# CHAPTER 1: Bodies, sex and sexuality

*Sarah Toulalan*

It has been observed that contemporary divisions of the stages of life were predicated on the male body and life cycle as the norm, deploying traditional numerical divisions which were not necessarily co-terminous with women's lives and bodies. This organisation tended to universalise ageing from male experiences, significant milestones in men's lives, and changes to male bodies.[1] Some studies of renaissance and early modern women have therefore moved away from this traditional division of life stages, relating 'age norms for women, based on medical, legal, and social discourses' to 'the key social and legal markers in a woman's life: namely, the phases of maidenhood, motherhood, and widowhood.'[2] However, as many studies of widowhood have pointed out, this stage of life did not neatly align with older age for a woman. Even very young, newly married wives, potentially including those in their late teens and early twenties, might be widowed.[3] Widowhood was also something that a woman might experience more than once if she remarried as 'Death and its disruptions formed a regular part of married life.'[4] In practice, then, widowhood was not necessarily the third and final stage of a woman's life as the experience of loss of a marital – and hence sexual – partner was something that might occur at any age after marriage; and neither did all women marry nor all married women out-live a husband to experience widowhood. This division also assumes that maidenhood was the first stage of life from which a woman inevitably moved on to marry and produce children as this was the expected trajectory for the female life-course. In practice, many women, possibly up to twenty-five per cent of the female population, at least in England in the seventeenth century, never married, although some of these would have experienced motherhood as unmarried mothers, even if

their infants did not survive or they were prevented by circumstances from being able themselves to raise their children.

The female lifecycle, then, might be broadly divided into three stages, but these stages relate to reproductive life, which at all stages of a woman's life shaped her experiences of her body and her sexual life, as well as having an impact on her life more generally. This chapter therefore will explore women's bodies, sex and sexuality in relation to the stages of their reproductive lives: infancy and childhood to sexual development at puberty; the potentially reproductive years post-puberty; and older age following the cessation of reproductive possibility at menopause. It will do so through a discussion of various contexts in which sex and reproduction were experienced within and without marriage, including rape and sexual assault, prostitution, fornication and adultery, childbirth, fertility and infertility, exploring each issue in relation to the different stages of reproductive life.

In one of the earliest considerations of the question of sexual knowledge in early modern England, Patricia Crawford observed that women's sexual lives took place in the context of reproduction.[5] This was undoubtedly so for women who had experienced the physical developments of puberty which prepared their bodies for both childbearing and sex. Whether pregnancy and childbirth were strongly desired after marriage as a confirmation of fertility and a successful marital union, or were feared as a potential consequence of extra-marital sexual relations which might lead to shame, dishonour, and worse, a woman's experience of sex would be coloured by the possibility of conception or by its absence. In a time before reliable and widely available contraception, even if they made use of herbal concoctions, barrier methods inserted into the vagina before intercourse, or post-coital douches that might impede conception, women could not be certain that such methods would achieve their aim – and it has been argued that rates of illegitimacy indicate that, if used, their efficacy is doubtful.[6] More recently historians have focused upon experiences, attitudes

towards, and the personal and social consequences of failed reproduction and infertility, which could be devastating for a couple in early modern European societies in which fertility was highly valued. The ability to conceive easily or otherwise was likely to affect women's sexual desire and pleasure in sexual relations, although it is difficult to find personal accounts that speak of sex rather than of the devastation (or, potentially, relief) of remaining childless. If sexual relations were productive, and pregnancy and childbearing successfully negotiated to produce offspring, continuing marital sex could also be adversely affected by the mismanagement of birth or by the consequences of multiple experiences of childbirth.

Women's experiences of marital sex also took place within an economic context where personal feelings of love or liking of the marital partner might not always be considered of any importance: whether entering into a marriage in order to further cement or enhance the wealth and prestige of noble or merchant families, to trade family name and social status for recuperation of dwindling or lost family resources, to provide household skills and labour to support a family workshop or business, or to trade one's body for goods or cash to keep oneself afloat in difficult personal circumstances, emotional compatibility or sexual attraction was likely to be a secondary consideration. However, it was not always a consideration that was disregarded, especially as contemporary family-state analogies emphasised the importance of marital harmony for community and national stability more broadly. Prescriptive advice by religious authors also stressed the importance of sexual contentment within marriage for the avoidance of adultery, which was perceived as inevitably leading to marital strife and both wider familial and community discord. Finally, medical advice about successful procreation theorised that the sexual pleasure of both man and wife was crucial for conception to take place. Sexual pleasure was thus understood as important not only at a micro level, as something that was a good in itself within marriage, but also on a

macro level for the continuation of societies through successful reproduction and for the stability of those societies as a consequence of marital harmony.

A woman's experience of her sexual life within marriage was hence shaped by a range of personal circumstances that included not only the circumstances of a marriage and the emotional connection with a husband, but also the age at which marriage took place, the ease or difficulty of conceiving, and experiences of childbirth and menopause. The legal age for marriage was twelve for girls (fourteen for boys) although outside of elite social circles the age at which it actually took place was generally in the mid to late twenties in most of North-western Europe, when partners had accumulated sufficient resources to support a new household. In England demographic historians have established that marriages usually took place at twenty-six for women and twenty-eight for men. This was slightly lower in other locations: Rossiaud has argued that between 1450 and 1550 age of marriage in South-eastern France was relatively stable at twenty-one/two for women and twenty-four/five for men.[7] Girls generally married at a younger age, below eighteen on average, in southern Europe, including Spain and Italy.[8] In the lower reaches of society marriage thus generally took place when young women were, unless affected by a disorder or malnourishment that had retarded sexual development, well past puberty, and hence when thought of as 'ripe' or ready for sexual relations and childbearing. In élite society, where dynastic considerations frequently guided choice of marital partner and negotiations were conducted by parents, relatives or others on their behalf, girls were often betrothed at a very young age, and might be married once they reached the legal age, whether or not they had reached puberty. However, demographic analysis has indicated that the age of marriage for girls in this sector of society rose from around twenty in the sixteenth century to between twenty-two and twenty-four in the later seventeenth century.[9] Evidence also suggests that even if marriage took place as soon as legally permissible, cohabitation and marital sexual relations did not begin until both

partners had sexually matured. For girls this would be indicated by the establishment of a regular menstrual flow (for boys by the ability to produce seed or semen).[10] As there was considerable variation in the age at which a girl might fully develop sexually at this time, there was also variation in the age at which she might begin sexual relations.

Medical authors throughout Europe were consistent in their assertions that the usual age for the onset of menstruation was between twelve and fourteen, but it was also not unusual for it take place much later than this, even into the early twenties for some girls and young women (it was more unusual for it take place earlier, although incidences were recorded, particularly when exceptionally early). The classical humoral model of the body underpinned medical ideas about sexual development as well as sexual differentiation. The body was composed of four humours – blood, yellow and black bile, and phlegm – which corresponded to the qualities of hot, dry, cold and wet. The constitution of the body related to the balance of these humours which varied according to both gender and age: women were more cold and moist than men, who were usually hot and dry; bodies were warm and moist in childhood, becoming gradually more cold and dry as they aged. The developmental changes of puberty began to occur as heat increased and the blood that was needed for nourishment and growth in infancy and early childhood was no longer consumed by the body for this purpose, and now was available for the production of seed and to be expelled in girls as menstrual blood.[11] The balance of humours, and hence bodily heat, varied individually, shaping appearance and state of health as well as the timing of physical development, explaining variation in age at menarche as well as its cessation later in life.

