosen to include issues from 2007 so as to trace any possible changes in the content of the magazines throughout the years, as well as 2010 since those were one of the most recent issues of *TOJ* that I could obtain, considering that it did not survive the whole of 2011. The magazines have been collected from various sources including the national library of Skopje, the editors’ office as well as issues I personally possess. The units for analysis consist of articles and advice columns about topics related to romance and sex as my primary frame of

reference. Besides these two topics, *TAA* also writes about latest fashion trends, celebrity gossip, beauty tricks and horoscopes whereas *TOJ* writes about technology innovations, sports, cars, scientific facts and places in the world. For the purpose of my analysis, I will rely on the topics related to romance and sex since these are the most dominant ones in both magazines. Moreover, as commonly represented within various cultural productions, romance and sex always assume two individuals who are the ideal feminine and masculine types and are based on a heterosexual coupling which is another reason why topic related to romance and sex are important to me when analyzing how gender roles are represented and sexuality is depicted within *TAA* and *TOJ*.

2.3 The Procedure

I started the procedure by scanning all the magazines in their entirety and collecting those materials that discuss topics related to romance and sex. After collecting the units for analysis, the next step was to select a set of coding categories. Since “this process uses inductive reasoning, by which categories emerge from the data through researcher’s careful examination and constant comparison” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p.2), I scanned the materials again making a list of the most dominant topics that appear in each version. Based on the identified topics I generated a set of categories and coded the materials into the appropriate category. While doing so, I noticed that some of the materials are applicable to more than one category which is permissible with this type of content analysis (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009, p.4). After collecting the coded material, I made a selection of those materials which I found most suitable for analyzing gender and sexuality representations, thus making sure that the materials for analysis cover each year evenly. Sample titles of coded articles appear in Table I and II. The coding rules of each category, as I defined them, appear below:

- **Being in love**

Definition: Feeling a strong and powerful affection for another person.

Coding rule: Material discussing definitions of love, importance of love, power of love, beauty of love, types of love and phases of being in love.

- **Being single**

Definition: Not being in a relationship.

Coding rule: Material discussing the advantages and disadvantages of being single and places, periods and tips for meeting potential partners.

- **Dating**

Definition: The act of engaging in a social activity with someone as a couple or potential couple.

Coding rule: Materials discussing the first date, best places for having a date, appropriate looks, manners, topics, behavior for a date.

- **Being in a relationship**

Definition: Not being single.

Coding rule: Materials discussing good/bad relationships, keeping the boyfriend/girlfriend, individuality, supporting and romance in a relationship.

- **Cheating**

Definition: Not being faithful to the partner.

Coding rule: Materials describing the seriousness and consequences of cheating and forgiving.

- **Sexuality**

Definition: sexual identity and behavior.

Coding rule: Materials discussing male and female sexuality and 'not normal' sexual behavior.

- **Being sexually active**

Definition: engaging in a sexual intercourse with someone.

Coding rule: materials discussing sex in a relationship, sex with many partners, amount of sex, quality of sex, getting sexual pleasure, improving sexual performance.

- **Having safe sex**

Definition: being engaged in a sexual activity with precautions.

Coding rule: materials discussing contraception and consequences of having unprotected sex.

Table I: Sample titles of articles from TAA³

2004	<i>“At the beginning of a relationship...”</i> <i>“Fake excuses”</i> <i>“Shy girls are sexy”</i>
2007	<i>“It’s time for another summer romance”</i> <i>“Transforming love”</i> <i>“How much do you know about sex?”</i>
2010/2011	<i>“Love on the prom night”</i> <i>“Did you finally decide to do it?”</i> <i>“Do you know everything there is to know about virginity?”</i>

Table II Sample titles of articles from TOJ

2004	<i>“The importance of keeping the magic in the relationship”</i> <i>“Are you unfaithful”</i> <i>“What turns you on?”</i>
2007	<i>“In a cheating adventure”</i> <i>“How to enjoy love to the maximum?”</i> <i>“The master of foreplay”</i>
2010/2011	<i>“Accept her habits (or pretend to be accepting)”</i> <i>“When is she in the mood for sex?”</i> <i>“Do you want her to please you?”</i>

³ The material for analysis is translated by the author of the thesis

2.4 The Results

The results indicated that most of the categories I devised appear in both magazines yet in varying degrees and context. I noticed that *TAA* most frequently mentions topics related to romance, while *TOJ* favors the topics related to sex. I also noticed that the topics related to romance and sex are far less present in *TOJ* in the last year of its existence when compared to the other two years chosen for analysis, whereas *TAA* still abounds in such topics.

2.4.1 *Being in love*

While both magazines write on the topic of being in love, the way they discuss it and the amount of material fitting this category differs, with *TAA* writing on the topic more frequently than *TOJ* does. Articles concerning the importance of being in love recur each year in *TAA* describing love as “the most important thing in the world” (November, 2004), “an opium that makes you addicted” (January, 2004) , the transforming power of love that makes one feel prettier, happier and full of self-confidence (May, 2007) or even the beauty of unrequited love (June, 2010). According to *TAA* “there is no girl who does not dream of a fairytale love” and claims that “this is because of the famous “happy end ... and... they lived happily ever after...” (November, 2004). It seems that *TOJ* has a similar view since it writes that “love and all that comes with it are the priorities of every girl’s life” (April, 2004) and posits that “they all look for love, perfect relationship in which they will love and be loved unconditionally” (February, 2007). For boys, as *TOJ* writes, “love is an erection and ejaculation, not a choice and self sacrifice” (February 2004), hence “[their] minds are blank when it comes to love” (February, 2007). However, *TOJ* does not portray boys as devoid from being in love. This is evident in an article entitled *All for love* in which the author writes:

I don't say that the feeling of being in love and having butterflies in your stomach whenever you see your beloved is not a nice feeling. ... I know that it is nice to fall in love at least once in your life, but make sure that you do not lose your head and pay the price for it for the rest of your life. (February, 2007)

In addition to articles discussing romantic love, there are pages dedicated to love poems, love letters, true love stories and quizzes which *TAA* has in abundance while such materials are absent from *TOJ*.

2.4.2 Being single

The amount of material discussing the status of being single appears in more or less the same amount in both magazines; however I noticed that the way they write on the topic differs a great deal. For instance, in an article entitled *Be happy without a boyfriend*, *TAA* writes that being single is not something to despair about. This article offers a list of all the advantages of being single such as starting a hobby, spending time with friends, reading, studying and so forth. Yet, in the closing sentence *TAA* asserts: "Enjoy your freedom. There must be another boy waiting for the right moment to approach you" (May, 2011). The same topic appears in an article from the August issue of 2007 in which *TAA* writes: "You don't have a boyfriend?! You are also member of the "lonely hearts" club? So what? First of all, you are not the only one, and second, that can be changed very easily. Follow *TAA*'s advice". Similarly, in the January issue of 2004, *TAA* encourages the single girl to go outside, take a walk or go partying because she never knows who she may bump into. When writing on the topic *TOJ* encourages the boys to enjoy being single rather than "being stuck up in relationship which is not likely to succeed" (November, 2007). However, unlike girls, boys are not advised to find a girlfriend, but rather find as many girls as possible. They are told that being single is so much better since "once [they] get tired from one girl, she can easily be replaced with another" (November, 2007). However, they are advised that, first of all, they should use all their energy on themselves so as to become

successful businessmen and make lots of money thus attracting even more girls. After experiencing many girls, they can choose the one they like the most (November, 2007). I also noticed that both magazines advise their single readers where and when it is likely to meet someone; however, I noticed that *TAA* does that more frequently than *TOJ*. According to *TAA* girls are likely to meet someone on every corner at any period of the year. One potential place is the school. In an article entitled *School Romance* *TAA* writes:

Did you know that you need no special place to be romantic? Romance can happen everywhere at any time. Yes, even at school. *TAA* will share with you several tricks about how to approach him, step by step, and make a real school romance happen (February, 2007).

Similar articles appear every season emphasizing how perfect that particular period is for a “romantic bliss”. For instance, the July issue in 2007 points out that “the summer brings something very exiting... a summer romance. That is something that simply cannot be missed”. A month later, *TAA* reminds the girl that she cannot miss having a summer romance and tells her where the cute boys are to be found and how to approach them. This articles states:

The cute boys are everywhere around you, especially in the summer. *TAA* knows that there is nothing worse than seeing that boy you like walking away from you just because you were too shy to talk to him. That’s why *TAA* is here to offer you several solutions about how to start a conversation with the cute boys this summer. Come on, girl, it’s high time to start flirting (August, 2007).

Three years later, the girl is told again that “[t]here are cute boys on every corner. You can find them everywhere, especially in the summertime” (June, 2010). In wintertime, the beginning of the new year seems to be the perfect time to let go of the past and start fresh i.e. find a new boyfriend and the New Year’s Eve is the ideal moment for accomplishing such a project. In the December issue of 2004, *TAA* instructs the girl how to choose the perfect outfit and do her hair and makeup according to what boys usually prefer, since “[her] mission is to kiss that cute boy before the party is over”. The same year *TOJ* also writes that the New Year’s Eve is perfect for

“hunting”. In the introduction of the article entitled *The hero of The New Year’s Eve TOJ* offers the following advice:

The night is not long. That is why you have to act fast and be efficient. The most important thing is that you have a strategy prepared beforehand so as to make sure that nothing comes as a surprise (December, 2004).

Another perfect event for coupling as it appears throughout the years in *TAA* is the prom night. Each month of May the girl is instructed how to get the “irresistible look” since “the prom is the right (and high) time to ask that cute boy from the other class if he would be [her] partner”, which can later grow into a true romance (May, 2010). It seems that spring is also ideal time for romance especially for curing love wounds. In April 2010, *TAA* gives hope to the girl that “maybe even today, on such a beautiful spring day [she] will meet some boy and feel the butterflies flying in her stomach”.

2.4.3 Dating

Materials discussing dating occur frequently in both magazines in similar amount. *TOJ* most often writes about what the best places for a date are and how to behave during and after the date (January, 2004). The boy is also told that he must be the one to pay the whole bill on the first date because the girl will have a very low opinion if he agrees to split the bill as much as she insists (January, 2004). For that purpose *TOJ* offers useful advice such as how to fascinate the girl “without spending a fortune” (April, 2007). Articles discussing the first date recur each year in *TAA* advising the girl “how to survive the first date” (May, 2007) or what the appropriate topics for the first date are (January, 2007). Articles as these tell the girl what to wear, how to behave and what to talk about. She is told that the boy is the one that should choose the place and he is the first one to call after the date (March, 2011).

2.4.4 Being in a relationship

The topic of being in a relationship occurs in both magazines in similar amounts. There are many articles throughout the years in which *TAA* offers advice such as what makes a “healthy relationship”. In the introduction of an article entitled *A cute recipe for a healthy relationship*, *TAA* writes:

Did you find the prince on the white horse and fascinated him with your irresistible charm? Now you wish that this grows in a beautiful relationship? [...] Don’t you know that there is a recipe for “they lived happily ever after”, a recipe for a fairytale love? (December, 2007).

In the rest of the article *TAA* reveals the secret ingredients of what makes a healthy relationship which include knowing, trusting, supporting, fidelity and intimacy (December, 2007). As it appears in *TAA*, the healthy relationship is the one that resembles a fairytale love story and holds that “there is no girl who does not dream of a fairytale love” (November, 2004). However, as the magazine points out, the girl cannot get that served on a silver platter. Therefore, *TAA* advises the girl to take the heroines of the most popular fairytales as her role models because “each one of them got her prince and a fairytale love, so why not [her]?” (November, 2004). Moreover, being in a relationship, according to *TAA* also requires buying romantic presents, respecting his individuality and refraining from arguments because it is not ladylike to argue. In a huge article entitled *Be his perfect girlfriend*, *TAA* explains:

If you behave like a male, argue all the time and have nothing delicate about you, you are hopeless. You are lucky if he is still with you [...] Put yourself together and start behaving like a girl. Be gentle and cheerful and do not argue with him” (October, 2010).

Similar advice appears in the January issue of 2007 in which *TAA* writes: “Do not argue with him and do not let him get mad with you. He must think you are the perfect girl”. Moreover, the perfect girlfriend should never try to change him but rather accept him for who he is and enjoy

(October, 2010). *TOJ*, on the other hand, assures the reader that “when she falls in love she will change by herself, no need to worry for that” (December, 2007). However, *TOJ* warns the reader to keep his male individuality even if he is pretty sure she is “the one”. According to the magazine there is a difference between “the one” and the “the one who’s always right” portraying the latter as the “biggest mistake of [his] life”, while “the one” as a “trophy he gets after experiencing many” (November, 2007). *TOJ* also offers myriad of articles for those who have found “the one” and are willing to keep her. One such article says that boys should “try to accept and understand her habits (or at least pretend to be understanding)” (December, 2007). However, *TOJ*’s ultimate advice that recurs throughout the years is that everything can be solved with romance since girls are romantic by nature (February, 2007). They are told that “with a permanent girlfriend buying flowers, jewelry every now and then is inevitable” (November, 2007) since for their girlfriends receiving presents “is the same as saying I love you” (December, 2007). They are also advised to buy a present when meeting her parents and most importantly, buying something she really likes such as flower, perfume or book can help fixing a mistake they have made (June, 2004).

2.4.5 Cheating

While cheating is seldom discussed in *TAA*, *TOJ* seems to be very fond of the topic. The boy is told that it is not a big deal if he cheats on his girlfriend since she can easily be replaced with another (November, 2007). Moreover, the magazine holds that cheating is something only males can do. This is clearly stated in an article entitled *Why are we not able to resist other girls* in which *TOJ* explains that males are privileged in that respect due to the possibility to be with as many partners as they wish as compared to females who would get an etiquette that no one desires to have (February, 2004). However, the reader is advised to be careful because “females

are not as stupid” and “they can sense cheating” (June, 2007). Yet, as *TOJ* explains, “cheating can be forgiven even though girls say that it is unforgivable if their boyfriends lie or cheat. However, their actions speak more than words. So they often forgive them for their mistakes” (September 2004). *TAA* seems to agree with this statement if taken into consideration the answer given to a girl who asks for an advice if she should forgive her boyfriend for being unfaithful. *TAA*’s advice is as follows:

The most common reason for such a behavior in boys is their fear from a serious relationship. If he insists to talk to you about this problem and promises you that it will never happen again and if you can feel that he is being honest, than give him another chance. But if he cheats on you again, you should leave him for good (December, 2007).

In another instance when a girl asks for an advice whether to tell her boyfriend that she kissed someone else, *TAA* responds: “If you tell the truth to your boyfriend, your relationship will end immediately since he will never forgive you for what you have done” (September, 2007). *TAA* openly tells the girl that “he lies if he tells you that he will never cheat on you” (March, 2004) but does not say that cheating is unforgivable.

2.4.6 Sexuality

When discussing sexuality both magazines make a difference between male and female sexuality. *TOJ* explains that “males are more interested in having good sex while females prefer romance” or when it comes to sex “females need reason while males only need location” (April, 2004). In another instance *TOJ* writes that “males for fall pornography, underwear, dirty talk, kinky stuff and the phenomenon of here and now [while] females fall for romance, fidelity, intimacy, emotions, kissing” (February, 2007). The magazine tells the reader that males have bigger sexual appetites than females, who are handicapped in that respect. The same article explains where “his best friend” i.e. the testosterone is stored and how bigger it is in comparison

to females so as to explain why males have a stronger desire for sex (February, 2007). Boys are also taught about female sexuality. In an article entitled *Everything you need to know about female sexuality* the author explains that female sexuality is directly connected with emotions (November, 2004). Apparently TAA also acknowledges the raging sexual needs of boys since it tells the girl that “he lies if tells you he does not want sex without love” or “if he tells you that he does not care about sex as much” (March, 2004). According to TAA “guys feel physical need that needs to be satisfied, whereas with girls there are emotions involved” (January, 2007). Similar statement is made in an article entitled *Is it love or passion* in which TAA explains that “passion is the need for making love and having an intimate contact with the boy that attracts you” while love as “a deep feeling that makes you feel strong connection to a boy”. However, as TAA explains, even though love and passion have different definitions, in reality it often happens that one is not sure which one they feel. “The confusion occurs because these two feelings are not mutually exclusive” (June, 2007). As for alternative sexualities, one of the very few occasions when this issue is insinuated is when a girl seeks an advice concerning her emotional attachment for her best female friend. The girl openly says: “I cannot stand boys anymore, I only want HER. Please help me”, on which TAA responds:

Probably some boy has really disappointed you or you have never been intimate with a boy [...] If you spend a lot of time with your pet, even though it is an animal you will grow to love it. Therefore, do not rush any decisions. Maybe you only love her as a friend. If you really think there is something unusual about your relationship, try thinking twice whether you should tell how you feel about her in an intimate sense. It is better if you think that you love her only because she is good to you. Be sure that you will not be accepted by your environment [...] It is not probable that your relationship will be accepted by your parents and friends (May, 2004).

In another instance a girl seeks *TAA*'s advice whether to break up with her boyfriend for she does not like kissing him. The girl the does not say that she has never kissed before, but rather explicitly says that she does not like kissing the boy on which *TAA* responds:

Many girls who haven't kissed a boy before have the same problem with the first kiss. The strong wish to kiss for the first time is sort of an obstacle that does not let you relax and do what is expected from you. Every time it is about to happen, you panic and you block. This is completely normal (October, 2004).

The only occasion I came across an article that mentions 'alternative' sexuality in *TOJ* is when an anonymous author explains that he does not mind if his girlfriend has a male gay friends but he claims that he would not tolerate if his girlfriend and the gay friend give each other love advice. As he puts it "it is a fact that he cannot be her best friend who advices her how to behave with boys. Some things are absolutely unacceptable" (December, 2007). Moreover, according to *TOJ*, not to feel sexually aroused around girls is simply not normal (March, 2007).

2.4.7 Being sexually active

Materials fitting this category are the most prevalent ones in *TOJ*. There are many articles throughout the years discussing various sexual techniques explaining the reader what it takes to be the master of foreplay (October, 2007), how to prolong the sexual pleasure (January, 2004) or how to maintain the dominance in the bed (February, 2007). There are also many articles that instruct the reader how to satisfy the girl but usually such articles end up with instructing the boy how to earn sexual pleasure for himself. For instance, in an article entitled *Do you want her to please you?* *TOJ* writes:

Sex is not a novel to you. But it can be if you start discovering the undiscovered. You better try. Otherwise she will think that as long as she touches your penis you are fully satisfied. But you want something more, right? (January, 2004).

