Hoe hoorde het? Seksualiteit en partnerkeuze in de Nederlandse adviesliteratuur 1780-1890
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Summary

This study focuses on the rules for sexual behaviour in conduct books, published in the Netherlands between 1780 and 1890. The analysis is based on two types of conduct books: the marriage manual and the conduct book for young adults. At the end of the eighteenth century, both types of books are already well established. At this point in time, however, a variation within the last type is developing: the conduct book for young women.

Central to my analysis is the question how the rules for sexual conduct are to be interpreted. This question stems from the juxtaposition of continuity and change in these guidelines. The advice of the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries follows the same pattern as that of the early-modern period: sexual intercourse is reserved for married couples. As far as the content is concerned, the instructions of the later period are similar to the ones of the former period. The way in which the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rules are presented, however, differs considerably from the formulation of the early-modern ones. Whereas the earlier advice is given in a straightforward manner, the later guidelines are formulated in a very complex way. The form is dominated by specific narrative strategies, especially by creating contrasts and through the transformation of these contrasts into moral categories. These strategies leave the reader with the impression that any transgression of the rules constitutes a sin, and will bring misfortune. As a result, the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conduct books are far more compelling than the early-modern ones.

Interestingly, in every type of conduct book the narrative strategies are used differently. In the marriage manuals they appear only in the paragraphs discussing the choice of spouse. This advice is directed at the not-
yet-wedded, that is – in the contemporary \textit{mentalité} – at young adults. In the conduct books for young adults these strategies are used more widely. In the books for young women they are present not only in the chapters concerning mating, but also in the ones on socialising with men. In the books for young men they can be found in the discussion of every possible subject. These differences point towards a connection between the use of narrative strategies and the age of the professed readership, and towards a relation between style and gender.

So far, the form of the rules for sexual conduct has not been taken into account in historical research on sexual education. As a result, no allowance has been made for a specific approach towards youth in the interpretation of these rules. However, changing perceptions of youth, developed in the course of the eighteenth century by Rousseau and other Enlightenment pedagogues, warrant such an allowance.

Besides, form provides the key to gender in the conduct books. For it is the formulation that gives away the presuppositions of the authors concerning the difference between the sexes. The authors, of course, follow the views that are already held in Dutch society, during the late eighteenth century.

Because of these considerations, the rules for sexual conduct are analysed twice. The first analysis focuses on content: what ought to be the sexual behaviour of young adults and married couples? The second one concerns the form: which narrative strategies are used? Do they have a specific effect on the reader, perhaps even serve a specific, educational purpose?

**Sexuality**

The marriage manuals only mention sexuality, when discussing the choice of spouse. As far as content is concerned, the advice runs that the responsibilities of marriage demand more of a couple than mere sexual attraction. Regarding form, these paragraphs show the use of two specific narrative strategies: contrasting the choice, in which the responsibilities of marriage are taken into consideration, with one, that is merely motivated by sexual attraction. Furthermore, they complement this contrast with references to good and evil. In this way, the authors appeal to the conscience of the readers.
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The books for young adults show an interesting difference between the conduct books intended for a liberal-protestant readership on the one hand, and the ones for an orthodox-protestant or a catholic public on the other hand. The latter stick to the same approach as their early-modern counterparts. As far as content is concerned, the guides don’t pay much attention to sexuality. Only a few of them give some rules for sexual conduct. These are similar to the ones of the earlier conduct books: they instruct to keep a distance to the other sex, and to refrain from talking, or joking about sexuality. All these guidelines apply to social intercourse, just as the rules of etiquette of the early-modern conduct books. Moreover, the form of these paragraphs provides further proof of the traditional approach: the rules are formulated in a matter-of-fact way. Besides, they stand alone; they are never accompanied by explanations, made up of contrasts, and intertwined with references to good and evil.

In comparison, the liberal conduct books for young adults develop a new approach to sexuality. In this approach, the rules for sexual behaviour are carefully integrated with the ones for the correct choice of spouse. Central to this approach is the attitude towards the opposite sex. Time and again they instruct readers to view members of the opposite sex as friends, or as potential spouses, instead of objects of lust or romance. This approach leads to a significant change in the discussion of the choice of spouse. Contrary to their early-modern counterparts, these books address the issue of sexual attraction when discussing the choice of a partner. They describe sexual attraction as a ‘natural fact’, and the source of all love. They stress, however, that attraction itself doesn’t constitute a solid base for a marriage.

In this approach, attention is given to coping with sexual desire, in order to prevent pre-marital intercourse. This advice is similar to that given in early-modern conduct books. As a consequence, the conduct books provide no evidence for the claim, that sexual behaviour became subjected to more, and stricter rules, as the nineteenth century proceeded.

Not merely the content, but also the formulation of the rules for sexual conduct show a new approach to sexual education. Firstly, the paragraphs show the same narrative strategies that are also used in the marriage manuals. The authors contrast the correct choice of spouse with one based on mere sexual attraction. In conduct books for young women they add other opposites, like financial security or pre-marital pregnancy. In addition,
they accompany these contrasts with references to health and sickness, and to religious teachings and the Bible. By doing so, the authors appeal to the consciences of the readers, and press them into making the given guidelines their own. Secondly, the authors complement these strategies with a third one: they address the readers as independent, autonomous persons. This suggestion of autonomy leaves them with the impression that they have to force the given rules upon themselves. This strategy engenders a strong sense of responsibility. The combined use of these strategies serves a specific purpose: to compel young adults to behave responsibly, when choosing their partner for life.