The onset of menstruation was significant not only because it indicated that a girl was now likely to be fertile and so ready for childbearing, but also because it was understood to facilitate sex. The menstrual flow both lubricated the vaginal passage and 'relaxed' it so that penetrative sex was possible, as, 'while her Courses flow or within a day after, then both the

*Hymen* and the inner wrinkled Membrane of the *Vagina* are so flaggy and relaxed, that the *Penis* may enter glibly without any lett.'[12] Both medical and midwifery books and reports of trials for rape involving younger, prepubescent, girls indicate that penetration was invariably impossible without force that caused tearing and bruising to the organs, and pain, as a girl's vagina could be too 'streight' and unlubricated to allow admittance of the male member.[13] When a girl married at a younger age it was therefore considered important that a regular and moderate menstruation had been established before sexual relations began. For example, Elisabeth de Valois married Phillip II of Spain in 1559 when almost fourteen and Susan Broomhall has shown how there was concern for their beginning marital relations as her menstruation at this time was not yet regular and settled.[14] However, this clearly did not delay matters long as she was pregnant by October 1560, although the child was stillborn, perhaps confirming contemporary anxieties about the dangers of bearing children at too young an age.[15]

If marriage took place at a young age, there might therefore be considerable anxiety about first sexual relations and their potential success, not only for the girl concerned, but also amongst those surrounding her and with an investment in their success. Here, success was measured in terms of a consequent pregnancy and not necessarily in whether or not the act itself was pleasureable, although the expectation might be that successful procreation indicated good sex - and there is some evidence that this connection was made in practice as well as theoretically, and not just in the context of rape where a consequent pregnancy might undermine the accusation.[16] Contemporary medical understanding about conception, until the early eighteenth century, held that in a two-seed model of conception in which both men and women had to release seed to form a foetus, both male and female orgasm, and therefore sexual pleasure, were essential.[17] The first act of sexual intercourse, however, might be difficult to achieve, or completely unsuccessful, depending on the age at which it took place,

even if a girl was judged to be ready. Sex during menstruation was usually strongly cautioned against because potentially polluting, or because it hindered conception as the flow would carry the seed away from the womb and out of the body, or, should conception nevertheless occur, it was likely to result in a monstrous conception. But the medical advice that menstruation facilitated penetration, as seen above, hints that the menstrual taboo was neither universally held, nor that it was always observed.[18]

There is also some evidence from personal documents and from published texts that confirms that sex during menstruation might not simply be regarded as due to excessive and unrestrained lust, even though highly popular works such as the late seventeenth-century *Aristotle's Masterpiece* characterised it in this way. When twenty-two-year-old Theophilus Hastings, the seventh Earl of Huntingdon, found himself unable to consummate his marriage to Elizabeth Lewis, aged eighteen, in 1672, he was advised by his uncle, Arthur Stanhope, to 'finger my lady espetially att this time now she has her flowers for I assure you those parts are most apt to delate and widen when she is in thatt condition, and the most probable time to gett yr p: in to her.'[19] This advice, however, did not prove successful and Stanhope further advised his nephew to use 'some oyle of lillies or oyle of swete almonds or plane sallet oyle' to facilitate the consummation of his marriage. We do not know how Elizabeth experienced these first attempts at sexual intercourse which must have been, at least initially, painful, potentially humiliating, and frustrating. This was, however, only a temporary impediment to successful marital relations as Elizabeth went on to bear two sons and six daughters before her death at the age of thirty-four, negotiating eight pregnancies in sixteen years of marriage. That Stanhope's knowledge about how to facilitate intercourse was more widespread, at least among the upper classes, is perhaps indicated by publication of testimony from the trial of the Earl of Castlehaven in 1631 for the assisted rape of his twelve-year-old daughter-in-law (and for the rape of his wife and sodomy with his servants) in which it was said 'that the Lord

Audley fetch'd Oyl to open her Body, but she cry'd out and he could not enter, and then the Earl appointed Oyl the Second time, and then Skipwith enter'd her Body and knew her Carnally.'[20] Similarly, Patricia Simons has suggested that enlarging devices to enable intercourse by stretching a girl's vagina were 'probably not imaginary'.[21] In such circumstances first experiences of sex could only have been painful, distressing, frightening and traumatic.[22]

Such aids to sexual intercourse might also have been found helpful at the other end of the female life-course, following menopause and the cessation of menstruation. Without a regular menstruation to lubricate the sexual parts it was understood that sex for older, post-menopausal, women was likely to be more difficult and therefore less pleasureable for both partners. Western European medical authors were consistent in their assessment of older women's sexual bodies as undesirable, both because the physical 'decay' of the ageing body meant that older women were regarded as lacking in beauty or physical attraction, but also because the sexual parts of the body changed so that they were no longer so suitable for the act of sex. Like pre-pubescent girls, the vagina of the older, post-menopausal woman would become 'streight' and the tissues more hard and dry, potentially affecting penetrative sex. Sixteenth-century French surgeon Ambroise Paré, whose work was drawn on by other medical authors into the eighteenth century, observed that 'it grows harder, both by use of venery, and also by reason of age', while seventeenth-century French physician Lazare Rivière further noted that the female sexual parts became 'withered' with increasing age and consequently 'cannot afterwards easily admit a mans Yard'.[23] However, as attitudes towards sex in older age were most usually negative, advice to facilitate it does not seem to have been forthcoming, even though Protestant marital advice allowed that sex was not only for procreation, but also for mutual comfort.

This view though was not necessarily adhered to in practice, as shown by at least one personal view that was not necessarily representative, as we shall see. Lady Sarah Cowper recorded in her diary for 1704, when she was in her sixtieth year:

> Sir T.L. is newly married to a lady old, decrepid with the palsey and other infirmities. Covetousness is thought to be his excuse (if it be one) for 'tis said she is rich; but none can imagine her meaning to be otherwise than to serve a beastly end. The end of marriage (say some) is society and mutual comfort; but they are rather an effect of marriage none of the principle end which is procreation of children and so the continuance of mankind.[24]

Anne Kugler interprets Cowper's comments here as a personal justification of her own lack of sexual relations with her husband, which had ceased following the birth of her fourth child, when she was still only in her twenties. When she began her diary at the age of fifty-six in 1700, Sarah Cowper was unhappily married and clearly found the idea of sexual relations distasteful, so it is perhaps not surprising that she then expressed a negative opinion about the potential for sexual activity in marriage in later life. However, her generalisation that 'none can imagine her meaning to be otherwise …' also suggests that there was, perhaps, a more general sense of distaste among her peers at the idea that an old woman might marry with the intention of not only consummating the marriage, but also perhaps seeking a more regular expression of mutual regard and desire.[25] Contemporary mocking of the unrestrained sexual desires of old women expressed in a variety of popular literature, including ballads and jokes, also suggests that not only was such distaste more widespread in society but simultaneously that older women *did* continue to engage in a sexual life, prompting expressions of disapprobation in both popular and elite literature.[26]

Whatever a woman's social and familial status, it was expected that within a short time of consummating a marriage, if she was within the range of her potentially reproductive years, the success of the marital union would be publicly confirmed by the signs of

pregnancy. It was important for women to conceive, successfully carry a child to full term and then give birth to a live, healthy child as it demonstrated fulfilment of their primary social and gender role as wives and mothers.[27] It also demonstrated that the marital relationship was successful, and the couple well matched, because it resulted in successful procreation. More significantly, though, early modern social, political and economic stability depended upon the generative success of couples because it ensured the smooth transference of power through dynastic continuity, of wealth, titles and property through inheritance, as well as national security and military ambitions by maintaining a population that was sufficient to support them. Women's demonstrable fertility, or lack thereof, was therefore a subject for comment and gossip so that women's reproductive bodies and sexual lives were experienced in a public as well as a private context. Lianne McTavish has argued that the 'reproductive surveillance of girls and young women was increasingly recommended by medical authorities during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' and Laura Gowing has shown how women's bodies were not only scrutinised for the signs of pregnancy but also, especially in the case of unmarried women, touched or squeezed to seek confirmation of suspicions.[28]

The potential fertility of women's bodies was also assessed by scrutinising appearance and the likely humoral constitution of the body. A well-balanced constitution was essential for successful conception and imbalances, indicated by the physical body through its size (too fat or thin) and colour of hair and skin, might suggest that a woman would not be a good choice for marriage because potentially infertile, or less fertile. These judgements were repeated in medical and midwifery books, often quoting Hippocrates as the source for this knowledge. In an English book on midwifery attributed to Aristotle, published at the end of the seventeenth century, repeating earlier assertions, the author stated that 'the first Consideration is to be had of their Species, for little women are more apt to Conceive than

great; slender, than gross; … to be very fleshy is evil'.[29] Women's bodies were thus not only assessed in terms of their beauty and desirability but also in relation to what their appearance might indicate about reproductive potential. Visible signs of infertility included those related to age: the absence of breasts and menstruation in younger girls; grey or white hair, wrinkled skin and leanness of the body in older women that were caused by increasing coldness and dryness, and therefore diminution of the necessary heat for reproduction.

During the potentially reproductive years, in a period before reliable contraception, sex must have been experienced in the expectation that it could lead to another infant. The only sure way of avoiding more children was sexual abstinence, which might be looked upon more positively in Catholic Europe than in areas where the Protestant Reformation took hold, as virginity and celibacy continued to be held as a higher ideal in Catholic theology following the Council of Trent (1545-1563). In these circumstances, experiences of sex would be shaped by whether continuing childbearing was welcomed or dreaded according to an individual woman's social, financial and health situation, as well as by her relationship with her husband. Magdalena Sánchez's examination of the letters between The Duchess of Savoy, Catalina Micaela and her husband, Carlo Emanuele I, between 1567 and 1597, suggests that they enjoyed a continuing affectionate relationship throughout their marriage until her death following the birth of her tenth child. How much power a woman held within her marriage to refuse sexual relations, should she wish to do so, would also vary according to individual circumstances. Protestant marital ideology held that both partners owed each other 'due benevolence', and sex was assumed to be consensual following marriage; marital rape was not recognised. Marriage was intended for the containment of sexual passion so it was important that couples enjoyed a mutually satisfying sexual relationship: sixteenth-century Dutch physician (and later priest) Levinus Lemnius (1505-58), whose work was drawn on by others into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, wrote that God had

sanctioned the marital bed so that couples might 'not defile themselves with wandring lust'.[30] Withdrawal before ejaculation, or *coitus interruptus*, was a known method of attempting to avoid pregnancy while continuing sexual relations, but was again one that was dependent upon a husband being willing to cooperate. It was also unreliable and perhaps unlikely to promote unmitigated enjoyment for both husband and wife.

However, recent studies of infertility have shown that women suffered considerable anxiety about potential childlessness. Whether Protestant or Catholic, women were inevitably familiar with the biblical stories of barren women such as Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah, and the understanding that a child was a gift of God whose divine purpose might include withholding this blessing on a marriage.[31] Catholic women might seek intercession from Saints Margaret and Anne, or the Virgin Mary, to remedy their infertility through prayer and pilgrimage, but following the Reformation Protestant women no longer had such recourse. God might nevertheless intercede in people's lives if He so chose, and so faith and trust in His divine will and earnest prayer were encouraged. The consequences of childlessness for a woman might include not only personal sorrow but also communal disparagement of her childless state. Women were often blamed for their inability to conceive, having wombs that might be too cold or hot, wet or dry, to welcome the male seed and allow it to meet their own to form a foetus, or that provided an inhospitable environment for either the male seed or for the newly formed conception to safely grow and develop. But men too might not escape blame, having themselves defective generative matter or suspected of poor performance in the bedchamber, lacking in the virility necessary to give their wives sufficient pleasure to release their seed for conception.[32] Female barrenness and male impotence could be grounds for annulment of a marriage: Frances Howard sued for divorce from her husband, the Earl of Essex, in 1613, on the grounds of his inability to consummate their marriage and so provide her with children.[33]

As women aged towards menopause, concerns about infertility might become increasingly pressing as women realised that their reproductive years could be coming to an end. The very inexactness of medical knowledge about the timing of menopause and about when a woman would definitely cease to be fertile, however, enabled women into their late forties and fifties to continue to hope for children and hence to engage in the sexual activity that might result in a pregnancy. For women who had been childless throughout their marriage, or who had had many conceptions but no living child, either as a consequence of multiple miscarriages or due to high infant mortality, the continuation of a menstrual bleed, however irregularly or varying in nature (lighter or more heavy) as they moved into late middle age, could also provide hope that their marital sexual relations might be reproductive and not only serve for 'mutual comfort' and sexual chastity. Authors of midwifery texts noted examples from their own practice of such women, some with sympathy for the triumph of hope over rationality, others more mocking in their recitation of a woman's credulity. French *accoucheur* François Mauriceau, for example, included the following story in his book for childbearing women:

> I know another Woman, a Timber-Merchant at *Paris*, who never had a Child, though she so passionatly [sic] desired it, as to be at the point of hoping for one at 55 years of age, under the colour that she had still her Courses. This Woman was once perswaded (upon the recital of such signs as she said she had) for the space of ten whole months, that she was with Child, of which the Midwife and many others assured her, and she herself likewise believed it (for it is easie to be perswaded to believe what one hopes for with a strong passion) she had a big-belly, and said also that she felt the Child stir; and believed it so truly, that finding her self one day worse than ordinarily (after having prepared very fine necessaries for the Child she imagined she went with) she sent for the Midwife, who when she was come, assured her it was her Labour: but the next day (having always till

then expected a Child) she voided only a quantity of Water, with some Wind from the Womb, and nothing else: after which she was forced to fold up her fine Toilets again which she had provided.[34]

Although it is likely that Mauriceau's intention here was to demonstrate the ignorance, credulity, and consequentally the misjudgements and errors of French midwives (as opposed to the superior knowledge and judgement of male surgeons and *accoucheurs*), such narratives also unintentionally reveal other information. A belief in the possibility of pregnancy meant that women in their mid-fifties continued to engage in penetrative sexual intercourse, and most likely also took pleasure in the act in the belief that orgasm was necessary for conception, despite what medical books said about the ageing female reproductive organs and their unsuitability for sex.[35]

There is a wealth of scholarship on the social and medical aspects of pregnancy and childbearing, but a paucity on the aftermath. Much has been written about the difficulties and uncertainties of conception and pregnancy in early modern Europe as signs might be ambiguous, so that women could not know whether they were really pregnant until quickening confirmed it, or whether it was a 'true' rather than a 'false' pregnancy, or mole.[36] Magdalena Sánchez has, however, argued that women, particularly aristocratic women who closely monitored their menstrual cycles, might be more familiar with and confident in the early signs of pregnancy than historians have previously thought.[37] Far less has been said about impediments to sex itself, or to continuing to enjoy sex within the context of experiences of childbearing.[38] Leah Astbury's work on the return to health for women following childbearing, and how it was understood by women themselves, is a recent exception.[39]

Medical and midwifery books, and especially casebooks recording the management of deliveries, provide a vivid, and sometimes horrific, insight into the nature of birth and its

potential long-term impact on a woman's life. Casebooks invariably record the more difficult births, which could be narrated in such a way as to demonstrate the particular skills and compassion of a practitioner in order to enhance the development of a reputation, and hence to build up a practice that would generate an assured income. If childbirth was difficult because the birth was obstructed or failed to progress, intervention by a midwife or surgeon could result in post-partum injuries which were likely to have had a highly deleterious effect on a woman's subsequent sexual experiences, especially if instruments were used to extract the infant, whether alive or dead. Some of these injuries, for example severe tearing that caused incontinence, including faecal, or mismanagement of delivery of the placenta that caused prolapse of the womb, were likely to have brought an abrupt end to a couple's sexual life.

We cannot know the extent to which these issues affected early modern women, although published casenotes, such as the 411 'observations' of the French *accoucheur* Guillaume Mauquest de la Motte, indicate that women experienced post-partum issues that included both minor and major injuries causing temporary and permanent disabilities.[40] We do know from some women's diaries that, after a number of births, they ceased sexual relations, whether from choice having fulfilled their duty of producing children, and finding motherhood sufficiently demanding to wish to avoid further potential pregnancies, or because they no longer found sex pleasureable or desirable. Joan Hinde Stewart notes that Françoise de Graffigny (1695-1758) stopped having sex with her husband after the birth of their three children, and Anne Kugler that Lady Sarah Cowper did so after the birth of their fourth child at the age of only twenty-six.[41] However, in the case of Graffigny at least, this seems not to have been due to any physical impediment to sex following several births, as she resumed sexual activity in widowhood, and apparently with much greater pleasure than ever before, as we shall see below. Although Lady Sarah Cowper recorded in her diary that she ceased

sexual relations in order to avoid having any more children, it is also highly likely that she did so because she was very unhappy in her marriage and felt little affection for her husband.[42] Other women, though, particularly aristocratic women who did not breast-feed their own infants and hence did not benefit from the potentially contraceptive effects of prolonged lactation, continued to bear numerous children testifying to a continuation of sexual relations throughout their reproductive years.[43]

Early modern attitudes towards women's sexual desires and behaviours post-menopause were, at best, ambivalent, and, at worst, infused with disgust and revulsion.[44] Attitudes were underpinned by ideas about the nature of women's bodies and their primary function as mothers in european societies that valued fertility, which were built upon familial inheritance, and usually primogeniture where the first-born son was privileged. Representations in both high art and popular culture generally, although not always, repeated negative stereotypes of older women which both reflected and reinforced such ideas. Despite contemporary conceptualisations of the stages of life which might suggest that old age began from around the age of fifty, coinciding with the time at which a woman might experience menopause (although in practice this could be much earlier or later), the post-menopause years for a woman were not a uniform stage of life in which sex was neither desired nor a part of that time of life. A woman's fertile years might now be behind her, but her sexual life did not necessarily end, despite societies' reluctance to approve of it; the very prevalence of expressions of revulsion and discouragement of sex into older age suggests that women clearly did not themselves heed them.

There are very few personal accounts of sexual lives in the early modern period, and even fewer that were penned by women, let alone by older women for whom contemporary ideas about and representations of elderly female sexuality were overwhelmingly negative. Yet, even so, there are tantalising glimpses of more positive experiences that we can infer

from sources which are otherwise negative in tone. Ballads and jokes reveal elderly women still eager for sex and keen on a younger husband whose virility could, perhaps, be more relied on than that of a man her own age. Personal accounts of women's sexual experiences are thin on the ground, but Françoise de Graffigny's letters reveal that she not only continued to engage in sexual liaisons as she rapidly approached menopause, indicated by increasingly irregular menstruation, but that she also now experienced the greatest sexual pleasure of her life: 'It seems that Graffigny is acknowledging, at forty-eight, after one husband, the birth of three children, and a fifteen-year love affair, having experienced orgasm for the first time.'[45] The affair in which this occurred was short-lived, and reveals some ambivalence about her sense of the appropriateness of such passion at this age, but nevertheless confirms that a passionate sexual liaison was still possible for an unmarried, menopausal, woman in late middle age who was on the threshold of early older age.

Contemporary anxieties about continuing female desire and sexual activity in later years was likely also fuelled by the knowledge that, post-menopause, a woman was undoubtedly no longer able to conceive. This was perhaps not quite such a concern for married women, where marital conjugality was encouraged as a contented marriage was one that functioned optimally for the benefit of families, communities, and, ultimately, the state. Although women in the upper reaches of society, like Graffigny, were perhaps able to carry on a discreet sexual liaison without fear of social retribution, widows and other single women further down the social scale were objects of moral scrutiny whose behaviour was likely to be gossiped about and condemned, even if no longer likely to bear a child out of wedlock and so be subject to penalties for illegitimacy. Janine Lanza, though, draws attention to the idea that women over sixty were thought to be beyond desire as, in her discussion of religious teachings about expectations for widows, she notes that, 'only widowed women over the age

of sixty who had been married once could be part of the the religious community.'[46] In contrast, younger widows should seek re-marriage to contain their lascivious behaviour.

***

It is particularly difficult to get at exactly *how* men and women engaged in sex in the early modern period. The reproductive imperative identified in contemporary moral, religious, and medical writing and the strenuous condemnation of sexual practices other than face-to-face penetrative intercourse, with the man on top to reinforce messages about patriarchal dominance, tend to obscure how far such strictures were ignored or deliberately contravened. Samuel Pepys in 1660s London clearly indulged, and was greatly delighted by other acts, such as intimate touching (with his wife and with other women) as well as sex from behind: 'and so to Mrs Martin and there did what je voudrais avec her, both devante and backward, which is also muy bon plazer.'[47] Here, however, he only records his own great pleasure with no indication of whether or not this was also to the great pleasure of Mrs Martin. The transgressive nature of such a position may have contributed greatly to the delight of both partners, but Pepys unfortunately does not tell us this. The very opacity of some writing about sex during this period, as Valerie Traub has pointed out, obscures the nature of early modern sex acts so that we should not assume that they are necessarily heterosexual and penetrative: it is not clear, for example, 'what *specific* sexual activity' is evoked by a metaphor such as 'ladling the pot'.[48]

Sexual encounters with prostitutes might allow engagement in different kinds of sexual acts than those thought appropriate to the marriage bed and the purposes of producing children.[49] Satirical literature about what particular prostitutes might offer to their clients – or

be asked by a customer to perform – indicates that other kinds of sex were certainly imagined, particularly in the context of illicit, extra-marital, sexual encounters. In pamphlets printed in London in the 1660s on the theme of 'the wandring whore', in imitation of continental literature, various acts are mentioned including the desire for anal sex:

> … who will not be contented with doing the business, but will have half a dozen Girles stand stark naked round about a Table, whilst he lyes snarling underneath as if he would bite off their whibb-bobs, and eat them for his pains; another will needs shite in one of our wenches mouth's (which is odd lechery) another who has brought rods in his pockets for that purpose, will needs be whip't to raise lechery and cause a standing P---- which has no understanding at all, and would quickly cool my courage; a fourth would fayn be buggering some of our wenches, if the Matron could get their consent, but had rather be dealing with smooth-fac'd Prentices.[50]

The original Italian dialogue, *La Puttana errante*, includes reference to sexual encounters between women.[51] Other pornographic representations, both written and pictorial, document sexual positions and acts, including sodomy between both men and other men and men and women, group sex, oral sex, and masturbation using dildoes.[52] While presenting such transgressive acts as those more likely to be found enacted in illicit, extra-marital environments, may have been thought appropriate to those situations, and because knowledge of sex was within the purview of those who sold it, we should not assume that these were the only contexts in which they took place in actuality. Diane Wolfthal also notes how during carnival in Renaissance Italy men sang ribald songs inviting women 'through double entendres to engage in sex from the rear, or *pentolini*, when they are menstruating' and notes that 'anal intercourse between men and their wives, servants, slaves and prostitutes is documented at this time in both Venice and Florence.'[53] Anal sex between men and women

was also represented in seventeenth-century French pornography, albeit transposed to an Italian setting and purporting to be the writing of a Spanish woman.[54]

Although the formalisation of marriage and the confinement of sexual relations within it was the ideal in western European societies, it has been shown that such clear boundaries between marital and non-marital unions were not always completely clear. Lower down the social scale a promise to marry might be taken as the cue for the union to be cemented by sexual intercourse, with illegitimate births occurring when such promises were not then made good. Recently Cecilia Cristellon has argued for Renaissance Italy that formal marriage and illicit relatonships should not be so clearly divided: she argues that records of matrimonial trials between 1420 and 1545 show that there was 'a commonly held, shared understanding of marriage that includes premarital relations between the betrothed (*sponsi*), allows for bigamy later on, and has space for adultery, concubinage and similar paramatrimonial relationships' at all levels of Venetian society.[55] Women who bore children out of wedlock were often punished harshly by public whipping or other shaming rituals. They could be forced to name the father of their child by the withholding of help during labour as parishes were reluctant to bear the costs of support for both mother and infant. Unmarried women's sexual behaviour and its regulation was of public concern not only for moral reasons but also because there were economic and financial consequences for families and communities.

Similarly, concerns about and regulation of prostitution, including through various rules for clothing, were not only to do with morals but also public order as it was perceived to be connected with other criminal and disorderly behaviours such as theft, drunkenness, violence, and the spread of disease as, particularly in urban areas, the pox became rife and, in the early part of this period, extremely virulent.[56] Although there is little specific information about individuals who engaged in prostitution during this period, it seems that most were

girls who had reached sexual maturity and were usually in their later teens and twenties. Rossiaud concluded from his sample of prostitutes in Dijon between 1440 and 1540 that most girls entered the trade around the age of seventeen, although a third had done so before they had reached fifteen.[57] Leah Lydia Otis references Rossiaud for the ages of prostitutes in her study of prostitution in the Languedoc, but adds (in a footnote) a reference to a fictional account of the response of a courtesan heroine of a 1524 romance to a question about the length of a prostitute's working life as beginning at the age of twelve.[58] Lyndal Roper mentions only that prostitutes in the brothel in sixteenth-century Augsburg should be 'of age', implying that they should be sexually mature.[59] Ann Rosalind Jones discusses prostitution in Renaissance Venice specifically as an issue for 'young women' and 'young girls', with only a passing mention of women who may have been married or widowed.[60] Jones does not clarify the ages of these women, but implies that they were in their teens or early twenties, and unmarried. Tessa Storey is more precise in her study of prostitution in counter-reformation Rome, identifying two-thirds of a sample in the first two decades of the seventeenth century as under thirty years of age, and that, of a similar number from a single year mid-century, just under a third were under twenty, nearly half were aged between twenty-one and thirty years, with only around one-fifth aged over thirty.[61] Rossiaud's study implies that there was an absence of child prostitution, supported by his assertion that 'cases of pimping involving girls between twelve and fourteen were prosecuted with exceptional dispatch and severity'.[62] Storey, like Tony Henderson for eighteenth-century England, argues that there is little evidence of child prostitution.[63]

There seems to be a consensus that prostitution rarely continued into middle and older age. Rossiaud concludes that women moved on after the age of thirty, either continuing in the trade as 'abbesses and managers of bathhouses', occasionally, if possible, retiring to 'a cloistered retreat in an institution for penitent prostitutes'. A few fell into a life of itinerant

poverty and begging for a living, some became servants, while most married, indicating that selling sex did not always relegate a woman to the margins of society for the rest of her life, at least in some parts of Europe.[64] Otis states only that 'there was little demand for elderly prostitutes, and by middle age, if she lived so long, the public woman was obliged to retire, if not to repent', while her example from fiction indicated the end of a woman's working life as a prostitute came at forty.[65] Storey's study of Rome in the seventeenth century also indicates that few women continued to sell sex into middle and older age. However, some small evidence from German witchcraft trials suggests that poor women over the ages of thirty and forty may have engaged in prostitution to support themselves, even into their sixties.[66] Representations of older prostitutes were, like those of sexually active older women more generally, highly negative. Patrizia Bettella noted that that they were characterised in disgusting and 'grotesque' terms: their moral corruption is 'represented in descriptions of bodily deformity, decay, and old age.'[67]

Ann Rosalind Jones focuses on contemporary discourses around why women entered the sex trade rather than on what this may have meant for their experiences of sex, even though they were invariably at the mercy of those who tricked or coerced them into prostitution, including mothers seeking to improve a family economic situation. For such women sex took place in the context of absence of control or choice of sexual partner, the threat of poverty and economic destitution, violence at the hands of pimps and/or clients, and of disease, both sexual and in spreading plague. Although prostitution is more associated with urban living where circumstances enabled it to flourish, it was never confined only to towns and cities. Rossiaud has noted that 'rural prostitution flourished as well' in fifteenth-century southeastern France, including 'roaming harlots' who took their trade to villages, working alone or in groups with or without a pimp, adapting their working life to the calendar of fairs, markets, pilgrimages and the agricultural season.[68] In towns, women engaged in

prostitution on the streets or in brothels where at this time and in this region, as in other areas of continental Europe, prostitution became institutionalised during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[69] Prostitutes might display themselves at windows and doors to attract customers, but Diane Wolfthal has noted that in renaissance Italy these were also sites for legitimate courtship where young men might serenade a prospective bride. [70] In these circumstances distinctive clothing may have acted as a signifier of sexual availability or of respectability. Bathhouses were also common sites for prostitution, and although frequently shut down to control the spread of disease, particularly outbreaks of plague, the association of baths with flourishing prostitution continued into the seventeenth century with the development of spa towns which attracted the wealthy and fashionable to take the waters.[71]

For medical men theorising and writing about venereal disease, authors of other literary and popular publications, as well as for women themselves who offered sex in exchange for money or goods, and the men who sought out the trade in sex, prostitution brought the real risk of infection with unpleasant symptoms and long-term deleterious effects on health and appearance. The disease that eventually became called syphilis broke out in Europe in 1494 with the return of sailors from the Americas, and rapidly spread.[72] Because it was associated with immorality and prostitution, affecting the sexual parts of the body, venereal disease – referred to as *lues venerea*, the pox or variously attributed to other nations such as the French or Spanish disease – was perceived as shameful.[73] Kevin Siena has argued that 'the suspicion of venereal taint could be enough to thwart young people's marriage prospects'; it could also affect their employment bringing the suspicion of immorality on a household, and might even lead to suicide.[74] This new, virulent, and lethal disease was initially attributed to a number of causes, including astrological and as an indication of God's wrath at human sinfulness, but a theory emerged in the sixteenth century that it came from the corrupt and venomous mixture of many men's seed in the womb, and hence from female

promiscuity. Ideas about origins in the hotter climates of other countries and continents, female promiscuity, and the pollution of menstruation, merged in the eighteenth century to explain the pox as transmitted by the over-heated wombs of menstruating native women which caused seed from frequent and indiscriminate copulation to putrefy and generate disease.[75]

The symptoms of pox, which encompassed infections that we now understand as different diseases such as gonorrhoea, included: discharge from the genitals which might be whitish-grey, yellowish or green depending on the infection, and foul-smelling; sores or ulcers; a rash; muscle aches and pain in the bones; fatigue; and eventually, in the final stages, facial disfigurement as the nose and palate collapsed, loss of hair, madness, and finally, death. [76] Treatments, particularly those involving mercury, brought their own very nasty side effects that might be as bad, or worse, than the disease itself, so that sufferers might avoid treatment, especially if believing themselves cured when the initial symptoms abated. Venereal disease did not, of course, only affect prostitutes: men infected their wives who, in turn, might pass it on to their infants at birth. There was also considerable anxiety about wet-nurses transmitting it to the infants they nursed and advice in midwifery books about choosing a suitable wet-nurse included that she should be healthy, and have a healthy appearance. While English medical practitioners promised discretion for their clients, and some advertised treatment by a woman for female clients whose modesty might prevent them from seeking diagnosis through examination of the intimate parts of the body, Catholic parts of Europe do not seem to have been so concerned about secrecy.[77]

Infection with venereal disease was also one of the potential further consequences of rape and sexual assault, but particularly for very young girls, those around or under the age of puberty. Sexual violence was committed against girls and women of all ages. Evidence from trials for rapes and sexual assault from the Old Bailey in London in the late seventeenth- and

eighteenth-centuries shows that being a very young infant or girl or an old woman was no protection against sexual assault and rape. The youngest female child recorded as a victim of rape was aged  two years old (two girls, Eleanor Clay in 1738 and Ann Radford in 1774) and the oldest, Sibila May, was 'about eighty years old'.[78] Of 306 trials for rape and assault with intent to rape between 1674 and 1799, just over half (51 per cent) are for assaults on girls aged fourteen and under; of these, the majority (just under 83 per cent) are of girls aged under twelve. Half of these girls were diagnosed as suffering from a venereal disease or genital discharge whose nature was unconfirmed and which was frequently discovered through staining of linen undergarments.[79] There is some evidence that the relatively high incidence of venereal infection among younger girls who had been sexually assaulted confirms the contemporary idea that sex with a virgin would provide a cure for a very unpleasant disease.[80] In most areas 'Child rape formed the largest category formally prosecuted, had the highest conviction rate, and resulted in the severest sentences.'[81] However, Rossiaud's discussion of the incidence of collective rape included noting that the victims of such rapes 'were usually between fifteen and thirty-three years old' and that 'Rape of little girls was unusual' but rape of a girl under the age of fourteen or fifteen was perceived as a 'serious crime'.[82] Women were at risk of rape throughout the life cycle and being very young or very old did not exempt a woman from the possibility; even though prosecutions for rape form only a tiny proportion of prosecuted crime in early modern Europe, it was undoubtedly very under-reported. Social rank and status affected prosecutions for rape in different parts of Europe: abduction was associated with rape as it involved forced marriage and/or clandestine marriage (and consummation), frequently involving higher class women, especially in places such as Dijon and Venice. However, in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, other places in France, Italy and Spain saw the incidence of gang rapes of prostitutes or other women.[83] Prosecutions for rape at the Old Bailey in London in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries involved

mainly girls and women from the servant and arisanal classes; it is likely that those from higher classes did not bring prosecutions to avoid the damage to familial reputation that such a public airing of loss of sexual chastity would bring.[84]

Sex outside the bonds of marriage does not just encompass fornication and adultery or prostitution, but also sex between women. It is impossible to know the extent to which women may have actually engaged in sexual activities with each other, nor how far these were a consequence of a preference for sexual relations with a female partner, but contemporary representations in a variety of different sources from high to popular culture indicates that it was not unknown at all levels of society. This was also not a kind of sexual activity that was restricted to female-only communities such as convents in Catholic areas of Europe, although erotic and satirical literature often represented it as endemic to such spaces.[85] There is also evidence from Inquisition records that sex between nuns was not simply imagined as a variety of erotic activity that would take place to assuage female lust – imagined by contemporaries as greater than men's and difficult to satisfy - in the absence of men and legitimate marriage. Judith Brown has drawn our attention to the case of Sister Benedetta Carlini who engaged in sexual acts with another nun in the persona of a male angel, Splendidiello.[86] Sexual behaviour here seems to have been imagined in the context of sex between men and women rather than as an erotic encounter between women. Women who engaged in erotic relationships with other women were often imagined, or explained, as doing so as a consequence of hermaphroditism or 'double gender' where the possession of a male sexual organ, or an enlarged clitoris, might allow a woman to engage in penetrative sexual intercourse with other women. Medical writers also described the development of clitoral hypertrophy as a consequence of sex with women whereby repeated rubbing or 'misuse' of the clitoris might encourage it grow to such a length that further enabled such sexual activity.[87]

Although the use of dildos or an artificial phallus/prosthetic device was often represented as something to be used between women so that a woman might take the man's part in the act of penetrative intercourse, it was also acknowledged that they might be used by women alone, for their own pleasure.[88] The use of such 'instruments' between women on the continent could be a dangerous activity if apprehended. In Germany, in 1721, Catharina Margaretha Linck was sentenced to death for having married and repeatedly engaged in sexual intercourse using a leather imitation penis with Catharina Margaretha Mühlhahn which she was also accused of having put in her mouth.[89] Elsewhere in Europe sexual acts between women also could be prosecuted as sodomy and conviction could lead to execution, although in England they escaped the attention of the law unless attracting attention for other crimes such as fraud or impersonation.[90] As Simons points out, most historical accounts are of women who supplemented their bodies in order to add verisimilitude to their cross-dressing as men; Catharina Linck was reported as having used a leather dildo when she was passing as a soldier.[91] Accounts of women having sex with other women in literature more often represented them as preparation for the more satisfying intercourse with a husband or lover, while paradoxically nevertheless resulting in orgasm. Rubbing of a woman to produce orgasm could also be justified as a remedy for retention of seed which was understood as dangerous to a woman's health, and medical and midwifery books repeated this idea, suggesting that this was something that a skilled midwife might do, but sometimes with the comment that it was not acceptable.

## Conclusion

Women's sexual lives and encounters were shaped by and experienced in the context of their particular stage of life and hence their relationships to a number of factors, including their physical development, marital status, prior experience of sex, fertility and childbearing,

and their economic and social circumstances (class, wealth and employment status). Sexual experiences were not only influenced by a woman's age and physical condition, but also by the nature and quality of her personal, emotional, relationships, or the absence thereof if engaged in the sex trade, whether by force or economic circumstances. Although medical, religious, and other prescriptive literature, as well as other forms of regulation, set strict limits to the legitimate and 'proper' expression of female sexual desires and behaviours, evidence nevertheless reveals that women did not always adhere to these, whether through personal choice or force of circumstance. While many women's experiences of sex were negative, whether married or unmarried, young or old, many others clearly enjoyed good sexual relationships even if, like Francoise de Graffigny, the full pleasures of sex were encountered only later in life, and not always within marriage, despite overwhelmingly negative contemporary social and cultural constructions of the ageing female body as neither sexually desirable nor physically suitable for the sexual act.

---

[1] See, for example, Aki C. L. Beam, '"Should I as Yet Call You Old?" Testing the Boundaries of Female Old Age in Early Modern England', in Erin Campbell (ed.) *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe: Cultural Representations*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, 95-116, pp. 98-101, 113; Erin J. Campbell, '"Unenduring" Beauty: Gender and Old Age in Early Modern Art and Aesthetics', in Campbell, *Growing Old*, 153-167, pp. 157-9; Anne Kugler, '"I feel myself decay apace": Old age in the diary of Lady Sarah Cowper (1644-1720)' in Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane (eds) *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500*, Harlow: Longman, 2001, 66-88, pp. 67-8; Hilda L. Smith, '"Aging": A Problematic Concept for Women', *Journal of Women's History*, 2001, 12, 77-86.

[2] Campbell, '"Unenduring" Beauty', p. 158.

[3] See, for example, essays in Allison Levy (ed.) *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2003; Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner (eds) *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Harlow: Longman, 1999.

[4] Janine M. Lanza, *From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris: Gender, Economy, and Law*, Aldershot and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2007, p. 4.

[5] Patricia Crawford, 'Sexual Knowledge in England, 1500-1750' in Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (eds) *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 82-106, p. 83.

[6] On contraception see John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992; John M. Riddle, *Eve's Herbs: A History of Contraception and Abortion in the West*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997; Patricia Crawford, 'Sexual Knowledge in England', p. 99.

[7] Jacques Rossiaud, 'Prostitution, Youth, and Society in the Towns of Southeastern France in the Fifteenth Century' in Robert Forster and Orest Ranum (eds) *Deviants and the Abandoned in French Society: Selections from the Annales Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, Vol. 4, trans Elborg Forster and Patricia M. Ranum, Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, 1-46, p. 9.

[8] Katherine Crawford, *European Sexualities, 1400-1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 22.

[9] Crawford, *European Sexualities*, p. 23.

[10] Sarah Toulalan, '"Unripe" bodies: children and sex in early modern England' in Kate Fisher and Sarah Toulalan (eds), *Bodies, Sex and Desire from the Renaissance to the Present*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011, 131-50, pp. 136-9.

[11] See my detailed discussion of these changes in '"Age to great, or to little, doeth let conception": Bodies, sex and the life cycle, 1500-1750' in Sarah Toulalan and Kate Fisher (eds) *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body 1500 to the Present*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013, 279-95, esp. pp. 284-8.

[12] Thomas Gibson, *The Anatomy of Humane Bodies Epitomized. Wherein all the Parts of Man's Body, with their Actions and Uses are Succinctly Described, According to the Newest Doctrine of the Most Accurate and Learned Modern* Anatomists, London: M. Flesher for T. Flesher, p. 155.

[13] See my discussions in: '"Unripe" bodies: children and sex in early modern England'; 'Child sexual abuse in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century London: rape, sexual assault and the denial of agency' in Nigel Goose and Katrina Honeyman (eds) *Children and Childhood in Industrial England: Diversity and Agency, 1650-1900*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, 23-44; and 'Child victims of rape and sexual assault: compromised chastity,

marginalised lives?' in Andrew Spicer and Jane L. Stevens Crawshaw (eds) *The Place of the Social Margins, 1350-1750*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2017, 181-202.

[14] Susan Broomhall, '"Women's Little Secrets": Defining the Boundaries of Reproductive Knowledge in Sixteenth-Century France', *Social History of Medicine*, 15:1 2002, 1-15.

[15] See, for example, such concerns recorded by Sir Simonds D'Ewes in J.O. Halliwell (ed.) *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Sir Simonds D'Ewes, Bart during the reigns of James I and Charles I*, London: Richard Bentley, 1845, Vol. I, October 1626, p. 319.

[16] See Magdalena S. Sánchez; ' "I would not feel the pain if I were with you": Catalina Micaela and the Cycle of Pregnancy at the Court of Turin, 1585–1597', *Social History of Medicine*, 28:3, 2015, 445–64, p. 455. Patricia Crawford cites changing guidance in Justices' handbooks in the early eighteenth century as demonstrating a shift away from the belief that rape could be discounted if pregnancy occurred: see Crawford, 'Sexual Knowledge in England, 1500-1750', pp. 87-8.

[17] This understanding is apparent in European medical writing throughout the period 1450-1750; see, for example, Margaret Schleissner, 'A Fifteenth-Century Physician's Attitude Toward Sexuality: Dr. Johann Hartlieb's *Secreta Mulierum* Translation', in Joyce E. Salisbury (ed.) *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991, 110-25, p. 117.

[18] See, for example, Anon., *Aristotele's Master-Piece, Or the Secrets of Generation Display'd in all the Parts Thereof*, London: J. How, 1684, pp. 48-9. On menstruation see Cathy McClive, *Menstruation and Procreation in Early Modern France*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014 and Sara Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

[19] HL, Hastings MS HA 12503 (1672); cited in Linda A. Pollock, 'Embarking on a rough passage: the experience of pregnancy in early-modern society' in Valerie Fildes (ed.) *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990, 39-67.

[20] Anon., *The Case of Sodomy, In The Tryal of Mervin Lord Audley, Earl of Castlehaven, For Committing a Rape. And sodomy with two of his Servants, viz. (Laurence Fitz Patrick and Thomas Brodway) who was Try'd and Condemn'd by his Peers on the 25th of April, and Beheaded on Tower-Hill, May 14th,* 1631, London: n.p., 1708, unpaginated.

[21] Patricia Simons, 'The cultural history of "Seigneur Dildoe"' in Allison Levy (ed.) *Sex Acts in Early Modern Italy: Practice, Performance, Perversion, Punishment*, Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010, 77-91, p. 86.

[22] For an excellent discussion of these events see Cynthia Herrup, *A House in Gross Disorder: Sex, Law, and the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven (Sex, Law, and the Second Earl of Castlehaven)*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

[23] Ambroise Paré, *Of the Generation of Man*, in *The Works of Ambrose Parey*, trans. Thomas Johnson, London: Jos. Hindmarsh, 1691 [1573]), p. 86; Lazare Rivière (Lazarus Riverius), *The Practice of Physick Physick in seventeen several books wherein is plainly set forth the nature, cause, differences, and several sorts of signs: together with the cure of all diseases in the body of man*, trans. Nicholas Culpeper, Abdiah Cole and William Rowlands, London: Peter Cole, 1655 [1640], p. 503.

[24] Kugler, '"I feel myself decay apace"', p. 72.

[25] Kugler, '"I feel myself decay apace"', pp. 67-8, 72.

[26] See Sarah Toulalan, '"Elderly years cause a Total dispaire of Conception": old age and infertility in early modern England', *Social History of Medicine*, 29:2, 2016, 333-59.

[27] Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003, p.114; Leanne McTavish, 'Reproduction, c.1500-1750', in Toulalan and Fisher, *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body*, 351-71, pp. 352-4.

[28] McTavish, 'Reproduction, c.1500-1750', p. 353; Gowing, *Common Bodies*, pp. 71-3.

[29] William Salmon, *Aristotle's Compleat and Experience'd Midwife*, London: n.p., 1700, p. 133. See my discussions in ''If slendernesse be the cause of unfruitfulnesse; you must nourish and fatten the body': thin bodies and infertility in early modern England', in Gayle Davis and Tracey Loughran (eds), *A Handbook of Infertility in History: Approaches, Contexts and Perspectives*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 171-97; 'Unfit for Generation: body size and reproduction' in Raymond Stephanson and Darren Wagner (eds) *The Secrets of Generation: Reproduction in the Long Eighteenth Century*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015, 299-318; ''To[o] much eating stifles the child': fat bodies and reproduction in early modern England', *Historical Research*, 87:235, 2014, 65-93.

[30] Levinus Lemnius, *The Secret Miracles of Nature: In Four Books*, London: Jo Streeter, 1658 [1559], p. 9.

[31] Daphna Oren-Magidor, 'From Anne to Hannah: Religious Views of Infertility in Post-Reformation England', *Journal of Women's History*, 27, 2015, 86–108.

[32] For a thorough discussion of fertility and infertility see Jennifer Evans, *Aphrodisiacs, Fertility and Medicine in Early Modern England*, Woodbridge: RHS The Boydell Press, 2014, especially chapter two.

[33] See Anon., *A Complete Collection of State-Trials, and Proceedings for High-Treason, and Other Crimes and Misdemenours*, London: T. Wright for C. Bathurst, 1776, p. 315.

[34] Francis Mauriceau, *The Diseases Of Women with Child, And in Child-bed*, trans. Hugh Chamberlen, London: John Darby,1683 [Paris: Henault, 1668], pp. 23-4.

[35] See Toulalan, '"Elderly years"', pp. 347-53.

[36] Cathy McClive, 'The Hidden Truths of the Belly: The Uncertainties of Pregnancy in Early Modern Europe', *Social History of Medicine*, 15:2, 2002, 209-27.

[37] Sánchez; '"I would not feel the pain if I were with you"', pp. 449-54.

[38] On impediments to sex caused by bodies that were judged to be fat see Toulalan, '''To[o] much eating stifles the child"'.

[39] Leah Astbury, 'Being Well, Looking Ill: Childbirth and the Return to Health in Seventeenth-century England', *Social History of Medicine*, 30:3, 2017, 500–19.

[40] See Guillaume Mauquest de la Motte, *A General Treatise of Midwifry: Illustrated With Upwards of 400 Observations and Reflexions Concerning that Art*, trans. Thomas Tomkyns, London: James Waugh, 1746. For example, faecal incontinence following tearing from the vulva to the anus impeding marriage, observation 372, pp. 481-2.

[41] Kugler, '"I feel myself decay apace"', p. 72; Joan Hinde Stewart, *The Enlightenment of Age: Women, Letters and Growing Old in Eighteenth-century France*, Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010, p. 82.

[42] Anne Kugler, 'Constructing Wifely Identity: Prescription and Practice in the Life of Lady Sarah Cowper', *Journal of British Studies*, 40:3, 2001, 291-323, pp. 313-18.

[43] See, for example, Sánchez, '"I would not feel the pain if I were with you"'; Caroline Castiglione, 'Peasants at the Palace: Wet Nurses and Aristocratic Mothers in Early Modern Rome' in Jutta Gisela Sperling (ed.) *Medieval and Renaissance Lactations: Images, Rhetorics, Practices*, New York and London: Routledge, 2016 [Ashgate, 2013], 79-100.

[44] Toulalan, '"Elderly years"'.

[45] Stewart, *The Enlightenment of Age*, p. 82.

[46] Lanza, *From Wives to Widows*, p. 55.

[47] Robert Latham and William Matthews (eds) *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, London: Bell & Hyman, 1970-83, 11 vols, vol. 7, p. 142, entry for 3 June 1666.

[48] Valerie Traub, *Thinking Sex With The Early Moderns*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, p. 183. See especially chapter seven.

[49] Crawford, *European Sexualities*, p. 199.

[50] Anon., *The Wandring Whore Continued: A Dialogue Between Magdalena a Crafty Bawd, Julietta an Exquisite Whore, Francion a Lascivious Gallant, And Gusman a Pimping Hector*, London: n.p., 1660, p. 9.

[51] Ian Frederick Moulton, 'Erotic Representation, 1500-1750', in Toulalan and Fisher, *The Routledge History of Sex and the* Body, 207-22, p. 213.

[52] Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999; Melissa J. Jones, 'Spectacular Impotence: Or, Things That Hardly Ever Happen in the Critical History of Pornography' in James Bromley and Will Stockton (eds) *Sex Before Sex: Figuring the Act in Early Modern England*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013, 89-110.

[53] Diane Wolfthal, 'The woman in the window: licit and illicit sexual desire in Renaissance Italy' in Levy, *Sex Acts in Early Modern Italy*, 57-75, p. 69.

[54] Sarah Toulalan, *Imagining Sex: Pornography and Bodies in Seventeenth-Century England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, chapter 4.

[55] Cecilia Cristellon, 'Public display of affection: the making of marriage in the Venetian courts before the Council of Trent (1420-1545)' in Sara F. Matthews-Grieco (ed.) *Erotic Cultures of Renaissance Italy*, Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010, 173-97, p. 174.

[56] On regulating prostitutes' dress see Kathryn Norberg, 'Prostitutes' in Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge (eds) *A History of Women in the West: Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes,* Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press, 1993, 458-74.

[57] Jacques Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988 [1984]), pp. 32-4.

[58] Leah Lydia Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society: The History of an Urban Institution in Languedoc*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, p. 72. In the footnote she adds that Rossiaud showed 'that most active prostitutes in Dijon were in their teens or twenties' as well as the fictional reference: fn 94, p. 193.

[59] Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 91.

[60] Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Prostitution in Cinquecento Venice: prevention and protest', in Levy, *Sex Acts in Early Modern Italy*, 43-56, pp. 43-5.

[61] Tessa Storey, *Carnal Commerce in Counter-Reformation Rome*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 127. Storey states that 'The majority of prostitutes were aged between sixteen and twenty-five', p. 17.

[62] Rossiaud, 'Prostitution, Youth, and Society', p. 16.

[63] Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, p. 17; Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis, 1730-1830*, London: Longman, 1999.

[64] Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution,* p. 36.

[65] Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society*, p. 72. In the footnote she adds that Rossiaud showed 'that most active prostitutes in Dijon were in their teens or twenties' and that the fictional courtesan categorised a prostitute's working life as 'From twelve to forty': fn 94, p. 193.

[66] See Jonathan Durrant, *Witchcraft, Gender and Society in Early Modern Germany*, Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007, http://0-www.jstor.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w76wh1,168-71.

[67] Patrizia Bettella, 'The Marked Body as Otherness in Renaissance Italian Culture' in Linda Kalof and Wiliam Bynum (eds), *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Renaissance*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2010, 149-81, pp. 150-1.

[68] Rossiaud, 'Prostitution, Youth, and Society', p. 2.

[69] Otis, *Prostitution in Medieval Society*, p. 39.

[70] Wolfthal, 'The woman in the window'.

[71] See Otis for closures in the Languedoc due to plague and contagion, p. 41. However, Otis argues that the closure of brothels in the southern part of France from the mid-sixteenth century was not a reaction to the coming of the pox, as the closures did not coincide with when the disease first arrived and was most virulent.

[72] Kevin Siena provides an excellent overview of the disease and the problems of origins and terminology in '"The Venereal Disease", 1500-1800' in Toulalan and Fisher, *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body*, 463-78.

[73] There is now a substantial literature on venereal disease; see, for example: Cristian Berco, *From body to community: venereal disease and society in Baroque Spain*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015; Laura J. McGough, *Gender, Sexuality, and syphilis in Early Modern Venice: The Disease that Came to Stay*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011; Kevin Siena (ed.) *Sins of the flesh: responding to sexual disease in early modern Europe*, Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2005.

[74] Kevin P. Siena, *Venereal Disease, Hospitals and the Urban Poor: London's 'Foul Wards', 1600-1800*, Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004, pp. 36-40; see also Kevin Siena, 'Suicide as an Illness Strategy in the Long Eighteenth Century' in John Weaver and David Wright (eds) *Histories of Suicide: International Perspectives on Self-Destruction in the Modern World*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, 53-72.

[75] Siena, '"The Venereal Disease"', pp. 466-7.

[76] Cristian Berco argues that it became associated with deformity: see Berco, 'The Great Pox, Symptoms, and Social Bodies in Early Modern Spain', *Social History of Medicine*, 28:2, 2015, 225–44, esp. pp. 229-30.

[77] Siena, '"The Venereal Disease"', p. 472.

[78] *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 25 April 2018), April 1738, trial of George Manning (t17380412-56); July 1774, trial of Richard Freelove (t17740706-57). Report of the trial for the rape of Sybila May 'a woman of about eighty years old'; *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 8.0, 25 April 2018), October 1683, trial of William Williams (t16831010a-11).

[79] Toulalan, 'Child Victims of Rape and Sexual Assault'.

[80] Siena, *Venereal Disease, Hospitals and the Urban Poor*, p. 193; Sarah Toulalan, '"Is He a Licentious Lewd Sort of a Person?": Constructing the Child Rapist in Early Modern England', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 23:1, 201, 21-52.

[81] Garthine Walker, 'Sexual Violence and Rape, 1500-1750' in Toulalan and Fisher, *the Routledge History of Sex and the Body*, 429-43, p. 436.

[82] Rossiaud, 'Prostitution, Youth, and Society', p. 16.

[83] Walker, 'Sexual Violence and Rape', pp. 431-2.

[84] See my discussion in 'Child victims of rape and sexual assault'.

[85] Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, pp. 111, 142-3.

[86] Judith C. Brown, 'Lesbian Sexuality in Renaissance Italy: The Case of Sister Benedetta Carlini', *Signs*, 9:4, 198, 751-58.

[87] Emma Donoghue, 'Imagined More than Women: Lesbians as Hermaphrodites, 1671-1766', *Women's History Review*, 2:2, 1993, 199-216.

[88] Simons, 'The cultural history of "Seigneur Dildoe"'.

[89] Brigitte Eriksson, 'A Lesbian Execution in Germany, 1721', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 6:1-2, 1981, 27-34.

[90] For an overview see Louis Crompton, 'The Myth of Lesbian Impunity Capital Laws from 1270 to 1791', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 6:1-2, 1981, 11-25.

[91] Simons, 'The cultural history of "Seigneur Dildoe"', p. 84; Eriksson, 'A Lesbian Execution in Germany, 1721', p. 31.