TAA also mentions various types of sexual expressions. The magazine tells the girl that “sex is much more than just penis entering the vagina; there are other sexual activities such as oral and anal sex, masturbation, petting” (October, 2010). However, *TAA* warns the girl that it is of utmost importance not to rush anything and to have into consideration her religion, her moral standards and the fact that she cannot predict for how long she will be with her boyfriend before deciding to experience any of those activities. (October, 2010). Throughout the years *TAA* tells the girl that sex is an important aspect of the relationship and if she is determined to lose her virginity, she should be sure that he is “the one” (January, 2007), since with “the one” it will come naturally (January, 2004). Moreover, the magazine tells the girl that enjoyment during the sexual intercourse depends on how well the partners know each other (July, 2007). In another instance *TAA* writes that “the longer the relationship is, the better the sex gets (December, 2007). The magazine also posits that sex in a relationship is more meaningful for the girl:

It is of big importance that the boy and the girl are in a relationship. If they know each other for a short time, sex can be only physical satisfaction. But if they are in a longer relationship and they love each other, the sex is more meaningful (especially for the girl). (January, 2007)

In a more recent issue *TAA* tells the girl that “when the time comes and the caring, sweet boy who truly loves you appears, then you can start thinking about getting sexually active with him (May, 2011). *TOJ*, on the other hand, tells the boys that a girl to have sex with can be found on every corner (November, 2007). Boys are encouraged to change as many partners as possible instead of being stuck with the same partner since the more they find, the more experience they get (November, 2007). If in a relationship, they are told that one of the key factors is her high libido because it is very important to remain sexually active with a permanent girlfriend and they are advised to experiment in longer relationships so as not to get easily bored (January, 2007).

One similarity when discussing sex is that both magazines tell the readers how to transform the shy girl into sexy. In the January issue of 2007 *TOJ* instructs the boy how to train the girl to start initiating sex by saying that “it takes and a little patience to turn even the shyest girl into a sex initiator [...] All you should so is manipulate her in a subtle way” (January, 2007). In an article entitled *Shy girls want to be sexy* *TAA* tells the girl that: “A little shyness shows that you are cute and sensitive which is something all boys look for in a girl [...] Shyness is sexy as long as it is not extreme. *TAA* will explain to you how to flirt, kiss and talk about sex” (August, 2004). Nevertheless, *TAA* never instructs the girl how to do any of the sexual activities mentioned above.

2.4.8 Having safe sex

The topic of having safe sex seems to be *TAA*’s favorite sexual topic, whereas *TOJ* completely disregards it. There are many articles recurring throughout the years in which *TAA* warns the girl how manipulative boys can be when it comes to using condoms and it offers useful advice such as how to recognize the fake excuses boys make for having unprotected sex (October, 2004) or that she should not trust him even if he promises to be careful while making love (March, 2004). While *TAA* does not deny that sex is an important aspect of girls’ lives, many a times it warns the girls of the possible consequences. The most dangerous consequences, as it appears in *TAA*, are unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, thus maintaining that “in a sexual intercourse protection is a must” (October, 2004). The importance *TAA* assigns to protected sex is evident in a response given to a girl who asks for an advice if she should have sex with her boyfriend who does not like wearing a condom on which *TAA* responds:

NO! NO! Do not ever believe him. It is of crucial importance to use condom because it is the ONLY way to protect yourself from sexually transmitted diseases (such as AIDS) and from pregnancy [...] It is much better to have protected sex than catch a disease or be a teen parent (September, 2004).

In a more recent issue *TAA* writes:

The sexual intercourse is not just a physical and emotional need, but also a reproductive process which can cause pregnancy. Only one sexual intercourse can cause many complications especially if you do it with the wrong person. The unwanted pregnancy or the sexually transmitted diseases are not the worst things that can happen. There can be physical consequences or even worse a psychological trauma which sometimes stays with the girl for a lifetime (May, 2011).

TAA also advises the girl to have a conversation with her boyfriend about using condoms before getting sexually active with him so as to protect herself from the possible consequences, or simply to buy the condoms herself since “there is nothing embarrassing about buying condoms” (May, 2004).

2.5 Discussion

My aim in this chapter was to provide sufficient description of the content of *TAA* and *TOJ* that will serve as a foundation for further research. For that purpose I conducted a qualitative content analysis, as this method is appropriate for identifying important themes and patterns within a body of content as well as providing rich description of the social reality created by those themes and patterns (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p.11). The samples for analysis consisted of articles and advice columns discussing romance and sex as I find these suitable enough to answer my research questions, while the coding categories emerged from the samples selected for analysis. I compared the coded materials so as to see how each topic is discussed in each magazine depending on the readership they address. As the result indicated, topics related to love are the most numerable ones in *TAA*, while *TOJ* abounds in topics related

to sex. Even though the way *TAA* and *TOJ* magazines discuss these topics differs, I noticed that both magazines have similar views. For instance both *TAA* and *TOJ* associate love with girls, while sex with boys. Also, they both hold that love and sex come in pair when there is a girl in question while for boys sex is just a physical need. When discussing relationships, *TAA* tells the girl that she should change something about herself, while not trying to change the boyfriend, whereas the boy is told that the girl will change. As for cheating, both magazines have the same explanation why would boys cheat, whereas both hold that for girls it is not permissible to do so. When it comes to being single, *TAA* encourages the girl to find a boyfriend whereas *TOJ* encourages the boy to find as many girls as possible, mostly for satisfying his sexual urges. In *TAA*, on the other hand, the girl is told that she should be sexually active only in a relationship and have a protected sex, while that is not expected from the boy. The descriptions that emerged in this chapter have set the stage for further discussion concerning the role of these magazines in constructing gender stereotypes and promoting consumerism which will be elaborated in the following two chapters.

Chapter 3: Situating TAA and TOJ in the national context

Drawing on the results of the qualitative content analysis from the previous chapter, I will now move on to critically analyze how gender and sexuality, as represented in *TAA* and *TOJ* reflect and reinforce the values of the society in which they exist. I will argue that these magazines construct gender stereotypes, equating gender with sex thus promoting traditional models of masculine and feminine behavior to boys and girls respectively. I will also argue that *TAA* and *TOJ* set heterosexuality as the norm and the only ‘authentic’ form of sexuality, not acknowledging other forms of sexual orientation. In order to relate the representations of gender and sexuality in *TAA* and *TOJ* with the broader social context, I will rely on the cultural study approach. According to this approach “we are born into pools of pre-constituted meanings and internalize these as we are socialized and learn to communicate” (Louw, 2001, p.2). More specifically,

These communicative pools are coding styles or circulation patterns that have taken on identifiable forms which we call societies and culture... As each of us internalizes the particular meaning-style that surrounds us, we are constituted as human beings and as members of various social groups/cultures. These meanings are resources that we use to generate our personas, to negotiate with each other and to position ourselves within a social milieu. But we also help to re-make these shared meanings as we proceed through life (Louw, 2001, p. 2,3).

Relying on this approach I will first focus on the representation of gender within the pages of *TAA* and *TOJ* so as to analyze what is the story these magazines are telling about

masculinity and femininity and indicate how such representations relate to the dominant gender regime of the Macedonian society. Then, I will analyze how sexuality, as depicted by these magazines, resonates with the dominant attitude towards sexuality within the Macedonian society. These initial steps will serve to identify the existing framework within which the production process takes place and will serve to “uncover the pre-existing stock of meanings employed by media producers” (Louw, 2001, p.14).

According to Judith Butler “there is no proper gender, a gender proper to one sex, rather than another [but] sex’s cultural property” (Butler, 2004, p.127). In that sense, behavior associated with a particular gender is learned rather than innate and gender differences which in certain social situations are perceived as a ‘natural’ are in fact products of cultural distinctions. This also means that the meanings given to masculinity and femininity should be examined as a set of social expectations, constructed and maintained in a particular society (Craig, 1992, p.2). As social institutions, magazines take part in constructing and maintaining meanings given to femininity and masculinity. As McRobbie argues “the work of this branch of media involves framing the world for its readers and through variety of techniques endowing with importance those topics chosen for inclusion” (p.68). However, when deciding on the topics, the editors do not simply come up with the what, when and how, as Ferguson argues, but rather, their decisions are influenced by the social context surrounding them. Put in another way:

The production structures originate the discourse but they do not constitute a closed system; “[t]hey draw topics, treatments, agendas, events, personnel, images of the audience, ‘definitions of the situation’ from other sources and other discursive formations within the wider socio-cultural and political structure of which they are a differentiated part” (Hall, 2003, p.53).

Looking at *TAA* and *TOJ* from this perspective, it follows that in the broader social structures in which these magazines exist, boys and girls are perceived as utterly distinct and separate. This disparity is apparent from the very first glance at these magazines. Already their names suggest that it is either the girl or the boy, the *HE* or the *SHE* to whom they speak. The fact that they exist as separate journals seems to rest on the assumptions that boys and girls cannot be addressed as one group, hence the need for two separate magazines. These two magazines serve to represent two separate worlds of boys and girls, thus normalizing gender difference. As segregated groups, it follows that their interests and preferences are gendered; therefore what is included in the content of these two magazines differs depending on the gender in question.

According to McRobbie (1977), when portraying the readers as groupings as if they all share the same interests, magazines obscure any possible differences among the readers, thus asserting a false unity which assumes a common experience of girlhood and boyhood (p.69). Such stereotypical portrayals serve to reinforce a general agreement of what boys and girls should be like. As Dyer (2003) puts it “stereotypes proclaim ‘This is what everyone – you, me and us – thinks members of such-and-such a social group are like’” (p.248). By his logic, the stereotypes constructed by *TAA* and *TOJ* proclaim that the way they represent boys and girls is what everyone thinks boys and girls are like. To support my argument that *TAA* and *TOJ* promote gender stereotypes, I will analyze what are the particular patterns of masculine and feminine behavior these magazines prescribe to boys and girls respectively. Providing that “the meaning of masculinity and femininity is neither predetermined nor hidden from view, rather it is out there in society, because it is of society (Barthel, 1992, p.153), I will also argue that what is represented as proper femininity and masculinity in both magazines is an effect of the gender

regime of the Macedonian society. But first, I will give a brief insight into the gender regime of the Republic of Macedonia.

As a post-socialist country, Macedonia is continuously making an effort to reach certain European standards on the road to European integration. Since its independence in 1991, significant progress has been achieved, yet the issue of gender equality in Macedonia has remained a highly problematic one. Even though under the Constitution and before the law citizens are equal in their rights, irrespective of their gender, and the principle of non-discrimination is also incorporated into domestic legislation, men and women in Macedonia do not receive the same treatment.⁴ A recent study on the economic activity of Macedonian citizens during the transitional period indicate that there are inequalities on gender grounds which “condition women’s economic independence and consequently affect the exercise of their full citizen rights in the sphere of civil and political activities and render them more vulnerable in the power relations that are created within the family” (Stojanoska, 2006, p.162). The same study suggests that there is a shared patriarchal matrix of behavior and understanding among Macedonian citizens which reflects the discriminative correlation of certain types of work with sexuality based traits of masculinity and femininity especially within certain minority groups (p.183). According to a more recent study only 11% of women in Macedonia receive a wage higher than the average, 5% own a house or an apartment and less than 4% of employed women are entrepreneurs (Damjanoska, 2012). Moreover, women from minority groups and those living in the rural areas face much bigger difficulties concerning their economic independency in comparison to women living in the urban areas. The numbers and facts mentioned above suggest that the status of women as inferiors in relation to men is a serious problem in the country.

⁴ For further information <http://www.iwraw-ap.org/resources/pdf/SummaryRec%20Macedonia1.pdf>

At this point I will return to the results of the content analysis so as to see how and to what extent are the stereotypes of inferior female and dominant male reflected within the pages of *TAA* and *TOJ*. Looking from a comparative perspective at what is placed before their audience, it emerges that boys are considered much more serious and future-oriented than girls if taken into consideration their presumed interests which apart from sex, include science, technology, various hobbies and travelling, while girls are portrayed as interested in trivial things such as love, beauty, fashion, celebrities and what is written in the stars for that month. Since my analysis was focused on the topics of romance and sex as the most dominant and rich ones, I will now explain how the roles of boys and girls are depicted in relation to these two issues. As the results indicated, there is a shared agreement between *TAA* and *TOJ* that romance is, to use McRobbie's words "the ethos *par excellence* of the teenage girl" (p.114), while sex is "the ethos *par excellence*" of the teenage boy. The portrayal of girls suggests that for them being single is synonymous with being unhappy since throughout the years *TAA* repeatedly instructs girl how to find a boyfriend or how to keep one if the girl has already got him. The discourse of being single in *TOJ* takes a notably different shape. Namely, the single boy is advised that he needs girls only occasionally i.e. to satisfy his physical needs, however he is encouraged to focus on his career development so as to become rich and attract even more girls. Such a portrayal suggests that boys are considered serious and mature enough to be advised about their future career, while girls are portrayed as dependent on boys for self-fulfillment, hence their goals do not concern future career nor money-making but rather future boyfriends and relationships. When discussing relationships, both magazines hold the same view concerning the role of the boy and the girl in the relationship. There is a mutual agreement that the masculine individuality in the relationship is something to be respected, while no such agreement was noted for the feminine individuality.

This suggests that male independence is much more valued than the female's. As for sexual practices, I noticed that these magazines posit normative sexual behavior of boys and girls, associating sex with physical need in the case of boys while associating sex with emotions in the case of girls. Relying on this explanation, both magazines approve of the rich sexual experience in the case of boys, while sexual experience of girls is approved only if gained in a relationship. Unlike girls, boys are offered a plethora of sex instructions for getting sexual pleasure and improving sex skills, whereas *TAA* remains silent on such topics. Having said that, it follows that *TAA* supports the masculine quest: 'boys will be boys' (Winship, 1987, p.335) while imposing social control on girls in terms of their sexual behavior by minimizing the number of partners and advocating passivity in sexual expression, yet girls are repeatedly advised to practice safe sex in order to prevent unwanted pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. Apparently, the boy is supposed to assume that the girl is being wary of the possible consequences for no such advice is ever offered by *TOJ*. As it emerges from the analysis, both *TAA* and *TOJ* represent behavior and attitude of each gender differently thus maintaining a sharp boundary between them, which, as Dyer (2003) points out is the most important function of the stereotypes (p.249). As this analysis indicates, boys in *TAA* and *TOJ* are represented as possessing stereotypical traits of dominant males such as independence, intelligence and seriousness, while girls in both magazines are portrayed as possessing the stereotypical traits of inferior female such as passivity, dependency, emotionality and carefulness. Such portrayals suggest that the gender representation within the magazines resonate with the dominant stereotypes and behavior patterns of the society in which these magazines exist.

As far as the representations of sexuality are concerned, referring to the results of the qualitative content analysis, it follows that *TAA* and *TOJ* address their readers as a homogenous group, all of whom are exclusively interested in the opposite sex thus assuming a shared heterosexual orientation. By doing so, these magazines promote heterosexuality as the compulsory form of sexual orientation while overlooking other forms of sexuality. This clearly shows that while the discourse on sex often seems progressive, especially in the *TOJ*, whenever homosexuality is mentioned, the same discourse becomes quite restrictive. Apparently other forms of sexuality are not appealing to *TAA* and *TOJ* since, as shown in the content analysis, whenever an “alternative” sexuality is alluded to, even though this seldom happens, it is referred to as something ‘not normal’, “unacceptable” or simply ignored. Foucault (1988) explains that sexuality is not something naturally given, but rather constructed through a method of normalization and control (p. 105). Adopting a Foucaultian perspective, McCabe (2005) argues that “medicalization is, at times, a constitutive process in which girls in the case of teen magazine readers, may willingly participate to define “normal” female behaviour” (p.156). Hence, such therapeutic discourse as what is ‘healthy’ or ‘normal’ serves to legitimize particular vision of normality (Illouz, 1997, p.200). For instance, in a Macedonian high school textbook homosexuality is described as a disease (Koteska, 2011, p.27), which serves to normalize heterosexuality, positing it as the healthy state. Not only are youngsters being taught at schools about the ‘disease’ called homosexuality; even in their leisure time while reading their favorite magazines teenagers get similar explanations. As noted in the content analysis, *TAA* and *TOJ* inform their readers that being sexually interested in a person of the same sex is not ‘normal’, or simply ignore to acknowledge that someone may not be interested in the opposite sex. Similarly, when explaining what a healthy relationship is, *TAA* posits that such a relationship resembles a fairy tale love

story, portraying the girl as the princess while the boys as the prince, which means that the healthy relationship necessitates a male and female. Explaining why some sexual behavior is ‘not normal’ or what a ‘healthy relationship’ is, these magazines set heterosexuality as the norm, while anything else that deviates from the norm is simply not acceptable.

Since meaning-making necessarily operates within a pre existing social structure (Louw, 2001, p.11), it is important to establish the link between the dominant attitude towards ‘alternative’ sexualities in the Macedonian context and the contents of *TAA* and *TOJ*. On the streets of Macedonia, same sex couples holding hands and expressing public affection are rarely seen. Homosexuals generally do not to manifest their sexual orientation in public because of the high level of discrimination which is present almost everywhere. Even though homosexuality in Macedonia is legal, the reality tells a rather different story. According to a research concerning the attitude towards homosexuality in Macedonia, being openly gay in this country is very likely to have serious consequences. Such consequences can vary from being publically insulted, laid off from work and beaten on the streets to being thrown away from the parent’s house or ‘cured’ with lexilium and diazepam (Dimitrov, 2006). This research suggests that the mainstream attitude towards homosexuality in Macedonia is still deeply biased perceiving it as something deviant, sick or simply not ‘normal.’ As a result, many people who identify themselves as homosexuals consider leaving the country for good, if they have not done that already.

The law on anti-discrimination in the Republic of Macedonia does not recognize sexual orientation as a ground for anti-discrimination (Koteska, 2011, p.7). Even though the law does not punish homosexuals, it does not protect them either. Same sex couples in Macedonia are not allowed to marry nor to live in a legally recognized union i.e. as a family (Dimitrov, 2006). In the Doctrine of the ruling party IMRO it is clearly stated that:

The family is a community consisting of one man and one woman who together take care of their children. Such form of a community is a natural one. There is no real alternative to family. The child is disciplined in the family. The family is of crucial importance to the society.⁵

At this point the link between the content and the context is quite apparent. *TAA* and *TOJ* exist in a heteronormative society which has at its core a heterosexual couple as the basic unit of social structure. The heterosexual culture, as Michel Warner (1993) puts it, “thinks of itself as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of inter-gender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn’t exist” (p. xxi). Thus the heterosexual ideology which is reflected within the pages of these two magazines totalizes the idea of sexuality, assuming that it is a ‘normal’ for all readers to be interested in the opposite sex.

Having explained how the common understanding of gender and sexuality as represented within the pages of *TAA* and *TOJ* reflect and reinforce the values of the heteronormative Macedonian society, I established the link between the content and the context. However, I do not claim that these representations are specific to the Macedonian national context, but rather, as I will argue in the next chapter, are globally constructed.

⁵ For further information http://www.vmro.org.mk/Dokumenti/Vrednosti_vmro_dpmne.pdf

Chapter 4: Situating TAA and TOJ in the global context

Having analyzed how the representation of gender and sexuality in *TAA* and *TOJ* resonate with the dominant values of the Macedonian society, in this chapter I will focus on the relation of *TAA* and *TOJ* with the global consumerist culture. I will argue that these magazines are both, consumerist objects and objects that encourage further consumption (McRobbie, 1977, p.74). Drawing on the results of the content analysis I will first analyze how *TAA* and *TOJ* are embedded in the experience of consumer capitalism, and then I will analyze how they construct an audience of consumers.

Capitalism... promotes the incorporation of all social groups into the market; it has created a powerful common symbolic space unified by the twin spheres of consumption as mass media... Capitalism makes possible that participation of everyone in the economic and symbolic sphere of consumption, yet sustains and reproduces itself ...(Illouz, 1997, p. I)

TAA and *TOJ* exist within one of the largest privately owned publishing houses in Macedonia. As privately owned ventures, it follows that these magazines are driven by the logic of profit derived from mass consumption (Louw, 2001, p. 48). According to McRobbie, it is of great importance for magazines to have a well-defined target group. She argues that *Jackie*, producing for a young market, its major concern is to promote a feminine culture for its readers, thus “endowing with importance those topics chosen for inclusion” (pp.68,69). Similarly, Ferguson (1983) argues that by clearly defining the target audience, magazines promote the market importance and confer status to that particular group, thus making serious business with it (p.185). In the case of *TAA* and *TOJ*, it seems rather problematic that a serious business can be made by targeting female and male adolescents most of whom are financially dependent on their

parents. However, the fact that these magazines have persisted on the market for such a long period of time suggests that the spending power of adolescents should not be underestimated. As Livingstone explains, young people have their own preferences in terms of what they want to read or how they want to spend their leisure time. In that sense, “the growth of the youth market for media and other consumer goods is filling the gap between childhood and adulthood which has arisen as the age of economic maturity rises and the age of physical maturity falls” (Livingstone, 2002, p.175). Nevertheless, as already mentioned, eight years after its inception, *TOJ* ceased to exist while *TAA* is still successful with around 10 000 issues sold out per month. The reason for *TOJ*’s disappearance could be explained with the logic of capitalism according to which it is illogical not to use the capital to the fullest. As Louw (2001) explains, failing to exploit the full potential of one’s capital leads to bankruptcy (p.48). Following the capitalist logic, it could be argued that *TOJ*’s disappearance from the market is due to its decrease in popularity, hence decrease of profit for its owners for whom it is illogical to publish the magazine and not gain profit from it; rather they would take the magazine out of print than run the risk of bankruptcy. But how could *TOJ*’s decrease in popularity be explained? Why did boys stop buying it? What affected their interest in the magazine?

Adorno (2003) argues that “the masses are not the measure but the ideology of the culture industry, even though the culture industry itself could scarcely exist without adapting to the masses” (p.32). According to his argument it follows that the interests of the readers, among other factors, are of paramount importance when it comes to the choice of the content. Besides being influenced by their social surrounding, what the editors find relevant to place before their audience is in part influenced by the demands of the audience itself. To be more specific, the content choice of the magazine is also shaped by the editor’s perception of ‘what the readers

want' and "the imperative of the market place - 'what will sell'" (Ferguson, 1983 p.10). As the content analysis of *TAA* and *TOJ* indicated, it follows that, according to the editors' perception, girls are mostly interested in romance, while boys are mostly interested in sex. Taking into account the period of time these magazines have persisted on the market and have been successfully sold out, it follows that romance and sex do sell. However, according the results of the analyses, the amount of materials concerning sex in *TOJ* was considerably decreased in the last year of its publication when compared to the other two years chosen for analysis, while the amount of materials concerning romance has remained more or less the same in *TAA* in the years included for analyses. Taking into consideration its presumed decrease in popularity, it could be speculated that *TOJ*'s disappearance has come as a consequence of the restricted amount of sex in its content; hence the readers have lost their interest in the magazines. While *TOJ*'s content changed over time, *TAA* remained overwhelmingly romantic. The fact that it is still sold out every month, besides the number of girlie magazines that appeared on the Macedonian market, suggests that girls respond well to what *TAA* has to offer, i.e. an abundance of articles discussing romance. *TOJ* also offered articles fitting the category of romance during its publication, although to a lesser degree. Nevertheless, these materials are suitable for analyzing how the readers are being pushed into the world of consumerism since romantic love, as Illouz (1997) argues "is at the cornerstone of the culture of capitalism" (p.6).

In her analysis of *Jackie* magazine, McRobbie (1977) observes that within the pages of this magazine, romance is portrayed as something important, serious and relevant (p.80). She also points out that the way romance is discussed in the magazine "owe[s] a great deal to popular cinema romances and novelettes" (p.81). Traditionally, romances have been associated with a female audience. Focusing on the genre of romantic novel, Radway seeks to explore the essential

characteristics that make women turn to romances in their quest for pleasure. As she observes “the most striking characteristic of the ideal romance [is] its resolute focus on a single, developing relationship between heroine and hero” (Radway, 1987, p.122). It focuses upon “one man-one woman and their interest in the evolution of love” (p.123). She also notes that the ideal union in romantic novels necessitates the hero and the heroine to be the ideal feminine and masculine types (p.131). As she explains, female’s beauty is the cause of “hero’s inability to master his desire for her once she is near him” (p.126). As far as female sexuality is concerned, Radway points out that in romances “female sexual response is something to be exchanged for love” (p.126). Moreover, the heroine trusts her men “even in the face of massive evidence to the contrary” (149). The hero, on the other hand, is quite promiscuous, until the heroines appears in his life and tames him. Moreover, in romances, the hero never “openly declare[s] his dependence on a woman” (p.148).

Given the essential characteristics of romance that are presumably appealing to the female audience, it becomes clear that the way romance is discussed in *TAA* bears strong resemblance to Radway’s description of romantic novels. It seems that *TAA*, just as *Jackie*, owes a great deal of its content to popular romances. Their most remarkable similarity is the insistence on monogamous heterosexual relationship which seems to be one of the building blocks of romantic love. As the content analysis suggested, *TAA* insists that the girl must be desperate if single, and posits that her main goal is to find a boyfriend in order to be happy. However, in order to find a boyfriend *TAA* teaches the girl that she needs to be attractive or more specifically look feminine. Taking popular romances as its role models, *TAA* reinforce the idea that only by nurturing her femininity will the girl receive the kind of love she desires for, since it is her feminine beauty that makes the boy fall for her. Moreover, *TAA*, just as romances, approves of sex only in

combination with love, consequently telling the girl that she should be sexually active only if she has a boyfriend whom she truly loves. The way *TAA* talks about boys closely resembles the portrayal of heroes in romances. For instance, girls are told that boys are promiscuous because of their physical needs, thus justifying their unfaithfulness and supporting their masculine individuality. However, as it takes shapes within *TAA*, romance does not only resonate with romantic novels but also with fairy tale love stories. As exemplified in the content analysis, the fairy tale love story is often evoked in *TAA* when the girl is offered love advice such as how to find or keep ‘the prince on the white horse’, while the girl is often referred to as the princess who waits for the prince. However, the fact that throughout the years *TAA* promotes a kind of love that exists only in fiction and as a consequence makes the distinction between fictional stories and real life appear blurry, does not reveal how consumption is being promoted; rather it suggests that *TAA*’s success rests on her resemblance to popular romances, which is assumingly appealing to girls when they seek for pleasure in their leisure times, thus bringing profit to the magazine owners. Having analyzed *TAA* as a consumerist object, in the rest of the chapter I will explain how the readers are being pushed into the world of consumerism.

The kind of love as described above is what Illouz calls ‘the idealist love’. She differentiates between two approaches to love, namely the idealist and the realist approach. As she explains “the idealist approach affirms the absolutist claims of love and passion and has strong affinities in the capacity to construct fantasies” (p.154), while the realist approach “asserts that love ought to be motivated by the practical needs and conditions of people and it is not compatible with romantic fictions” (p.155). She points that in reality people often take as a reference the fictional portrayal of romance as it appears in mass media when referring to love. Yet, such portrayals, even though seem to be the most appealing ones, are often treated with

suspicion and people would rather opt for the realist story grounded in everyday life experience (pp. 154, 155). As it appears in *TAA*, both the idealist and realist approach coexist within the materials fitting the category of romance. Not only is the girl told that there is a prince on the white horse, but she is also advised that she needs to put an effort in order to get him. As Illouz explains, love is work since it requires certain skills in order to be sustained. As it emerges from *TAA*, one of the most important skills the girl is supposed to possess is her ability to take care of physical appearance so as to be attractive to the future prince. To achieve that look, *TAA* offers myriad of instruction such as how to put make-up or do her hair, to what type of skirt best suits her body and what is the fragrance that matches her personality. However, the magazine seems to take for granted that the girls they are addressing, at that point of their life, still cannot afford to buy all those lipsticks, perfumes and fashionable clothes. Nonetheless, it is here that the magazine introduces the girls to the world of what Illouz calls the oblique consumption. As she explains "the objects of oblique consumption are never referred to directly as objects of consumptions, but are insinuated into a scene as a part of what makes it "naturally" romantic" (p.37). In this way the magazine is indirectly suggesting that only by using certain products will the girl experience romance, thus "making commodities 'romantic'" (p.41). Another occasion when both girls and boys are encouraged to improve their potentials as consumers is when the magazines offer advice about dating. To have a date means to go out and engage in some form of leisure activity, explains Illouz (p.69). Such leisure activities often include going to a coffee shop, to a restaurant or to the movies, where one needs to have money in order to pay the bill or the ticket, let alone the preparation beforehand. Moreover, boys are repeatedly told that they are the ones to pay the bill, which points to the fact that one needs to have money in order to date (Illouz, 1997, p.66). "This clearly implies that both before-the-date and during-the-date, acts of

consumption [are] perceived as “natural”, intrinsic elements of the dating system” (p.69). To be romantically involved with someone also requires buying presents, making phone calls, texting, transportation to certain dating place and so forth, which means that the possibility to experience romance can be heavy on the pocket. While *TAA* and *TOJ* in the role of advisors tell their readers important tips concerning relationships and dating, they also play an important part in encouraging them to develop their consuming potential.

In this chapter I explained in what way adolescents are introduced to the world of consumerism and the role of *TAA* and *TOJ* in that process. Even though my analysis was focused on a specific context, my aim was to show that there is nothing Macedonia-specific about these magazines, rather they occupy a position within the global consumerist culture. I showed that *TAA* and *TOJ* are no different from British or American youth magazines since the two models of love dominating the Western society, namely “love as an all-consuming intense force and love as hard work” (Illouz, p.192) also coexist within the pages of *TAA* and *TOJ* and are equally powerful in selling the magazines and promoting consumption. These magazines just as *Jackie* and other magazine that exist on a global level are consumerist objects that “encourage further consumption and powerful ideological force” (McRobbie, 1977, p.74).

Conclusion

The aim of my thesis was to explore the role of magazines in constructing stereotypes, promoting compulsory heterosexuality and consumption. I critically analyzed two Macedonian monthly youth magazines addressing male and female audience respectively. To see how gender and sexuality are represented within these magazines I first conducted qualitative content analyses of each version using the topics of romance and sex as my primary frame of reference. The purpose of the analysis was to detect patterns and meanings associated with masculinity, femininity and sexuality within the content of each magazine, or more specifically within materials discussing romance and sex, so as to provide rich description as a basis for further analyses. After analyzing each version separately, I compared the results of both analyses and detected the similarities and differences in the way these magazines discuss topics related to romance and sex. I argued that *TAA* and *TOJ* promote traditional models of gender behavior, positing heterosexuality as the compulsory form of sexual orientation while not acknowledging other forms of sexual expression. Relying on these arguments I explained in what way such stereotypical representations reflect and reinforce the stereotypes of the heteronormative Macedonian society. However, in doing so, my aim was not to nationalize these representations but rather to show how they fit within the global context. I argued that besides publishing for profit, these magazines also introduce their readers to the world of consumerism. In doing so, I did not make any claims as to what extent *TAA* and *TOJ* are successful in imposing their influence on their readers since I did not analyze how the readers interpret what they read.

However, I do not assume that readers consume everything they read without questioning, rather my assumption is that readers choose what they like to read and what not. This was explained with *TOJ*'s disappearance from the market which occurred simultaneously with its decrease in sexual content, hence decrease in popularity, while *TAA* owes its success to the massive amount of romantic content which apparently sells well for more than 15 years now. However, until a double-sided research is conducted, these statements remain speculative. In order to understand the impact of these magazines I propose an audience research as a way to further develop this study and see whether *TAA* and *TOJ* are truly successful in influencing the readers.

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