Adolescence

In the formulation of the rules for sexual conduct, the authors refer to certain qualities of young adults. They confront readers, for instance, on their inclination to excessive behaviour, and warn them not give in to this inclination. The fact that specific qualities in young adults are singled out, constitutes a breach in the tradition. Conduct books of the early-modern period never mentioned specific tendencies in youth. Instead, authors warned youthful readers against a lack of control over their feelings in general.

This change in the genre points towards a changing vision of youth. The references to specific qualities suggest that the authors hold a specific, psychologically oriented view on young adults. If this is the case, the authors are influenced by the concept of adolescence as formulated by Rousseau. The comparison between the utterances on specific tendencies in youth, and Rousseau's description of adolescent males in *Émile ou l'éducation* (1767), indeed shows a remarkable similarity. In the conduct books two tendencies are mentioned over and over, namely honour and sensualism. The first one induces young men to compete, while the second lures them into feasting, drinking and womanising. These are similar to the inclinations singled out by Rousseau: competitiveness and lust. Moreover, both the authors and Rousseau speak about these qualities as passions.

However, interesting differences between the authors and Rousseau exist as well. The authors and Rousseau hold divergent views on the cause of the development of passions in youth. Where most authors attribute the emotions to the development of reason, the authors mention the influence of the emotions on the development of the conscience. This process of adolescence involves the transcendence of the emotions and refer to specific passages in the Bible, and religious teachings.

Gender

The twofold analysis of passion in the genre of conduct education of youth is also reflected in the relation between men and women. Regarding the development of male and female sexuality in the genre, the authors focus on the various roles played by sex. They refer to specific roles only in their own times, as the ones for which conduct books were written. Conduct books of the early-modern period did not make a distinction between what was suitable for men and what was suitable for women. Instead, authors warn young men against the idea that they can get married at any age, and warn women against the idea that they can control their feelings or their own bodies.

Although women are depicted as less able to control their feelings, their lives are also subject to gender roles. Women are seen as the ones who have to take care of the household, and as the ones who are responsible for the upbringing of the children. A woman who strays from this role is seen as a bad mother, and as a woman who is not able to control her own emotions.

In this book, the authors focus on the differences between men and women. The authors refer to the fact that men are more capable of controlling their emotions, and that women are more inclined to let their emotions rule their lives. Where the authors focus on the merits of being able to control one's own emotions, they also refer to the dangers of being unable to do so. The authors refer to specific examples, such as the case of a woman who murders her husband, and the case of a man who is unable to control his own emotions. The authors refer to these examples as warnings, and as evidence of the dangers of being unable to control one's own emotions.
the emotions to a sequence of physical and mental changes, Rousseau only mentions the development of sexuality. Also, a difference in the application of the concept of adolescence can be discerned. The authors see the process of adolescence occurring in females as well as in males, since they refer to specific inclinations in both sexes. Instead, Rousseau reserves the concept of adolescence for males.

**Gender**

The twofold analysis of the rules for sexual conduct shows that the sexual education of young women follows the same pattern as that of young men. Regarding the content, the guidelines for women address the same themes as the ones for men: the general attitude towards the other sex, the role of sexuality in the choice of spouse and sexual abstinence until marriage. Differences only come to the fore when authors become very practical and detailed in their advice. These differences are consistent with the traditional sexual roles in mating. For instance, women are warned not to be seduced to pre-marital intercourse, while men are given advice concerning drink and diet to curtail their desire. In the formulation, the guidelines for women show the same narrative strategies as the ones for men: contrasts, moral categories and the suggestion of autonomy.

Although the conduct books for women hardly differ from those for men in the discussion of sexuality and mating, they show considerable differences in the discussion of all other aspects of life. While the books for men prepare readers for their future responsibilities as husbands and breadwinners, the books for women lack any sense of purpose. Where the guides for males share one distinctive style, those for females don’t share a particular style. Instead, the authors use all sorts of stylistic devices, from sketching the life of an exemplary woman, to abundantly using metaphors and metonomies – as if to wrap the advice in.

In this hodge-podge of stylistics, only one common feature comes to the fore: every book shows a division between the way in which sexuality and mating are discussed and the way the rest of the book is written. The first shows the use of contrasts, moralisms and the suggestion of autonomy. The latter is characterised by the use of metaphors and metonomies, almost always referring to virtue and happiness.
This division in the presentation of the advice points to a twofold educational aim: the first style instills a sense of responsibility, the second one invites readers to become caring and responsive to the needs of others. This division coincides with a division of power: women are educated to responsible behaviour in mating, because of their freedom of choice. They are simply taught to be good girls in all other matters of life, where they are supposed to obey to the authority of the father, or of the husband. Because of this, the division of styles is proof of the partial application of the Enlightenment concept of youth, just so that the application doesn't interfere with the existing order of society.

This division in the conduct books for women is not in keeping with the picture both historians and literary critics have painted of nineteenth century bourgeois femininity. Although the image of the angel in the house is present in the advice literature, it is more elusive than could be expected. Hopefully, the diffusive character of the conduct books will inspire new research on representations of femininity among the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie.