Analysing Expectations Around Sexual Agency for Women in England during the long Eighteenth Century

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is their own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

With thanks to Liz, Gary, and Jim for being the best supervisors a student could ask for, and to Mum, Dad, and Jay for always supporting me.

Abstract

The long eighteenth century has been called a sexual revolution due to a perceived change in practices and a loosening of conservative medieval ideals. However, when examining the guidance given to young women, recommendations were still traditional in their expectations of purity and reputational upholding. This thesis will examine society's view of the ideal woman through conduct literature (along with pornography and some other published texts demonstrating real and fictive women) to analyse how much sexual agency women were expected to have during this time, to counter the idea that this period was the birth of a modern mindset of sexuality. In reality, expectations were that while sex was to be enjoyable, it was still a duty to a husband only to be performed by married women, and should be seen as a necessary rather than desirable task for reproduction or marital upkeep. Female sexual agency in this period was desired by society to be moderated carefully, through adolescence and even into choice of partner and the life of the marriage.

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Introduction

I will be answering to what extent women were expected to have sexual agency during the Enlightenment. This study will first examine how much agency women were expected to have during the act of sex itself; whether they were encouraged to seek and experience pleasure, to ask for what they wanted, and whether their ability to say no to sexual acts and ability to control the consequences of sex (pregnancy) were supported. I will then examine the levels of agency women were supposed to have when they were unwed; whether pre-marital sex was shamed or accepted, and whether they were able to be seen as sexual beings. Lastly, I will examine marriage as a part of sexual life; how much choice women were expected to have in choosing a husband (which is ultimately who you would be having sex with for a long time), and once married how much agency they were given in the marital bed, and indeed in who shared or strayed from it. This is an important area to examine as whilst the history of sexuality has grown as a field, it has focussed primarily on either wider picture views or on very narrow studies of individual texts, rather than exploring sexual experience, particularly from an autonomous female perspective.

The history of sex has become a booming field over the last ten years, with large compilations such as *Kate Lister's A Curious History of Sex* (2020) (Lister, 2020), or Fern Riddell's *Sex: Lessons From History* (2021) (Riddell, 2021) reaching commercial success along with earlier more specific examinations such as Mary Roach's *Bonk: The Curious Coupling of Sex and Science* (2008) (Roach, 2008). When looking at history shelves in any major bookstore, one can see sex history as a new passion area of the public, along with texts on more traditionally popular focuses such as World War 2, or more exciting subjects such as Witchcraft (which one may arguably count as sex-adjacent).[1] Within the strictly academic world we can see the same trend. Focussing on the Early Modern Period, scholars of many specialities have been exploring sexuality though various but scattered studies.

Many of these studies have taken on a narrow aspect of sex, with particular emphasis on either the aristocracy or politics, and often as smaller parts of wider studies. For example, *Sex, Money & Personal Character in Eighteenth-Century British Politics* by Marilyn Morris (2014) is a very comprehensive in-depth look at the growth of personal politics and the growing interest in the private lives of those in power, but despite the title sex is only a very small part of the study (Morris, 2014). Additionally, there has also almost been an over-saturation of scholars examining erotica not from a sexual angle but a political one, using the sexual metaphors in pamphlets during the Civil War and Restoration as a tool to examine questions on the levels of anti-Catholic sentiment or views on Royalty.[2] Together,

[1] Witchcraft was often very sexualised; the basic view was that it was women who had had sex with the Devil, and so many images and stereotypes around Witches were based on ideas of promiscuity, and was connected to ideas of bestiality and monstrous births. See '
Harmes, M. & Bladen, V., 2016. *Supernatural and Secular Power in Early Modern England.* London: Routledge'. and 'Millar, C.-R., 2019. The Devil and Familiar Spirits in English Witchcraft. In: D. Oldridge, ed. *The Witchcraft Reader.* 3rd ed. London: Routledge.'

[2] See publications such as '

these studies begin to remove the study of sex from the stigmas of sexuality and even the study of sex itself, instead opting to see sex as merely a tool or angle towards more conventional areas of academia. This follows the trends of early historiography of women and gender, and follows many of the patterns of marginalised topics being added to fields via conventional topics. Whilst I would never criticise the embracing of sex history, it does leave somewhat of a dearth of studies exploring sexual experience.

However, there are still many studies where sex and sexuality history are at the forefront. One topic which often leads to more comprehensive studies on sex is the exploration of the shaping of gender, which is something which historians have been interested in since the feminist boom in the 1990s, and many of these studies have focussed on the Enlightenment as a time of great change in views on gender and gender roles, especially owing to scientific progression on understanding biological sex. This discussion often begins with the ideas of Keith Thomas in his paper *The Double Standard*, published in 1959. This article essentially just poses questions that Thomas believed to be unexplored, ultimately answering the questions of whether there was a double standard in the sexual expectations of men and women in the Early Modern Period, and whether the assumption of one was justified. His conclusions are that female sexuality was treated as a male possession, and therefore an expression of that sexuality was a bigger issue (and more of a property issue) than male expressions of the same (Thomas, 1959). Since this article, many people have countered or deepened this hypothesis. Notable cases include Bernard Capp in 1999 who explored the ways that this double standard empowered some women to fight against abusive men, their situations (often unwanted pregnancy), or just to make money (Capp, 1999). Others have explored the biological beliefs held at this time and their effects, such as Karen Harvey in her book *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century* (2004), which explores beliefs around the different temperature of men and women, and how different senses were represented in erotic scenes due to ideas around bodily fluids and stigma around oral sex (Harvey, 2008).[3] However, whilst these studies are incredibly valuable, they often hypothesise around a very abstract idea of gender and women, with limited regard for real or even fictive women. Additionally, as they are focussing on the abstract, the agency of women or even men rarely comes through as a practice, as it is the reading of ideas happening to bodies rather than the bodies themselves.

When it comes to examining individuals directly through real-life case studies and statistics, many historians have taken a very progressivist approach, similar to more general views on the Enlightenment, but often with a much more liberal view of the period than studies on politics or work. In 2013 Faramerz Dabhoiwala summarised what many historians had

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Purkiss, D., 2005. *Literature, Gender and Politics During the English Civil War.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.' and Weil, R., 1993. Sometimes a Scepter is Only a Scepter: Pornography and Politics in Restoration England. In: L. Hunt, ed. *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800.* New York: Zone Books, pp. 124-153.

[3] This is a response to ‘
Laqueur, T., 1990. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.' which explores the one sex and two sex models and asserts that the body is a representation of gender rather than a foundation.

concluded, that the years between 1660 and 1800 marked the “First Sexual Revolution”, calling it “the birth of the modern mind-set” (Dabhoiwala, 2013, p. 2). This assertion is based on a lot of quantitative analysis of birth records and individual case studies from diaries or records of women in institutions, and shows the change across this century very well. However, the evidence he presents does somewhat counteract the idea that this was a modernising revolution, as particularly the chapters that focus on women explicitly, such as the examination of prostitute reform houses, instead shows a liberalisation of punishment but still negative (though changing) views of female sex workers (Dabhoiwala, 2013).

Dabhoiwala cited another influential historian who saw the Early Modern Period as a “momentous watershed”: Lawrence Stone (Dabhoiwala, 2013, p. 2). In one of his most central texts, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (1979), Stone concluded that this period was when modern ideas such as marriage for love and more liberal views on premarital sex emerged, albeit with a slower uptake by the aristocracy and lower classes (the latter being restricted to survival and the former being concerned with heirdom). Like Dabhoiwala, Stone creates his conclusions from primarily case studies and statistics, which draw upon court cases and parish marriage records (Stone, 1979). His conclusions are often sometimes wildly presumptive, and are clearly based heavily in personal bias of what he and the historical community believe this time to be like. For example, his summaries of why certain social classes embraced romantic love at different rates rests on harsh assumptions such as the idea that poor people were simply too busy to care about their families so did not idealise romantic marriage as much. However, ultimately the conclusions are that at least the middling sort had very progressive and modern ideas about families, marriage, and sexuality (Stone, 1979, pp. 407-428).

Some historians have also seen this revolution as specifically involving women, when they were able to pursue sexual pleasure freely for the first time. These studies are often focused on written pornography, which was a growing and international market. Manuela Mourão in her study on *The Representation of Female Desire in Early Modern Pornographic Texts, 1660-1745* (1999) concludes that many examples of Early Modern pornography are surprisingly non-patriarchal, not phallus-centric, and overall could be called feminist (Mourão, 1999). Katherine Crawford also mentions fictional female pursuits of pleasure in texts like *Fanny Hill* not being shocking (Crawford, 2014, p. 211), and Bridgit Orr discusses strong and liberated female sexual figures in her chapter ‘Whore’s Rhetoric and the Maps of Love: Constructing the Feminine in Restoration Erotica’ (Harvey, 2008, pp. 103-104). However, as Karen Harvey points out, these generalisations of liberated women stemming from examinations of pornography are often found from very selective texts use to confirm the idea of a sexual revolution, and representations of female sexuality are in fact very diverse during this period (Harvey, 2008, p. 105). Additionally, as I will go into more detail on later on, pornography does not necessarily reflect reality as it is entertainment specifically tailored to arousal, not education, and even if the women within erotica more generally were given lots of agency, that does not mean that society endorsed it.

So, the scholarly community has concluded that the Enlightenment was a fairly liberal time for sexual expression and female enjoyment. However, what many of these studies are

missing is asking to what extent society was actually on board with the changing behaviours of the populace. Historians often assume that behaviour leads society, but behaviours being present does not necessarily mean that contemporaries would approve of or recommend them. As Pierre Bourdieu discusses in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, it is impossible to distinguish whether collective actions produce events, or whether they are produced by them (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 82). Therefore, I will be examining what the ideal societal woman behaved like, constructed from the examples of both real and fictive women were used within the texts; focussing on what choices she (and therefore women in general) were supposed to make. This gives a more direct picture of expectations, as it focusses on the views of general society rather than extrapolating from theorists such as scientists. This will then help to understand whether there was a sexual revolution of expectations, to add to the conversation around behaviours and scientific ideas.

Periodisation

This thesis will be examining the period between 1650 and around 1760. This time is categorised as part of many eras: the Early Modern Period; the Enlightenment; the Long Eighteenth-Century. All of these periodizations have different merits, and are often used based on the perceived continuity of whatever subject the historian is studying.

The Long Eighteenth Century was a term coined primarily by political historians to describe the period of rule between the Glorious Revolution in 1688 and the Reform Act of 1832 (though these years are debated, with some ending the period in 1815 with the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and some beginning the period in 1700 simply to mark the new century) (O'Gorman, 2016, p. 3). However, as well as being used by political scholars due to the unique system of quasi-democracy that existed during this time, it has also been adapted by many scholars of sexual history. This is owing to the combination of religious, cultural and political changes during this time which impacted the sexual culture and sex lives of contemporaries (Harvey, 2003). This also ties into the idea of a 'Sexual Revolution', and this period containing the changes which led to "modern sex" (Harvey, 2003, p. 901).

I believe all of these allocations are valid, and as, unlike the other scholars of this period, I am looking at a much shorter time frame, I will be using all three fairly interchangeably. This is for several reasons. Firstly, using more common period names such as the Early Modern Period or the Enlightenment makes it easier for non-historians to understand when we are discussing, and I am a strong believer that academia should be as accessible as possible. Secondly, whilst other historians of sexuality have sometimes stuck to the Long Eighteenth-Century due to the aforementioned changes, sex has transitioned in great ways through what we consider the Early Modern Period and the Enlightenment as well, and I don't believe we need to discount those era categorisations since they are all equally relevant to such a cross-specialty subject. And lastly, it simply makes it easier to write!

Defining Agency

In order to explore what sexual agency women were expected to have, one must of course define what agency, and then sexual agency, means. Whilst this may seem straightforward, the concept of agency is one which has been examined and adapted for many areas of

study, and which can change depending on the scenario. Agency can also look different to different people, and sexual agency adds an extra clarification to the definition. In this section, I will examine what other scholars have defined to be agency, and create my own definition from these ideas. The Cambridge Dictionary defines agency as "the ability to take action or to choose what action to take" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). Whilst this is a very basic definition, it is a clear one and -being the dictionary definition- it provides a good starting point.

Andrew Pickering has taken this standard definition based on action and extended it in his chapter 'Material Culture and the Dance of Agency'. He states that "A person has agency precisely to the extent that his or her actions make a difference to other people" (Pickering, 2010, p. 195). However, I would have to disagree with this assertion. I believe that a person's agency can be expressed in ways which do not even include another individual, and whilst the cause-and-effect nature of his definition served his area of study, for the study of sexual agency I do not think it holds up. For example, masturbation is an act which does not have to include or affect another person, yet I would still count it as an act of agency.

Therefore, instead of using Andrew Pickering's adaptation, I am more inclined towards Nicki Lisa Cole's definition from her academic blog post 'How Sociologists Define Human Agency': "Agency refers to the thoughts and actions taken by people that express their individual power" (Cole, 2021). This particular definition stood out because the thoughts aspect is something that is incredibly important to remember that individuals have control over and thinking is therefore an act of agency. This is admittedly difficult to study in history, as even diaries are often moderated, and is not often going to be relevant to this study which is primarily focussed on behaviour, however it is an important aspect of agency to remember. The other aspect of this definition that stood out to me was "expressing their individual power", which is really what this study is measuring; how much power were women expected to express within their sexuality? (Cole, 2021)

Cole then goes on to explain the ways in which culture and society interact with individual or collective agency, and vice versa. She states that "Individual and collective agency may serve to reaffirm social order by reproducing norms and existing social relationships, or it may serve to challenge and remake social order by going against the status quo to create new norms and relationships" (Cole, 2021). This is a particularly key idea for this study, as I am asking the question of expected agency not to understand the situation of individual women, but of how society was attempting to impact the agency of those women, and how some women (and men) sought to adapt that. Agency has also been analysed as the opposite of structure, opposing, and freeing one from it, which is how women's agency appears to have been impacted by societal expectations (Hays, 1994, p. 57).

This interaction with the social order is why it is important to make sure that one is using terms and critiques appropriately for the time period which they are studying, as a-historical perspectives can lead to ignoring key nuances led by the culture and context of the time. The term agency itself by my definition is one which I think can retain its meaning throughout history, as based on the scholarship I define agency as the freedom to act how one wishes within the limits and constraints placed on an individual, which applies in all

historical context (although may present differently depending on what the context is or was). However, when it comes to specifically sexual agency, all of the existing definitions come with extra cultural implications which are hard to apply to historical environments without multiple studies, or are difficult because of a lack of sources.

Key examples of this are hard to find listed in scholarly sources, as agency is a concept which tends to refuse simple definitions. Some can be found by Pamela Madsen in *Psychology Today,* who defines sexual agency as "a complex group of rights, knowledge, skills, personal authority and/or abilities" (Madsen, 2014). However, of the examples she lists, few are able to be explored within this study, which for reasons explained above is only focussing on cisgender women in predominantly heterosexual relationships. For example, she lists both "the right to choosing how you define your sexuality" and "The right to choose your gender" (Madsen, 2014). Whilst I would never deny that these are important aspects of sexual agency, nor that queer and trans people did exist in the Early Modern Period, exploring these aspects of sexual agency would require a larger study on LGBT+ identities during this time, which have not only been done by other scholars, but which involves a much thinner source pool due to the cultural conditions of the time. Similarly, she lists "The ability to choose safer sex practices or birth control" (Madsen, 2014). There will certainly be mentions of this within the body of this study, however it is important to remember even at this point that the birth control and safer sex options were far fewer than exist today, and the understanding of conception and sexually-transmitted infections was also more rudimentary and often incorrect. Because of this, we must consider the access to these options from the perspective of what was available at the time, rather than trying to apply our current notions of safer sex practices. Whilst a woman technically did have less sexual agency because she was unable to go on a birth control pill or get a coil, that does not tell us much about her situation other than the fact these solutions were not invented yet.

The rest of Madsen's points can however be applied more generally: "The ability to give consent to participating in or declining a sexual activity and having your desires honored", "The ability to choose whether or not you want to engage sexually with a specific person, or in a specific place or even the time", and "The ability to stop right in the middle of ANY sexual activity. Sexual agency includes your right to change your mind in the middle of any sexual encounter or act" (Madsen, 2014). These will form the basis of my definition. However, it is important to remember that the ways women would be seen or expected to express this agency may look very different to how we would expect to see them expressed today, particularly when it comes to exploring consent and the use of coyness.

Abby Wilkerson added another dimension to the discussion of sexual agency when exploring the denial of such agency from disabled individuals. She emphasised that sexual agency is not just about choosing how, when or if to perform sexual acts, but the ability to be seen and see oneself as a sexual being (Wilkerson, 2002). This is a particularly interesting addition for this study, as by exploring expected sexual agency there is a large aspect of exploring how much of a sexual being a woman was supposed to be, and therefore how much society sees women as sexual beings. Nicki Lisa Cole included "thoughts" in her definition, which

reaffirms this point of internal experience being just as crucial as external actions to agency (Cole, 2021).

Ine Vanwesenbeeck et al have constructed a very detailed definition of sexual agency which considers the effects heteronormativity and patriarchy can have on different individuals, particularly women and girls.

> "Sexual agency refers to a continuum of dynamic, every day, situated modalities of action related to sexuality in which agents navigate (contrarieties between) personal goals, desires, and preferences on the one hand and personal living conditions, normative expectations, and the wider structural context on the other hand. A diversity of internal (e.g., self-identification) and/or external goals (e.g., maintain social relationships or challenge the status quo) motivate and direct sexually agentic behavior. Sexual agency may aim for change as well as for endurance, continuity, and stability. It may be overt or tacit. It varies with individual (e.g., temporal orientation) as well as situational variables (e.g., novelty). Sexual agency may reproduce but also resist and renegotiate (aspects of) prevailing norms and the status quo. There is no simple relation between sexual agency and sexual health or well-being. Modalities of action as well as the constructiveness of their (multiple) effects always depend on personal frames of reference as well as on the opportunities and restrictions provided by the (immediate and distant) personal and structural context, including moral and ideological frameworks and dominant sexual stories." (Vanwesenbeeck, et al., 2021, p. 384)

This definition reiterates how variable sexual agency can be depending on the historical context and individuals in question, and also importantly suggests that something which may be an expression of agency to one person or group may be a restriction on agency for another. This is particularly relevant for some of the sources I will analyse, especially when it comes to examining pornography in a historical setting.

With all of these definitions to consider, I will not be explicitly defining all that sexual agency can mean, as it could take up the whole of this study. Instead, for this study specifically I will be exploring: how far did expectations of women's sexual agency in early modern England centre on their ability to choose how, when, and with whom they had sexual experiences, including the ability to decline sexual activity at any point? I will also be considering how much women are expected to be sexual beings. This will all be understood through descriptions of sexual encounters, such as describing female pleasure, or consent, through guidelines for how much choice women should have of a husband (a life sexual partner), and other indicators of free choice and enjoyment of sex.

Sources

As previously noted, most previous studies on sex and sexuality during this period have focussed specifically on behaviour, and therefore have used more quantitative data extrapolated from court cases and parish records, interspersed with some examples of literature or personal correspondence. For this examination of expectations, which is a much less administrative record-based question, I will be referring to two main types of

sources; conduct literature and erotica, both of which have distinct qualities that affect the type of expectations they disseminate, as well as to whom and how they go about it. This section will briefly explore these implications. They also both have somewhat different audiences, but it is important to note that literacy levels have been estimated to be around 75% amongst men in lower orders (in London at least) and 40% by 1750 for women overall, working out to around 40% of the general population being literate. However, this number is most likely lower in reality as literacy is often measured by who could write their own name, which is not necessarily an indicator of reading or even writing ability (Peakman, 2012, pp. 33-34). Whilst historians tend to agree that literacy rates were rising, by no means could everyone read, and therefore the audience for these works and those who would be directly affected by these expectations is not everyone (though information could be spread orally and writing could be a reflection of general expectations) (Peakman, 2012, pp. 33-34).

Because this study is focussing on expectations, the main type of source I will be examining is conduct literature. Conduct books and pamphlets, which particularly flourished in the Eighteenth Century, were "designed to guide women on manners and upstanding moral behaviour, and often contained instruction on subjects which were considered women's domains, such as modesty, keeping a proper household, and aspects related to childbirth and child rearing. They were primarily aimed at the middle classes, who were (thanks to the print boom) able to access these texts and have a goal of respectability progression through, at least in some ways, virtue. However, many texts did also contain passages or chapters intended for the aristocracy, or even servants and other members of the lower classes (Raven, 2007). Whilst there was conduct literature targeted at young men, it was usually reserved for the aristocracy, and often took more of an academic tone than that designed for female direction.

Whilst Conduct Literature has not often been studied through the lens of sex history, Jessica C. Murphy has written a very valuable chapter that argues that conduct literature was central to the circulation of feminine virtue during the Early Modern Period. She highlights that in texts written by women, they are writing from their experience, and see the books as part of a collective female exchange of virtue with readers giving their virtue to the text, and vice versa. This exchange also meant that these texts were not necessarily only intended to reach literate audiences, as women expected other women to pass down their knowledge to peers, who may not have accessed the same texts (or any at all). However, with male authors, they see their authority to write such guides as coming from their masculine authority, and often see their books as texts to be emulated, rather than as facilitating a conversation and exchange of experience and virtue (Murphy, 2015). Whilst these texts were also somewhat intended to be shared, those lessons were expected to be taught by men, or at least conveyed by men to female guardians who should then echo them to the women (Murphy, 2015).

This gendered difference can also relate to whether certain conduct literature is prescriptive or descriptive; describing how women have acted and are acting now, or explaining how women should be acting. This line often blurs when it comes to conduct texts, as often

historical or biblical figures are used as examples to model oneself on, but the discussion on what this means for individual texts will be explored in this study.

Unlike some of the other sources I will be using, conduct literature rarely if ever mentions sex explicitly. This will not only form an argument in itself, but also means that the evaluation of sexual agency from it comes a lot more from subtext and implications than may be ideal. This will be combatted in part by accompanying the study of conduct literature with examining other kinds of texts including pornography, poetry, and treatise, so that one can compare the expectations from one genre to another. We can also explore aspects related to sexual agency, such as the choice of marital partner, which is explored more explicitly. Whilst some generalisations or extrapolations will have to be made from certain words or phrases, such as 'duty', the overall patterns of expectations should be appropriately understood.

Before discussing pornographic texts, it is important to note that there has also been a large peripheral debate on the language used around sexual texts during this period, which has often distracted from examining some aspects of the material. The debate comes down to the fact that contemporaries did not use the term 'pornography' to describe such texts, and even modern definitions of the terms 'pornography' and 'erotica' are not fixed. Some scholars such as Julie Peakman (2003) have decided to use modern terms with their own definitions (erotica being an umbrella term for any text with explicit sexual content and pornography as a sub-category for texts intending to arouse the reader), which allows a more in-depth study of the content itself (Peakman, 2012, pp. 5-7). However, scholars like Ian Frederick Moulton have argued against this de-contextualisation of terms, and elect to simply study all of it under the term 'erotic writing', seeing pornography as a modern phenomenon. This approach has allowed him to study the transition of erotic writing from a commonplace technique to what we would call pornography, which he argues has a very different purpose (Moulton, 2000, pp. 3-15). That being said, his definition is somewhat prescribed to fit his specific study, rather than necessarily adding anything to the field. For the purpose of this study, I will be using Julie Peakman's definition; that erotica is anything explicitly sexual, and pornography is sexual texts intending to arouse (Peakman, 2012, p. 7). I will primarily be using pornography, but will note if it isn't.

This debate shows a methodological issue in this field, which is that the language we use has such strong modern connotations, which often leads to an ahistorical view of the genre. This is an issue which Manuela Mourão identified while studying sexual agency in what she identified as pornography; modern feminist viewpoints of pornography (as an inherently violent and misogynistic genre) prohibits contextualisation and therefore fair evaluation and analysis of pre-modern texts (Mourão, 1999). To combat this, I will be looking at the language used in erotic texts as objectively as possible, and also ensuring that context is used to understand any double meanings or coyness.

Of course, pornography is intended to arouse, and is therefore fantasy more than a reflection of real sexual experiences. However, this does not mean that it can't be valuable for evaluating expected sexual practice for several reasons. Firstly, this study is examining what agency women were expected to have sexually, not what they were actually doing.

Pornography, while just entertainment for some, does create a level of expectation for one's real sexual experience, particularly when there is little to no sex education. I am not saying that all readers of pornography would then expect their female lovers to behave as the women in the texts did, but it is not unreasonable to assume a level of influence and expectation. Also, fantasy is based in desire, so while it may not always apply to logical expectations, it does still relate to what a portion of society wanted their women to be like.

Secondly, pornography's subversion can tell us about the ideals that the text is attempting to subvert, or reinforce that those ideas are subversions. For example, if a pornographic text has a woman in complete control of her own actions and decisions, but another form of literature is instructing women to be passive, then this may reinforce the idea that society was expecting women to appear passive in situations.

Additionally, not all pornography is that distant from normal societal expectations or even actions, with some just being the explicit version of events. For example, a woman may be openly receiving a lot of pleasure within a pornographic text, and this can be combined with beliefs around female pleasure and biology that conclude that women were expected to receive pleasure during sexual activity. Also, some things that are stigmatised by society are also not included in pornography because they are simply seen as undesirable or unsanitary, so they are not a topic or action worthy of subversion.

Of course, pornography is still limited in what it can tell us about overall societal expectations. For one thing, the authorship and audience of pornography was overwhelmingly male, and whilst it cannot be said that no women consumed pornography or wrote anonymously, it is safe to say they would have done so very secretly. Even if we consider masturbation as an indicator of consumption of pornography, outside of the pornography itself one is hard pressed to find any sources about women on the subject before Anne Lister's diaries, which in themselves are an outlier. Also, as it is fantasy and often deliberately provocative, it is important to note that pornography is often much more liberal than its conduct literature and other counterparts, particularly as it is not concerned with showing virtuous women.

It is not just erotica and conduct literature portrayed expectations, but almost every kind of text could be read with them in mind. Therefore, I will be exploring a few other kinds of texts to reinforce the themes coming out of the two main genres.

Many kinds of literary source are important for conveying expectations and personal opinions on behaviour, and poetry is one of the most interesting forms for this. Poetry varies significantly by audience, and some can be included within other categories, such as the bawdy poetry of the Earl of Rochester being included within erotic texts. For this study, I will be looking at the poems of the Earl, as well as some much more personal and high-brow poetry by Katherine Philips, who often wrote to friends and family on her feelings on family, life and death, some of which included opinions and reflections on marriage. Unlike conduct literature, neither of these writers were intending to instruct on societal expectations, nor were they likely to create such expectations through being the only blatant content on a subject that would be consumed. However, as part of a literary culture, they were in

conversation with society on expectations, and therefore I think they are valuable to include. Other sources will be explained when they are used.

Limits

There are some limits with this study that are important to note.

Firstly, this study will almost entirely be focussing on cisgender women in heterosexual scenarios and relationships. This is for several reasons. Firstly, since this is dealing with expectations, one large expectation of this time (and let's be fair, even of modern times) was that women would be cisgender and heterosexual, so agency in same-sex relationships or of transgender individuals was automatically against expectations.[4] Additionally, there are simply fewer sources discussing LGBT+ individuals, and therefore there are even fewer discussing women, and then fewer still discussing sexuality related subjects. Pornography is somewhat the exception to this; there are many texts which involve same-sex relations between women, but as I discussed when exploring kinds of sources this is a source that is difficult to study through the lens of expectation in isolation.

Due to the aforementioned lack of sources and basic expectations, there will also be no specific mention of disabled women or women of colour. These women would of course be the consumers of the content presenting expectations, and so they are impacted by those, but any specific expectations are missed due to the lack of precise writings. Similar to explorations by historians specialising in queer history, there have been other important studies on depictions of women of colour in Enlightenment texts, specifically exploring exotic-fetishization, and I believe these have done the subject better justice than I would be able to if I attempted to add the topic to this study.[5] The study of the interaction of disability and sexual agency is still unfortunately extremely new, but again I feel that this deserves its own exploration.

This study

This study will be analysing expectations around sexual agency for women in England during the long Eighteenth Century, examining to what extent pornography and conduct literature set ideals for women in who, how and why they were having sex. Chapter One will examine sex in general, focussing on explicit scenes within pornography to understand expectations around pleasure and desire, and how subversion of societal norms within erotica could lead to fewer limits on sexual agency. Chapter Two will examine expectations around female behaviour before marriage, including understandings of innocence and corruption, connection between non sexual behaviours and assumptions of promiscuity, and protection of family reputation. The final chapter will look at marriage, from the agency women had

[4] Sodomy was illegal, though passive tolerance was growing. There was still horror at homosexual relationships and lesbian interactions though, and transgender individuals were all but ignored. See 'Hitchcock, T., 1997. Subcultures and Sodomites: the Development of Homosexuality. In: *English Sexualities, 1700-1800.* Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, pp. 58-92.'

[5] For an introduction to this see Berkowitz, E., 2012. The New World of Sexual Opportunity. In: *Sex & Punishment: 4000 Years of Judging Desire.* London: The Westbourne Press, pp. 250-294.

over their choice of life partner, to expectations of duty, to how good wives should respond to an extra marital affair. This will all help to understand female sexual agency better, and therefore women's agency in general, as well as being a good study to compare to our current society which we often view as sexually liberated. It will also serve as a counter to historical analyses of this period as a 'Sexual Revolution'.

Chapter 1- Sex

In order to understand expectations around female sexual agency during the Enlightenment in England, one must of course first look to the bedroom, and at agency advised and expressed during explicitly sexual encounters. As I discussed in the introduction, historians focussing unreservedly on sexual acts is a relatively new area of study, and centring agency has often been neglected in favour of using scientific or literary lenses to examine sexual texts. However, in the last decade more scholars have begun to examine the female sexual experience, often through focus on contemporary beliefs about the differences between men and women, including beliefs on reproductive function, libido and sexual fluidity. These all tend to conclude the same things about contemporary understandings; that women were seen as biologically inverse men, and being closely connected to nature made them uncontrolled (Peakman, 2012, pp. 189-191). This would indicate, particularly the uncontrolled mind ideas, that women were seen to be the actors in sexual scenarios, throwing themselves on men as they could not control their lust. However, studies on social standards have suggested that women were being seen more as victims of circumstance, who became sexual (sometimes falling into prostitution) through rough upbringings and a lack of church guidance (Dabhoiwala, 2013, pp. 234-281). This chapter will develop the historiography arguing that this period was a sexual revolution for female enjoyment, and argue that women were expected to enjoy and desire sex, but also sex was still framed as being for male needs and pleasure, sometimes regardless of whether a woman enjoyed it. There was also little recourse to contraceptives or sex education, so overall in real terms women were not expected to have a lot of sexual agency.

Sex was everywhere during the late medieval and Early Modern Periods, with almost every sector of life having a sexual element, from joke books, to trial reports, to children's games and medical literature. Tim Hitchcock in 1997 described this as a "public culture of sexual reference" (Hitchcock, 1997, pp. 8-9). Whilst this theoretically gives many sources for examining the history of sex, it actually makes it even more difficult to distinguish between what would set and was perpetuating genuine beliefs and expectations versus what was simply using sex as a tool towards another aim such as criticising the King. Additionally, because we are examining expectations rather than the reality of sexual life like most of the historiography, sources such as trial reports, even if they were sensationalised, are less useful (as well as already having been studied extensively in other sexual histories as covered in the introduction). Therefore, I have narrowed the scope down to focussing on aspects such as pleasure, consent, and desire, rather than including all erotic or sexual sources or studies. This is because these are the three most key aspects for sexual agency, as described in my definition, and because some sexual sources are commentating on other factors such as political distaste or medical developments, more than the personal effects of sex.

A few key studies have focussed on pleasure, often looking at how it was expressed within erotica, and this is where focus on female experiences really becomes clear. Some notable studies include Karen Harvey's, which examines the idea that women in erotica were

“crucial players in pleasurable encounters” but “were permanently sexually responsive” due to an emphasis on modesty (Harvey, 2008, pp. 199-221). This would somewhat contradict the conclusions made by other scholars focussing on scientific understanding, which therefore suggests that contemporaries were contradicting themselves in their assumptions and expectations, or that it was seen as a constant battle between nature versus behaviour. This chapter will be arguing for the latter, building on Harvey’s work; that contemporary expectations were that women would and should have to fight their natural urges and desires and prioritise their decorum, along with male satisfaction, though along with this should still be enjoying their sex lives (sometimes due to their effect on men) and present themselves as sexual beings.

For the rest of this thesis I will be looking at conduct literature to examine expectations, as these books set out directly to the women (or to their parents) how upstanding women should behave and consider their sexuality. However, conduct literature rarely directly mentions sex itself, choosing instead to allude to sexuality through advice on indirect aspects such as modesty, purity, and marital bliss. Therefore, to examine expectations around the sex specifically in this chapter, one must turn to erotic writings, specifically pornography.
As pornography is intended to arouse rather than specifically to instruct individuals on how to act or to reflect the realities of society, it is different to conduct literature in how it sets expectations. However, as I discussed in the introduction, this does not mean that it can’t be useful for understanding those expectations around sexual agency. A fantasy is in itself a form of expectation, and it can reflect or subvert the typical understandings on relationships in order to arouse the right feelings. Additionally, the lack of comprehensive sex education at this time could mean that individuals would only gain understanding of what would happen during sex from written pornography, which would then in itself create an idea in their head of how sex should be and what to expect from a partner.

Additionally, the study of erotica and pornography during the latter half of the Early Modern Period is muddied by the fact that sex was everywhere in public life for contemporaries. French pornography circulated the elite whilst joke pamphlets and trial reports brought salacious stories and images to the middling sort and lower classes, even those who were illiterate were surrounded by bawdy songs and images (Hitchcock, 1997, p. 8). Distinguishing sexual and bawdy culture from the deeper cultural realities of sexual attitudes and expectations is difficult enough in modern societies, but during the eighteenth century the lines between raunchy, bawdy, erotic and pornographic were not entirely clear. Therefore, whilst one should not discount the effect such a wide sexual atmosphere had on expectations, I will only be referring to something as pornography when it is explicitly describing sexual acts in a realistic and arousing way, and other texts discussing sex will be treated as a separate form of literature. This is because they do set expectations in slightly different ways.

Initially, it is important to note that unlike conduct literature, which was intended for a female audience (or her guardians) and was sometimes written by women, pornography at

this time was almost exclusively made and circulated within upper class male dominant circles. This was exemplary of the libertine movement that spread from France; a flowering culture of males attempting to enjoy the better parts of life to excess, particularly focussing on the romantic and "heroization" of sexuality (Turner, 1990, p. 100). Most of the formal records for pornography consumption are found in the records of these libertine clubs, such as the Dilettanti Society formed in 1733 and the earlier Beggar's Benison society in Scotland from around 1706 (Peakman, 2012, pp. 28-33). Whilst some of the records are thought to be forged by later erotic book sellers to advertise their trade, this nevertheless points to an assumed and desired audience for such novels. The literacy and print boom across the century did later give rise to more of the middling and lower sort reading and engaging with pornographic books, but the price of print still held many longer form novels back from the lower ranks, who were instead sold pamphlets, abridged translations, or books by the page (Peakman, 2012, pp. 33-34). Women were not necessarily unable to access pornography; pornographic texts themselves mention female readership, which suggests it was not outside of the realms of possibility. Despite this, they were not the targets for the writing, nor were they likely to be the writers (though some may have used pennames or written through their husbands). Ultimately, pornography of this time does reflect male fantasy and expectation, even if some women were consuming it.

Despite the authorial demographic, it is key that a large portion of the longer form pornography during this time was written from a female perspective, either in the first person like John Cleland's *Fanny Hill, or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (published in 1748) (Cleland, 1748 : 1985), or as a dialogue between women like *The School of Venus: The Ladies Delight, Reduced Into Rules of Practice* (published in 1655 by Michel Millot in France and later anonymously translated and published in England in 1680) (Millot, 1655 : 2017). This automatically centres the female experience, which, even if the content of the text does not explicitly give agency to the woman or women, does implicitly mean it is her driving her story. Therefore, by having a female narrator, the authors are somewhat setting an expectation for women to be active members of their sex lives, rather than sex simply happening to them.

It is also important to note than the lead character 'Fanny' in *Fanny Hill, Or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, spends the majority of the story as a prostitute (Cleland, 1748 : 1985). This adds a different dynamic to the question of agency, as how much agency one has when they must do something to be paid is questionable. Additionally, it was not exactly expected for women (particularly those who were of a higher status or who had other employment opportunities such as domestic service) to be prostitutes, so that aspect also affects the expectations being set. As questions around the ethics and freedom of prostitution are a much wider debate than can be covered in this thesis, and are more prone to be affected by a-historicization, I will be analysing the sexual encounters in *Fanny Hill* as fairly stand-alone to conversations on prostitution or her job in general, particularly as much of the text makes it clear that she is very happy to be doing it, and we shall therefore assume a baseline of consent unless it is clear that that is not the case. It is also part of a wider theme of stories of the fallen woman, which I acknowledge is a key factor in how contemporaries would view Fanny, but this genre and this specific text also assume her enjoyment of the fall, which is

why she is written as condemned. However, her job will be acknowledged when I believe it affects her agency in a significant way.

Additionally, other than where certain authorial context is necessary, I will be taking pornography at its word, and treating the fictional women within as no different from the imagined women within conduct literature. Since this thesis is around expectations, there is very little difference between a fictional or a fictive woman, as they are all simply products of expectation and an ideal in one way or another, and of course they both may have been based on accounts of or by real women Therefore, the situations the women are written in will be treated as if they were real, and authorial intent or a large amount of contextualisation is not crucial to the analysis. This is not to say that these things will not be mentioned, but to say that their somewhat absence is intentional.

The first thing one can understand about female sexual agency from pornography was that despite the medical panic over the consequences of self-love, female masturbation was still seen as arousing and desirable, and was normalised as an expected activity of any young woman. A large but often underdiscussed aspect of sexual agency is the ability to enjoy one's sexuality outside of another's company, or in other words, masturbation. Male Early Modern masturbation has been covered a lot by scholars, given its adjacency to libertine culture and notable influences such as Samuel Pepys. Masturbation in general was also a large focus for contemporaries, though as a growing fear. The body was seen to run due to a careful balance of fluids, or humours, and (as a fluid) sperm was seen as necessary to keep in check. The panic therefore was over a needless loss of sperm, which could throw the humours out of balance and lead to severe illness (Peakman, 2012, pp. 54-55). Whilst there was concern over masturbation affecting a woman's mental state, the vast amount of medical literature on the subject came out after around 1760 due to the publishing of Tissot's *Onanism: or, a Treatise upon the Disorders Produced by Masturbation*, which lay out horrific consequences including epilepsy and even death from over-ejaculation of men, and hysterics and cramps for women (Peakman, 2012, pp. 55-58). A letter was even written to the author of Onania in 1731 describing a woman's story of masturbating for a year at boarding school and then struggling with sexual pleasure and conception during her marriage (Riddell, 2021, pp. 139-142).

Despite the medical concerns, female masturbation was still fairly common in pornography. In *Fanny Hill, or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, published by John Cleland in 1748, Fanny first masturbates whilst spying on another couple in the brothel having sex. She describes being "guided by nature only" to quench the "fires" building, and copies the movements of her same sex encounter until reaching a "critical ecstasy" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 63). Nature was seen as the connection between and main metaphor of female sexuality; a wild untamed urge as opposed to male rationality (Peakman, 2012, p. 189). Cleland's choice to continue this suggests he saw Fanny's actions as uncontrolled and irrational rather than a reasonable and thought through response to desire. Curiously though, she does comment that watching the couple gave the "last dying blow to my native innocence" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 63), but does not express any shame or regret over touching herself or orgasming.

This is one of the boldest examples of a woman exhibiting sexual agency within erotica; she is aroused, follows her urge, enjoys it, climaxes, and does not feel shame over the action, regardless of the author's intentions.

A similar message is seen in *The School of Venus*, a dialogue between an older woman, Francis (also referred to as Frank, who may be named that way because of associations between male experience and knowledge against a more ignorant woman), and her younger cousin Katy, who is ignorant to the ways of sexuality and needs her companion to teach her how to have a fulfilling sex life. Whilst discussing urges, Katy admits that sometimes at night she feels her "Cunt Itch", and struggles to sleep for it (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 35). Francis advises that she find herself a penis, but if she cannot she tells her "rub your Cunt soundly with your finger, and it will give you some ease" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 36). Katy is confused but accepts this (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 36). Also, after Katy asks what happens to women who don't want to have sex for fear of pregnancy, Francis tells the story of a woman who "made use of a pleasant device", and fashioned herself a male sex doll with a penis that could ejaculate, "which pleased her almost as well as Swiving" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 111). Poorer women she says use "dildos made of Velvet, or blown in glass" and fill them with "luke warm milk", whilst Nuns "make use of their fingers" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 112). She concludes by saying that "Fucking is so natural, that one way or another Lechery will have its vent in all sorts and conditions of People" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 112). Sex toys are one of the oldest tools we have records of, though as with most sexual topics they have been stigmatised as consistently. During the long eighteenth century they were particularly feared as part of the panic around transgender and lesbian individuals (Riddell, 2021, pp. 199-201). Self-ejaculating toys were seen as a fantastic invention of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so mention of them this early is unusual, but as sex toys were often sold and used in brothels perhaps an avid erotic writer would have had earlier access to such inventions. Evidence also suggests that the Early Modern London sex toy trade was not particularly luxurious, and therefore not just a phenomena accessed by the upper classes, though even those who couldn't afford such accessories would hand make them (Riddell, 2021, pp. 201-205). Whilst it may not have been commonly discussed, it is somewhat unlikely that Francis' assertions on use of masturbatory aides was an exaggeration or satirisation, but an exposé of a hidden truth. The messaging is clear that masturbation helps to relieve discomfort, can help avoid pregnancy, and is natural, so shouldn't be snubbed. These texts were not written to influence women (whose readership of pornographic texts was ignored by contemporaries or seen as something to be avoided), and men would have few expectations for female masturbation as it doesn't impact them. Nevertheless they normalise female masturbation as a thing that was possible and enjoyable, and neither woman goes crazy from the experience.

Early Modern Pornography is often praised by scholars for its depictions and celebration of female desire, which often drives the plot of these texts forwards and is a central theme. One of the most dedicated to this idea is Manuela Mourão, whose conclusions are that the centring of female experience, along with subversive and rhetorical qualities of Early

Modern pornography refute anti-pornography feminist arguments, as much of the representation of desire was actually empowering (Mourão, 1999, pp. 597-598).

Whilst I disagree that Early Modern pornography was entirely liberating for female agency, due to factors this chapter will cover such as women following male expectations and ignoring one's own discomfort for the man's sake, the women in the texts do exhibit a lot of desire for both the men and for sexual relations and show immense enjoyment at the results. In *Fanny Hill* the women show enthusiasm for beginning and continuing sexual activity, like when an older lady "sprang up, with all the vigour of youth, derived no doubt from her late refreshment, and making him sit down, began in her turn to kiss him, and to pat and pinch his cheeks, and play with his hair" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 63). Similarly, in *The School of Venus* Francis encourages Katy to participate fully in the fuck by thrusting into him "to get in his Prick as far as you can" and "taking him about the Neck and Kissing him" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 93).

Women frequently both display enjoyment and discuss it, sometimes with metaphors of death (the French term for orgasm is la petite mort (Fryer, 2021), which may be where this idea came from). For example, Francis describes how women will be "dying almost with pleasure" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 29), and Fanny whilst observing a couple says the woman "seemed to expire in an agony of bliss" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 69). It is also not always presented as simply good for women, as Francis argues "the Woman's pleasure is greater than the mans, because she is not only pleased with her own Fucking, but also hath the satisfaction of perceiving her Gallant so extremely delighted" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 29). This intense desire and enjoyment is a big indication that expectations of female agency were at least somewhat positive, as whilst these are pornographic texts they set an example for their readers that women should be enjoying the encounter and wanting it, and that them doing so is more enjoyable for the man too so he should be invested in her pleasure. This is also partially a commentary on scientific belief; women were thought to be almost designed for embracing unrestrained desire, as their bodily fluids could not be spent and they were more connected to nature which is known to be untamed (Peakman, 2012, pp. 189-191).

Despite women having a clear desire and passion for sex, they are still rarely the ones who are actively making the moves during sex. One rare example of a woman fully leading and controlling sex is in the poem *The Imperfect Enjoyment*, written by famous satirist John Wilmot, The Earl of Rochester, in 1680. The poem is a lament of premature ejaculation, but before this happens "She clips me to her breast and sucks me to her face", orders him to fuck her, and "her busy hand would guide that part" (Wilmot, 1680 : 2013, p. 40). Whilst the woman in this poem is very much the active side, this poem is completely satire, and as other erotica suggests other expectations, her controlling may be the excuse and thing to blame for his lack of control, rather than a thing to be praised.

Aside from this rare case, pretty much every description of sex within pornography features the man acting and the woman reacting, from finding a position; "he lay her down pretty

briskly", "he threw himself upon her" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 62), to undressing; "he stole as it were the shift off the girl" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 67), to sexual contact and movement; "he toyed with her provoking breasts" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 70), ""he puts his Prick in my hand again, sometimes he thrusts it between my Thighs, sometimes between my Buttocks, rubbing my Cunt with the top of it" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, pp. 44-45). The verb 'makes' is used frequently, not necessarily with a forceful connotation but nevertheless making it clear who is in control, even when the woman is clear she wants and likes it. There is also a very strong metaphor of war and conquer. Penises are describes as weaponry, such as "that fierce erect machine of his, which threatened no less than splitting the tender victim", and more directly "his weapon" and the tip as "flaming point of his weapon" which he "sheathes it now up to the hilt" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 68). His touching is described as a "hunt of pleasure" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 67), Fanny describes her partner as "My conqueror" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 73), and he proceeded "cavalierly" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 77). The men being the ones controlling and doing the sex, as well as this implication of the women being overcome, fought, and invaded, suggests that whilst women were expected to be reciprocal they were not supposed to be the drivers of sex, and were seen as supposed to be acting more like reactionary vessels than necessarily active participants. This suggests that women were not expected to have a huge amount of agency in the form or layout of the sex, in how it was had, or in how they enjoyed it.

Whilst many of the women in these scenarios are expressing their desire for the sex and are shown to enjoy it, there is also a lot of fear mentioned throughout the texts, often from the same women who show desire. In *The School of Venus*, Katy expresses much more enthusiasm for learning and receiving than fear, most likely because she serves as more of a driver for the sexual stories rather than showing a realistic learning experience (Millot, 1655 : 2017). However, terror is particularly prominent in *Fanny Hill*, which as it is framed as a Memoir was most likely aiming for a more realistic portrayal. When Fanny is about to lose her virginity, which she was excited for, she says "a sudden fit of trembling seized me; - I was so afraid, without a precise notion of why and what I had to fear" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 56). The fear grows when she sees his member, "which did not appear, at least to my fearful imagination, less than my wrist" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 65); this continues even in later encounters, for example where she is first with the man she fancies she expresses "I know not how or why I dreaded the point which had been the object of my fiercest desires" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 76). This terror is an interesting choice, as throughout the text she expresses a desire for sexual entanglements, and she also echoes this confusion. The fear may be because of the impression that her virginity, or maidenhead, is a huge thing to lose, despite the fact she already accepted her loss of innocence. Virginity as something that is physical and can be lost has been seen throughout different cultures and is a belief which has sustained to this day. Virginity testing, or the act of checking a hymen to see if a woman was a virgin, was under debate during the Early Modern Period, but was still performed in scenarios such as annulment or divorce cases, and was often driven by other women acting as midwives (Luttfring, 2015). This reinforced the idea that virginity was key, and if one lost it everyone would know, and judgement would be swift by the community and one's peers.

This may be one motivation for Fanny's sudden onset fear; a belief that what she was about to do would shape her life. And, vice versa, Fanny's reaction would reinforce the expectation that losing one's virginity as a woman would be a substantial moment, and something that you should think in depth on in order to cope with the emotions of such a huge decision. Clearly, the idea of virginity being a big thing and a loss severely impacts expectations of female sexual agency, as it adds an extra pressure to the decision, framing it as a life changing moment for one's character rather than a decision which should be purely based on desire and comfort, and gives an expectation of the first time feeling particularly bigger or different to any other sexual experience.

The strong element of fear is also sometimes driven from pain from intercourse, which was also featured in pornography of this time, particularly heavily in *Fanny Hill*. When looking at pain in erotic texts scholars essentially only focus on intentional pain from kink, particularly the boom of flagellation in erotica that was used to explore religious contention and mock power dynamics. However, throughout *Fanny Hill* there is a constant and consistent emphasis on non-intentional pain for the woman from penetration. From the first time she attempts sexual intercourse Fanny's pain is described in graphic detail, often with comparison to injuries in a similar tone to the conqueror metaphor. Before she has had intercourse, her fear is at least partially driven by her struggles attempting to penetrate herself or be penetrated by another woman, saying she "breathed with pain" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 63), and expressing to her lady friend that "even a finger thrust in there, hurt me beyond bearing" and that was why she was "afraid of the pain" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 65). She describes screaming, having to bite through her petticoat, and fainting during her first time, and concludes by describing how her "thighs were instantly all in a stream of blood that flowed from the wounded torn passage" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 78). In future attempts, whilst she says "the pain being pretty well over" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 87), it is still clear there is some discomfort.

Notably, at several points whilst describing the pain during her first intercourse with Charles, Fanny uses the pronoun "he", as in "he hurt me", rather than simply 'it hurt'. This is also in line with the fact that he does not stop immediately upon her expressing her pain, he instead expressed "surprise" that he could not push himself in, and after she "tenderly complained I could not bear it" he then assures her "that he will be as tender of hurting me as he would be of himself" but tries again, pushes himself in, and hurts her more (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, pp. 77-78). An often unmentioned but quite significant part of sexual agency is being able to experience sexual pleasure without pain, and whilst the pain is probably due to an external condition, Charles' actions are ignoring this pain and her pleas to stop, and therefore Fanny is unable to either stop the situation or change to a form of sexual relation that is non penetrative and will not hurt. This means that the text is setting up an expectation for sexual activity to necessitate penetration to be fulfilling, regardless of pain level, and it also normalises pain being present as Charles is only concerned that she must therefore be a virgin, not at the level of pain she experienced (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 77).

A similar but more insidious version of this plotline is seen in *The School of Venus*. Whilst describing her first time with a man, Katy discusses almost verbatim Fanny's experience; "it

pained me a little", "I told him it pained me extremely, he told me he would not hurt me much more", and "he so tortured me" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 70). Like Fanny, Katy had to stop for a while as "the pain was so great" that she thought her insides were falling out (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 71). However, rather than just her partner ignoring her cries, Francis, her wiser cousin, almost chastises Katy for complaining and experiencing such pain, saying that she herself "should not complain" if she was presented with a penis, and brags that she "made not half this stir" and she "near flinched" at her first time (Millot, 1655 : 2017, pp. 71-72). There is also an element of Francis, the older and more experienced woman, attempting to gain a sort of hierarchy above the less experienced Katy, either as an overcompensation for the fact being very experienced was seen as a negative, or a confirmation that within people's ideal fantasy women knew what they were doing. She then contradictorily expresses deep sympathies for Katy's male partner, saying "Poor Fellow, I pity him, he suffered a great deal of pain", and even Katy states that he insisted "he endured a share of the pain" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, pp. 70-71). This suggests that whilst pain was presented as a negative, it was not seen as a problem; complaining or using one's agency to stop the encounter due to it was however. Women were not expected to use their agency in a way which disrupted the man's enjoyment, even if it was detrimental to her health or own enjoyment. This also leads on to my later conversation on consent, as both women feel compelled to continue the sex even though they were no longer enjoying it, which implies they felt unable to withdraw consent and stop when they wanted to, and the men did not pick up on the obvious reluctance and continued regardless.

In terms of what the pain itself being featured means for expectations of sexual agency, the conclusions are not particularly clear. Since the books are intended to arouse, including something which hinders sexual activity and makes it explicitly painful for the woman is a concerning indication of the expectations of what good sex would be like for men; them getting their fill regardless of a woman's experience or situation. Particularly the fact that their partners are not concerned about the pain they are experiencing sets an expectation that it was okay for other men to do the same. Additionally, the way Fanny deals with the pain is framed as romantic, and as pushing through an obstacle for the sake of her partner in a noble way. Whilst he is struggling to insert himself the first time Fanny praises herself that he is pushing "whilst my extreme love made me bear extreme pain almost without a groan" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 77). She then urges him to continue, saying "Alas! it was enough I knew his pleasure, to submit joyfully to him, whatever pain I foresaw it would cost me." (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 78). In *The School of Venus*, Francis explicitly says to her young progeny ""Woman, who if she loves a man, she will permit him to fuck her though she herself have no inclination thereunto", even after hearing about the awful experience her cousin had, and Katy herself proudly says that he "told me what a great deal of pleasure I had given him" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 75). Whilst this does, ultimately, set a high expectation of female agency, suggesting that women can control their pain and fight through to make love, it ignores her autonomy in favour of serving her man as a sign of love. They are not pushing through because just because they want the sex, they are forcing themselves to put up with the pain in order to "submit" and satisfy "his pleasure" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 78). This therefore sets the expectation of sex being something that is given

by women as a sign of love, not as a personal desire, and therefore her sexual agency is reliant on her romantic feelings and his desires, not a mutual combination of the couple's wants and needs.

Alternatively, the pain in *Fanny Hill* specifically at least may be simply down to increased understandings of anatomy and conditions that could affect it. From the descriptions of Fanny's pain and difficulty even with herself it appears that she may have a condition called vaginismus, which is an automatic tightening of the vaginal muscles when penetration is attempted (NHS, 2021). Though the term vaginismus wasn't coined until 1861, increased investigation and understanding of female sexual dysfunction happened throughout the eighteenth century (Cryle, 2012). Therefore, rather than being a rather negative feature of the story, perhaps Fanny's pain is instead a sign of that increased normalisation of female sexual dysfunction. In showing this pain it could have allowed space for an imperfect expectation of sexual intercourse, and for blame for these issues being moved away from being seen as any kind of personal failing of the women (to a point, as Fanny is shown to be bearing it as she should). If this is the case, then it creates a fairly high expectation for women to have greater freedom of sexual agency, as there is an understanding that pain is not an inhibitor to sexual activity, nor is it a thing she should be ashamed of. However, it does also suggest that pleasure was a seen as a secondary concern for women's agency to pursue sex, which links back to the sex being to pleasure the man rather than herself.

Regardless of its actual intentions towards female agency, the purpose of these books being to arouse overshadows most of the nuanced reasoning. If one is to take the simple reasoning; that pain was common and so normalised that it would have been seen as just another part of sex by readers, then one must question why it wasn't seen as an issue. Furthermore, pornography as a genre is typically idealistic, so including something so unnecessarily conflicting seems counterproductive. One must conclude that pain was so normalised that using it to drive the plot and to symbolise the women's heroic pushing through for love didn't put off or obstruct its arousing purpose.

Putting the pain and fear together, it is also possible that this was intended to serve as a sort of warning to women who may read such pornographic material and have a desire to emulate the care free sex lives of its female protagonists. By having the sexual encounters cause such strong fear beforehand, and pain during and after, it almost makes those the consequences of sex; a punishment for transgression against what latter chapters will demonstrate was seen as the natural and Godly ways of sex only between a married couple for procreation. It creates an idea that women expressing their sexuality can never be an easy or purely exciting venture, and that any illicit activity will be punished at least in emotion if not in real world consequences.

This focus on non-deliberate pain does not mean there also wasn't a fair share of deliberate pain within the erotic texts, particularly spanking. However, the impact of this on agency is more questionable than most. Portrayal of kink and consent is a very grey area, as the scenarios both need a high level of control and unequal power structures, and yet many people have a strong desire for them, so the line between portraying kink or rough sex and abuse is fine and can be hard to identify. None of the women are asked if they would like to

be spanked, but at the same time it may have been so common it was part of what people consider assumed consent, even if that isn't a perfect system. Additionally, whilst spanking may be seen as purely a sign of male sexual aggression, particularly from a second wave feminist anti-pornography perspective, it was not always men on women; there was a huge subculture of men being spanked or flogged by women as a subversive power play. *Fanny Hill* is particularly known for this, as in one scene a young man desires to be forced down, tied to a bench, and given "ten lashes", and then more as he begs (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, pp. 183-185). Fanny finds this sight "piteous" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 184), but it is nevertheless one of the main (if not only) sexual encounters in the book where she has total control, and is not expected to perform any sexual acts herself. Therefore, I do not consider spanking itself a topic to analyse effect on female sexual agency, as it is so subjective depending on the situation. Its constant presence however does suggest that this was at least a phenomenon that wasn't extraordinary, even if like many of the things we have discussed it was not to be brought up in polite company, and therefore women had more options for expressing their sexuality than vanilla or missionary encounters. However, it may have been normalised to the point of men not expecting it to need individual confirmation, so it may have prevented women from having their agency fully respected if it was an involuntary part of sexual relations.

The fear and pain expressed within the text brings us on to an important part of sexual agency; the ability to say no and stop the proceedings if one wishes, which includes feeling able to withdraw consent and place one's own health and enjoyment first. It is clear from many sources that consent was not seen by contemporaries in the way we see it today. Modern definitions of consent and what it should contain, as well as what it is not, are very wide and detailed (Rape Crisis England & Wales, 2022). Information about consent is includes in nearly every erotic or educational context, even including disclaimers at the beginning of pornographic videos that all participants are of age and consented to the scenes. Conversely, a definition or even proper discussion of consent, by any name, was very difficult to find in Early Modern texts, including conduct literature and erotica. What we must do instead is to analyse the dialogue and actions within pornography and other texts to see if one could call what the women were doing enthusiastically consenting. Sadly, enthusiastic consent appears to be the opposite of what was written.

The School of Venus, being framed as an educational text, is one of the only places where explicit discussion of consent (though not named) is had, however, it advocates that female consent is not a requirement for sexual activity. When discussing he upcoming relations with Mr Roger, Katy asks "but must I let him do what he will with me?", and Francis responds "I marry must you" as he will "give thee a World of delight" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 42). Whilst this is obviously urging Katy to participate for her own pleasure, the word 'must' does not particularly support her free choice to change her mind on what she desires, regardless of the fact she has shown she would like to have sex. Later, ignoring one's own choice is framed as a romantic act, as I have already quoted Francis says "Woman, who if she loves a man, she will permit him to fuck her though she herself have no inclination

thereunto" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 75). This again frames sex as something which is necessary to show commitment, rather than something both people should want, and expects women to ignore their own desires and agency in order to prove herself to her partner. This idea is also seen in many pieces of advice about marriage, which I shall cover in chapter 3.

We do see one scenario of Katy being able to withdraw consent; during her first time with Mr Roger the pain is great, and she describes that "once more I desired him to get off, which he did" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 71). However, this was not the first time she had asked him to stop, and he previously did not (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 70). Francis also expresses frustration at Katy's withdrawal of consent, suggesting it is a sign of weakness rather than a valid choice (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 71). Despite this scenario being so distressing to modern principles, it is very mild in comparison to some other descriptions of less than or completely un-consentual sexual scenarios. In *Fanny Hill*, Fanny's entire first time with a client is distressing and at face value a description of rape, even without the added client-service dynamic. The description is peppered with words such as "forcibly" and "struggles", particularly as he attempted to "with his knee to force them [her thighs] open" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 56). She also describes him very emotively, calling him first "the monster", and later describing how he came back at her after she begged him to stop the wording is "snorting and fuming with lust and rage, he renews his attack" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 56). The description is not at all flattering towards the gentleman, and therefore one couldn't call it an endorsement, but in the same way as I discussed the inclusion of so much pain in the book it is concerning that such a visceral rape scene would be included in something that is intended to arouse. It could be a commentary on prostitution; Fanny's experiences with the man she fancies are much better than those she is made to have with a paying client, which could be because there was a general expectation that prostitutes would be exploited and abused. This was around the time that attitudes to prostitution were becoming more sympathetic than judgemental, and efforts were turning to help girls who had fallen into the profession rather than condemning them (Dabhoiwala, 2013, pp. 250-255). However, there must also have been some element of seeing violence as a turn on.

Fanny Hill also applies a concept that Karen Harvey discussed as a key way sound was used during erotica, the idea of silence indicating consent. Harvey gives many examples of women falling silent being used as a contrast to the "activity of male bodies", and that this led to women falling silent being used as an indicator of desire and enjoyment (Harvey, 2008, p. 209). It is very possible that this trope set an expectation that silence was enough to show a woman was enthusiastic about the act, and *Fanny Hill* as more of a reflective than a prescriptive text turns this on its head slightly as Fanny feels she must stay silent when attacked, and the man uses this as his driver. She describes how he found her "next to senseless and unresisting" and proceeded to tear off her clothes, and later he was explicitly "emboldened by my sufferance and silence (for I had not the power to speak or cry out)" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 56). Fanny describes this as "passive endurance" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 56). Even in her relations with Charles, who she has expressed desire for, is the sentence "I lay fairly exposed to the examination of his eyes and hands, quiet and unresisting, which confirmed to him in the opinion he proceeded so cavalierly upon, that I

was no novice in these matters" (Cleland, 1748 : 1985, p. 77). It is clear that there was both an expectation that silence was a sign of consent, and that women should expect to be used sexually if they were to stay silent. These are all obviously huge indications that consent was not considered very heavily during the Early Modern Period, and that women were expected to put up with being used for the sake of love or simply getting it over with, and that they were not expected to be given many recourses to stop such activity which is a huge prevention of agency.

Birth control, contraception, and abortions are not particularly mentioned in pornography, which is somewhat understandable given they are not exactly sexy topics. The School of Venus is somewhat an exception to this as it did masquerade as a textbook however, so there is some discussion of various contraceptive efforts. When Katy expresses her worries about unwanted pregnancy, Francis reassures her that she has "infallible remedies" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 109). She does however emphasise discreetly hiding a pregnancy until a friend can whisk away the child, saying "'tis easy to have medicines to make us miscarry" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 109), but "'tis a pity" to abort when the King needs "able subjects" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 110). Carla Spivack did an in-depth study into the legal and cultural background of abortions in the Early Modern period, and found that abortion was actually predominantly seen outside of a legal context, and as a fuller-term miscarriage. Abortions as we see them today were included in with miscarriages, and the prosecution of these was only really considered as part of the efforts against illicit sex, incest, and harm to the mother, not due to a view on the beginning of life (Spivack, 2007, pp. 150-151). This adds credit to the sentiment that Francis expresses; it isn't a pity to induce miscarriage because it is a child, it is a pity because England needs good citizens. She does also state that "none [are] more likely to do him Service than those which are illegitimate" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 110), which was definitely not the typical view of society, but this is where the satirical and anti-societal aspects of pornography come through.

Later in the dialogue she does discuss some other birth control methods, such as the pull out method where they will "not suffer him to spend in them" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 113). She also mentions rudimentary condoms; "some will tie a Pigs Bladder to the Top of their Pricks, which receives all without hazard" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 113). Condoms were condemned by Christian authorities during the seventeenth century after the discovery of spermatozoa, but the upper middle and upper classes essentially ignored this directive as they were the most effective preventative method available, though they were still not regularly used as they were expensive and annoying to use (Cain, 2014) (Walton, 2013). Modern latex condoms are between 98% and 85% effective, and a study on modern lambskin condoms (the closest comparison studied) are the same for preventing pregnancy (Santos-Longhurst, 2018). Lastly, she mentions the scientific belief that both parties must orgasm to conceive, saying that women would permit a man to orgasm only "before or after they have done it themselves" as if they do not "spend together" "Physicians agree" it will not result in pregnancy (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 113). Whilst none of these methods are particularly effective (other than condoms which are not perfect and were not overly used),

Francis does say that “these misfortunes are not very frequent” (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 109). Unfortunately this claim is hard to verify, as birth rate data is difficult to set before 1800 due to sparse records. Francis’ (and the authors’) assertion, if a common belief, was most likely due to the infrequency of non-marital sex and the actual frequency of abortions or hidden births, rather than a sign that these methods were effective. However, it may not be based on a common belief or data set at all, and may instead be related to the rest of Francis’ advice related to, essentially, telling Katy to chill out. This therefore would be more of an expectation for women to try not let pregnancy weigh on one’s mind, as it only detracts from the experience. It is also interesting that Francis does refer to an unwanted pregnancy as a misfortune, suggesting that there was at least some understanding and acceptance that not every sexual encounter desired a baby at the end.

Conduct texts, which are less likely to be concerned about including an unsexy topic, still do not make any mention of birth control or abortifacients. The closest I could find was a recipe for preventing miscarriage (called abortion) in *The Gentlewoman’s Companion*, but this is the opposite of a contraception as it was intended to maintain a healthy pregnancy (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, pp. 186-187). Medical texts, such as *Culpepper's Directory of Midwives, or, A Guide for Women* (1676) also only make reference to causes of spontaneous abortion or how to prevent one, not directions for providing one (Culpepper, 1676). Abortion and birth control are clearly discussed within *A Treatise Concerning the Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed,* a publication by author Daniel Defoe railing against his perception of the state of contemporary marriage in 1727. His views are extremely negative of both things, explaining that whilst he understands prostitutes who “take Drops and Draughts” because they are already immoral characters who make it a necessity, married women who engage in such practices are engaging in “Conjugal Lewdness” and should be condemned (Defoe, 1727, pp. 163-165). However, I do not believe his views are that of the majority of society, otherwise he should not need to express his distaste so emotively.

This all suggests that contraception wasn’t expected to be readily available, and of course more consistent options such as the pill did not have an equivalent. However, there is no shame attached to Francis’ statements, and the options themselves are not presented as the provocative parts of the text, merely the explicit way they are discussed. The lack of any mention of birth control or abortifacients, and the lack of written recipes for such concoctions, suggests that whilst they did exist and were used they were still not thought of something to encourage, or talked about in good society. Such recipes were most likely only handles by midwives, or passed secretly between female family members and close friends, rather than being advertised or encouraged. This does therefore mean that some women, particularly those who were incarcerated or orphaned, would lack this agency, as they may not have had access to the correct or safe information due to the lack of a safe or knowledgeable person to help them. However, it does ultimately seem that there was not a huge stigma attached to their private use so long as one kept it private.

Perhaps this normalisation of fear and pain, the lack of clear-cut consent boundaries, and sex being portrayed as designed for men is why so many short form publications by women

encourage female celibacy, and why there was such a culture of satirising these. Poet Katherine Philips was renowned in her time for her numerous poems on love and friendship, though she only circulated manuscripts amongst friends until a compilation of her work was published shortly before her death in 1664, and a larger collection was released in 1667. Whilst her own marriage does not appear to have been difficult, Philips nevertheless published some poetry advising friends against romantic and sexual pursuits (British Library, 2022). This concern around sexual motivations is particularly seen in her short poem *Against Pleasure. Set by Dr. Coleman*, which is essentially a warning that pursuit of pleasure merely leads to deceit and devastation. This particularly draws on biblical and lager metaphors, such as saying "if we do approach, The Fruit of Sodom will impair, And perish at a touch" (Philips, 1710, p. 85). It is clear that the message is whilst something may look good, you will be punished for going further. The poem ends with mentioning "its Attending Shame" (Philips, 1710, p. 86), a key way of dissuading young women from sex that will be covered in more detail in the next chapter. Ultimately, the poem is a fierce reminder of the dangers of attraction, and therefore of sex. Whilst Philips was not necessarily encouraging complete celibacy, nor was she attempting to create wider expectations of female virtue given she did not publish her works, they do contribute to what Jessica C. Murphy has termed the "circulation of feminine virtue" (Murphy, 2015, p. 82), which in Philips' case was amongst friends and relatives but was still creating a network of female experience and wisdom, which in itself would create expectations between those women (Murphy, 2015, p. 87). In this case, the expectation is to limit one's agency over acting on attraction, as danger will follow.

As seen in Katherine's metaphors, pain was not the only motivating factor for encouraging women towards celibacy, regardless of their personal desires. As has been seen throughout history, religion was also used as a reason for abstaining from intimate relationships. However, unlike many other times in history, holy celibacy was relentlessly mocked by general society in England due to the legacy of the English Revolution and its effect on anti-Catholic sentiment (and it's connection to aristocracy), to the extent that religious erotica is considered a key point in the development of pornographic writing (Peakman, 2012, p. 126). Religion, particularly Catholicism, became intertwined with ideas of illicit sexuality more than celibacy, as record came out over priests affairs resulting in pregnant nuns, and combining these images with descriptions of penitential flogging, fantasies of homosexual relations, and metaphors of forced confinement and exploitation (Peakman, 2012, pp. 127-160). Because of these connections Katherine, and a great majority of the conduct literature we will cover later in this thesis, still include a lot of religious metaphors in their encouragements around sexuality. There appears to have been a line, where purity and celibacy were to be aimed for and expected of good holy women, but only until marriage and then only for children, except for a few special cases. Marriage was the goal, not religious enclosure, despite the motivations being similar. This distaste for religious life service removed the legitimacy for what once was a huge aspect of female sexual agency, either forcibly removing their choice or allowing them to choose another life without sacrificing stability. Whilst the choice of marriage became wider (as we will cover in chapter 3), the choice to abstain became harder.

In addition to serious women's statements for resisting sexuality, there was also a rich satirical culture of discussing celibacy and virginity in the form of bawdy poems and songs. The clearest example of this is the set of poems beginning with *The Fifteen Plagues of a Maiden*-Head (1707), then the response *The Maids Vindication: or, The Fifteen Comforts of Living a Single Life* (1707), and concluding with *The Fifteen Pleasures of a Virgin* (1709). These poems were all written somewhat anonymously, with the first being known under the pseudonym "Madam B—le", or essentially "Madam Fuck" (Anonymous, 1707 : 2016, p. 107), the second being merely "a Gentlewoman" (Anonymous, 1707 : 2016, p. 117), and the third claiming to be "By the suppos'd AUTHOR of The Fifteen Plagues of a Maidenhead" (Anonymous, 1709 : 2016, p. 127). Additionally, the publishers and printers are somewhat uncertain; the printers of the first were convicted but it was quashed on appeal (Anonymous, 1707 : 2016); the second was published under what was most likely a fake name (Anonymous, 1707 : 2016); and the last gave no hints whatsoever (Anonymous, 1709 : 2016). This means that unlike most of the other texts we will cover in this thesis, we cannot gain many ideas on motivations from the authors themselves. However, they are clearly trying to create a stir, as they are pretty sexually explicit, and are also part of a satirical trend of listing fifteen comforts, plagues, or pleasures, as seen in poems throughout the 1710s. Unlike conduct literature or erotica, satire's purpose is to be a reflection and exaggeration of common or unfavourable attitudes or actions. The audience would also be of middling and lower social orders, unlike the upper class libertine audience of pornography, and were reading for amusement rather than arousal. Therefore, rather than necessarily setting their own expectations for female agency, or attempting to spread the views of society, these poems are making fun of common societal views, and be funny rather than excite passions. So, satire can be used to examine what expectations were set by certain groups, such as women or other unfavourable sects, and the expectations of those who disagree.

The first poem attempts to dissuade people from celibacy, arguing that virginity will constantly occupy one's mind until it is dealt with, as it affects her dreams and waking moments (Anonymous, 1707 : 2016, pp. 110-116). However, at the beginning of the last poem the supposed same author issues an apology, saying she (the author assumed female identity even if it was a man) has become "a Modest, Civil girl agen" and expressing regret at the "blasphemy" and the "Ugliness of Vice" that was on display (Anonymous, 1709 : 2016, p. 130). This repentance, if it was the same author, could be due to the writer realising the influence the first poem may have on young women, and regretting any affect this may have had. On the other hand, and more likely, it is merely a satirical choice to argue against sexuality, given that so much other comedy was based in bawdy humour. Both latter poems give similar reasonings for abstaining, often expressing that men are fools and the life of celibacy is better than the "Ills of a Wh—re or Wife" (Anonymous, 1707 : 2016, p. 121). Whilst these are clearly making fun of the idea of a languishing spinster, they do also satirise unfit husbands, and therefore do give a fair amount of credit to women who have the agency to avoid such entanglements.

In conclusion, whilst Early Modern erotica is praised for its celebration of female desire and passion, women were still very much expected to have sex for the man, both how and when he liked it, regardless of her own desires. Putting up with sex was seen as something every good partner did as an expression of love, and silence and non-resistance were seen as enough to signal consent. Additionally, pain and fear were normalised for women, particularly during their first times, and whilst masturbation and some forms of contraception were available, they were not openly promoted. Therefore, within the bedroom, women did not have much sexual agency, though this was not seen to be a hinderance to their experience. Conduct literature also avoids mention of sex directly, implying that sex was not a polite subject for ladies, which would hinder their ability to understand themselves as sexual beings and therefore their sexual agency.

Chapter 2- Before Marriage

"There is no time requires modesty from a young Gentlewoman, than in wooing-time." (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 124) This sentence sums up well contemporary attitudes to young sexuality: be cautious and modest when temptation comes around. Sexuality before marriage was designated as a shameful thing, and something that was expected to be carefully and consciously avoided in all areas of life. This chapter will explore how young and unmarried women were given sexual agency only in their ability to control themselves and the actions of others to avoid it, and fear of the corruption of their innocence was a constant.

Historians do not have a very conclusive view on what sex and relationships looked like for women before marriage. Adolescence in general is difficult to study pre-1900 due to a lack of consistent contemporary categorisation, and it has been concluded that teenagers did not particularly have different values or occupied exclusive spaces to adults (Krausman Ben-Amos, 1994, p. 205). This has led to a confusion of where young women stood with their sexual expression.[6] Historians, and contemporaries, tend to get stuck between two sides; the more liberal views of pre-marital sex and love that were beginning to evolve, and the traditional views of monogamy and what could be called family values. For example, the practice of sharing beds before marriage is often brought up as fairly common as an act of courting, though without intercourse (Stone, 1979, p. 384). However, it is both spoken of as being a sex-positive practice that allowed couples to become intimate, and yet also as being prudish and absurd for often requiring safeguards to ensure no sex, for example bundling (the existence of which is debated) (Muir, 2018, pp. 66-68). These contradictions are sometimes in the same study. For example, Lucy Worsley calls it a "strange parallel" to the "chivalric cult" and explains that it was done in such a way to ensure the parent's conscience in protecting their daughter's virginity (Worsley, 2012, p. 66). However, immediately afterward she states that "pre-marital pregnancy could be welcome proof of fertility" (Worsley, 2012, p. 67), suggesting it was possibly not as strictly enforced as assumed.

This confusion also comes because Enlightenment contemporaries appeared to be struggling with the same contradictions when it came to young unmarried people. For instance, from the beginning of the Early Modern Period it was increasingly common for young unmarried men and women to flock to London for a more independent life, which, while it gave the individuals in question more opportunity to express themselves sexually or otherwise, caused great worry to society (Hubbard, 2014, pp. 16-22). Servitude and apprenticeships are credited as the intended solution for this, as it allowed young women especially to be carefully monitored to protect from unwanted pregnancies, and from the appeal of higher-paying prostitution (Hubbard, 2014, pp. 23-24). However, these did not

[6] The word and even categorization of 'teenager' is a postwar consumerist media term, and is not seen in popular use until around the 1950s in the US and UK. Adolescence was seen as different to adulthood physiologically from the Greeks, but due to the nature of work the transition between childhood and adulthood was in actuality pretty immediate. See 'Hamilton, G., 2002. Mapping A History of Adolescence and Literature for Adolescents. *The Alan Review,* 29(2)' for more information.

always work, as there are numerous accounts of servants being coerced into sexual relationships with their masters (Gowing, 2001, pp. 55-57). These complex mixes of liberal and conservative ideas not only make it difficult for historians however, but meant that young women's sexual agency was difficult to navigate, as it appears that more freedoms only brought more restrictions.

Possibly in part due to the inconsistencies of the culture, society's expectations rather than the reality of an unmarried woman's sex life are often underexplored, and rely on extrapolating from individual stories. This chapter will explore to what extent young unmarried women were expected to have and use their sexual agency, and argue that actually before marriage sexuality was seen as a terrifying threat to a woman's reputation. In order to avoid this they were motivated to remain both celibate and ignorant of sexual practices and their own desires through connecting all sexuality to feelings of shame.

One thing that is heavily emphasised in some conduct literature is a sense of literal and constant threat to a woman's innocence. The cause and level of this threat varies, but all use very vivid language to express this. A key example is the influence of popular culture as a large source of fear in *The Gentlewoman's Companion*, written in 1673 as a women's alternative to the men's advice genre of non-fiction. This is a no-nonsense (straight to the point with its direction) handbook for young women written by Hannah Woolley, who was previously known for recipe books (Albano, 2001). It is specifically addressed "To all Young Ladies, Gentlewomen, and all Maidens whatever" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 55), so it is a text aimed at all ladies at all levels of society, and indeed offers specific advice to those working in service. Within the section titled *Of wanton Songs, and idle Ballads*, Woolley specifically states "Let your prudence renounce a little pleasure for a great deal of danger", and goes on to warn that listening to such songs is impossible without "staining your self" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 115). This visceral language continues with a message to "guard and defend our selves" and calling the tunes "alluring poison" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 115). If girls get too fond of such music their "innocence will be in daily danger" and the presence of such songs is a "contagion" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 116). She says similar things about other forms of bawdy writings, suggesting that rude pamphlets should be prohibited to protect virtue (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 117), and comparing suggestive books to the biblical snake which led Eve astray (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 128). This all concerns hearing about explicit activity, not even acting upon it, and yet Woolley is highly concerned about it. This was most likely because such songs and pamphlets were seen as temptations towards sin, as seen with her Eve metaphor, and therefore such content not only affects a woman's innocence as she now knows of such things, but means she may be inclined to ruin her innocence further by acting upon the things she hears. They were also very accessible, and therefore a key way women could be seen as being influenced. "Guard and defend" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 115) also suggests that this was an intentional move, and a literal attack, which also implies that women were expected to be facing challenges intended to affect their sexual agency, and that they must be constantly alert and aware.

However, whilst this terminology plainly makes innocence something crucial for a woman to maintain, it as frames it as incredibly fragile. Therefore, the wording can suggest one of two things about the agency a young woman is expected to have. Firstly, it could suggest that a woman should be resisting temptation, which therefore expects her to have strong sexual agency to protect her own virtue and say no. Alternatively, it is suggesting that women are not strong enough to resist temptation, and are therefore weak willed and cannot make good choices without those choices being kept away from her. Whilst it is most likely a mixture of both, Woolley's explicit insistence on banning this material would suggest the latter, as if women were expected to have the ability to resist then it would not be a problem.

In a similar tone of protecting oneself and one's innocence, George Hickes warns young women of the dangers of vanity in his 1721 translated and edited version of *Instructions for the Education of a Daughter*, originally published by François de Salignac de La Mothe-Fénelon in 1687 (Hickes, 1721). This is specifically a book targeted towards "families of Quality" (Hickes, 1721) who have daughters, and advises them on how to best raise proper ladies. He asks "Would you hazard now your own Soul, and that of your Neighbour, for the Sake of a foolish Vanity?" (Hickes, 1721, p. 165). The term 'foolish' assumes not only that the young female reader is ignorant of the behaviour she is participating in, which is highly infantilising and suggests young women were not expected to know their own intentions, but that vanity is an unimportant pastime. The idea that vanity -which in this text is coded very much to mean caring about one's appearance in almost any way- should be unimportant negates the young woman's agency around her own appearance and expects her to limit her choices whilst also not putting much thought into them. It also suggests that Hickes did not expect women to place any strong meaning behind her appearance, including the potential to attract a partner. Whilst appearance is not necessarily an act of sexual agency, Hickes is framing it as such, and expecting women to limit their choices in order for her appearance to not be implying any sexual connotations.

Pursuing looks is also condemned in the 8th edition of what is essentially a conduct book in pamphlet form called *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (1766), by Rev. Wetenhall Wilkes. He jumps straight in to using vivid language, saying "An immodest woman is a kind of monster, distorted from its proper form." (Wilkes, 1766, p. 117). "Monster" suggests a level of threat, not just to the woman, but to those around her, and one which is unnatural, suggesting immodest women are against nature in some way. When describing the aspect of modesty that concerns clothing, he states strongly "If the various arts of dress serve to draw the amorous wishes, and to gratify the passions of lewd people; such females are greatly to be condemned, as use these arts in dress, and beauty, that may probably betray weak minds, into such dangerous offences." (Wilkes, 1766, p. 118). This is shares the condescending aspect of Hickes; "betray weak minds" is not only suggesting that women are easily lead astray in their choices, but also that those who chose to act a certain way are "weak" (Wilkes, 1766, p. 118). This suggests that women were not expected to be in control of their own agency, as their choices are easily controlled by others through witness. He also describes clothing as purely a way to attract men and be sexual, using terminology such as "amorous wishes" and "lewd". This again reduces women's choices of presentation to

nothing more than erotic pursuits, dismissing any true intentions and therefore her agency. It also emphasises the danger as Woolley does; calling focus on "the arts" of clothing and beauty "dangerous offences" (Wilkes, 1766, p. 118). This all shows again that women were expected to limit their agency in order to avoid sexual sin. Also, like vanity, whilst modesty is not an explicitly sexual term, modesty is often used as a form of prevention of sexual sin, and is therefore part of sexual agency.

Indeed, even Woolley gives some focus to vanity, though less severely, through her examples of letters. One of these such letter templates is an example of discussion between a mother and a daughter, the former of whom is attempting to persuade the latter against wearing "Spots and Black-patches on her face" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, pp. 228-230). The mother grieves that her child is "addicted to its fashions", calls the adornments "deformities" and despairs that women lose modesty and "think they add to their beauty by subtracting from it" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, pp. 228-229). These concerns echo those given by Hickes and Rev Wilkes, particularly deformities as relating to monstrous women. The answer is that of "a dutiful daughter", who argues that beauty spots are natural, but that her "Mask" is clearly upsetting her mother and therefore she will stop using them, despite the argument that she finds no "such vanity in them" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, pp. 229-230). This letter exemplifies that though women would not always be expected to know their wrongdoings, they should put family feelings above all, even when that limits their own agency, in order to be "dutiful". Her obligations to her parents are expected to be stronger than her personal choices.

The particular concern about vanity from George Hickes and Rev. Wetenhall Wilkes may be because of the rapid decline of sumptuary laws in England throughout the eighteenth century. Sumptuary laws in England began around the beginning of the fourteenth century, as well as being common throughout Europe. They were a collection of regulations that designated certain materials and colours for the use of only certain groups, predominantly based on economic class. These were intended to do several things: regulate expenditure, control consumption, prevent the sin of pride, and identify certain classes and groups easily.[7] Whilst these were very active throughout the Tudor dynasty and the latter half of the seventeenth century, they took a sharp decline around the beginning of the eighteenth century (Desierto & Koyama, 2020, p. 7). It is theorised that this was predominantly because of the rise of the middling sort, which meant that more individuals could afford the clothes that were restricted to upper classes, and therefore that social status distinction became harder to maintain. Luxury goods also became much more accessible due to increased trade connections with the far East and the Americas. However, the removal of legal restrictions on expression can sometimes still leave behind social restrictions, which then get strengthened to fill the gap. In terms of sexual agency, as we have discussed, dress can be a way of expressing one's sexuality, and exerting sexual agency in making oneself sexually attractive. By removing certain legal limits on dress women could express this more freely.

[7] For information on sumptuary laws please see 'Riello, G. and Rublack, U. (eds) (2019) *The Right to Dress: Sumptuary Laws in a Global Perspective, c.1200–1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/9781108567541'

However, social limits can still create the same structure to limit this. This seems to be at least part of the case with Hickes' insistence upon eliminating vanity.

Additionally, the messaging of men being unable to control themselves is actually slightly contrary to what scholars lay out as beliefs around the sexual body at the time. Women were believed to be scientifically more connected to nature, and therefore to be wild, unrestrained, and uncivilised, as opposed to male bodies which more controlled, and sexual activity could weaken them due to spent fluids (Peakman, 2012, pp. 189-190; Harvey, 2003, pp. 102-145; Rousseau, 2014). This could indicate two things. One, whilst women are the uncontrolled sexual wild cards, they are also seen as sly, and therefore use their allure to weaken men rather than outwardly pursuing. This would then mean that all of the advice against dressing immodestly etcetera is necessary because women are seen as the ones pushing for sex, so therefore need to be explicitly told not to. Alternatively, it shows a disconnect between the scientific community and the social one, where one is working off assumptions mismatched with biological observances, and the other is using anecdotal observance. Perhaps social expectations still did see men as the uncontrolled ones, although with the caveat that women should be responsible for preventing any opportunities. Whichever is the case, this is another example of why it is necessary to examine expectations as well as beliefs and real world cases.

This sin that George Hickes warned women against was clearly also not just about vanity itself, but of the perceived invitation to sexual sin. Hickes asks "But, Ladies, when you seek to please, what is there hereby pretended? Is it not to excite the Passions of Men?" (Hickes, 1721, p. 166), asserting that young women are only concerned with appearance in order to arouse men. His next statements then add an extra element to how that invitation is perceived, stating that "You have the Government of these, to keep them from going too far; ought not therefore all the Effects to be imputed to you? And do they not always exceed too far, if they be once but a little kindled?" (Hickes, 1721, p. 166). Whilst this statement does create an expectation of young women to have a lot of agency over her sexuality, as she is creating the actions, it also implies that men going "too far" and perhaps taking advantage is in fact an understandable result of vanity, and that it is therefore not only under her control but her fault if such a thing happens. This means that not only did George Hickes expect women to use her sexual agency to prevent any kind of sexual expression, but also for her to be responsible for the agency of men who may be attracted to her.

This responsibility for male actions continues into advice around how to interact with men. In *Instructions for the Education of a Daughter to Princesses*, the section of George Hickes' book specifically targeted towards the aristocracy, the writer begins with a passage advising moderation, saying "However, I do not recommend to you a melancholy and too rigid Vertue, such as shall make you look upon all Men as your Enemies; nor that you should receive their compliments as Affronts, except they are too extravagant" (Hickes, 1721, p. 263). This is explicitly expecting that women should not be overly wary of male approaches, merely that she should be cautious with overly friendly compliments. However, he then goes on to almost contradict this advice a few pages later, saying that should a worthy man show any passion she "ought to avoid his company" for fear she may develop a tenderness

for him despite her virtue (Hickes, 1721, pp. 271-272). This small but significant contradiction shows that he expected women to be able to very carefully analyse male intentions in order to react appropriately to them. To add this to his advice about not attracting men, it is yet another example of the responsibility of controlling a situation being given to women, rather than men. This gives her a lot of agency, but also gives her responsibility for the actions of others, and therefore that expectation to be in control comes with the ability to judge her if she (or he) steps out of line.

For Woolley, expectations around men are primarily based in advising against courtship, and having crushes, entirely. She states that “Before reaching this honourable condition [marriage] all wanton fancy you must lay aside”, as one can never have a successful marriage when “the object is evil” (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 127). This is clearly suggesting that a marriage built on sexual attraction is doomed to fail, so one must avoid considering it. Part of her concern is that “Wanton love hath a thousand devices to purchase a minutes penitential pleasure” (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 127), so essentially sexual attraction draws you in very easily but gives very little, and very sinful, satisfaction. Her language on these techniques are more emotive than her concerns around innocence, with lines such as “words corrupt the Disposition” and “Eyes are those windows by which death enters” (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 128). It is probably that these are used because Woolley believes that wanton fancy will lead to a loss of innocence, which must be protected as it is vulnerable. It therefore echoes the same dismissal of female sexual agency, suggesting woman’s wants are easily controlled rather than expecting and her to maintain the autonomy to resist such things without a harrowing warning. She is also concerned about wasted opportunity for a marriage, as “consorts are thieves of time, which will rob you of many precious opportunities” (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 128); something which is difficult to know before experiencing it, and which shows women were expected to use their agency to make non-sexual moves towards only particular choices, which I will cover in the next chapter.

In order to avoid such entanglements, the responsibility is yet again placed on the woman. “Make a contract with your eyes not to wander abroad”, “Treat not of love too freely” as “Your sports will turn to ill jest” (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, pp. 128-129): these are all both expecting a high amount of self-discipline and control to not even look at certain temptations, and if she does so then what “ill jest” comes is on her head. However, like Hickes, she also says she “cannot commend your extraordinary coolness in affection, slighting all, as if none were worthy of your choice” (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 129), which makes the expected level of romantically suggestive interaction difficult to discern. This in itself suggests that women were expected to understand exactly how much sexual or romantic expression the right amount was, and how to implement it in proper ways. This creates a tightrope of sexual agency, where women were expected to have the perfect balance of expression and restraint, and going too far either way would receive condemnation.

To make the expectation of restraint clearer, Woolley includes an example template for letters for women to write, in the form of fictional letters from various individuals, including

friends, family, and men. The one that demonstrates how to behave when it concerns men is a correspondence between a gentleman who professes love to the woman, and her response is a carefully constructed rejection. The man begins “It hath pleased Heaven you should have the sole command of my affections”, and continues on to how “being deprived of [her] I shall not only live, but die miserably” (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, pp. 230-231). The short letter shows nothing short of an obsession. Her response, reflecting the advice on responding moderately unless the affection is too much, states “should I accept tenders of affection from all such amorous pretenders, I might be married to the whole Troop, and make my self a legal Prostitute” (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 231). This is a clear demonstration of the expectation of women to limit their affections, as well as their acceptances of romantic or sexual advances, for if she were to react kindly to too many she would degrade herself. I do not need to tell you that prostitution was not exactly looked upon kindly. She then tells him to “never trouble her" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 231) again. Whilst this idealised response toes the line on being polite whilst also being stern, it does portray an expectation for women to have a high amount of agency to say no to men clearly when they are uncomfortable, and, since this is the correct response, an expectation that it would work. However, the fictional context behind this letter could be someone who did return the affection, but could not show it, and though the tone does not portray this, going in line with the other recommendations is it a possibility that this is another expectation on women to limit their sexual agency when it comes to someone showing passion.

The second example of note is a dialogue called “A method of Courtship on fair and honourable terms” (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 237). The conversation begins in the same moderate tone, with the gentleman, Inamorato, discussing how meeting was “the happiest day I ever had” and calls making her acquaintance an “honour and satisfaction” (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 237). The woman, Lusippe, modestly admits that she does have “imperfections and weakness” and that if he gets to know her then it will “yield you less happiness than you imagine” (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 238). The exchange goes on in the same, with him insisting that he is charmed by her “virtues and merits” and nothing would put him off, and her continuing that she is not worthy of such affections (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 238). This is interesting, as it suggests that exemplary women must not only graciously accept compliments, but to keep in mind the less than favourable parts of her character and be honest about these. She then ends the conversation by stating that if he should want to pursue her affections then she will leave herself “to the disposal of my dear Parents” and that he should “consult them”, and if they like him then he may “conquest” her affections (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 238). The influence of parents in marriage decisions will be covered in the next chapter, but this shows that it was expected for women to consult their parents at the first sign of a courtship proposal, and that therefore even the decision of who she dates (or simply gets to know) is up to them. This suggests that her sexual agency is not hers, but her parents agency over her romantic and sex life. The use of the word ‘conquest’ is also quite telling; whilst it can simply be read as chivalric romance, it can also be an indication that the example is suggesting women’s decisions can be, in effect, invaded, and that it is not her making those decisions of romance (and later sexual intimacy), but him.

It is also clear from all of this that before marriage women were not expected to be or to see themselves sexual beings at all, and if they did feel such desires they should avoid and minimise sexual associations and actions as much as possible. Rev. Wetenhall Wilkes even describes remembering dreams as a transgression of morality, stating “If wanton dreams be remembered with pleasure, that, which before was involuntary, and therefore innocent, becomes a voluntary and sinful transgression of this virtue” (Wilkes, 1766, p. 166). This is particularly interesting as it explicitly separates what the Reverend believed to be an act of agency, and what he does not; dreaming is not a choice, but thinking on it is intentional. During the introduction I defined a key part of sexual agency as being the ability to see oneself as a sexual being, and this clearly expects there to be none of that. He does not just expect women should limit their sexual agency in actions, but in thought. This is also an interesting piece of agency to be policing, as there would be no external signs or consequences, and nobody would know except for the woman and anyone she decided to confide in. This suggests that the limits on what sexual agency women were supposed to have were not just placed there to avoid any consequences of premarital sexual action such as unwanted pregnancy or harm to reputation, but that acts of sexual agency were considered a problem in themselves, not just in their results.

The reasoning given for adhering to this advice on modesty is often hinged on the actions harming a woman’s reputation, as well as the reputation of those close to her. Hickes states that women should chastise friends by showing them that “they make themselves but despised” (Hickes, 1721, p. 166). Similarly, using stories of illicit lovers to show what example to avoid, Woolley admonishes “what trouble, what hazard, and what not, they run into, to ruin themselves, distract their Parents, and leave a stain on their reputations, never to be washt out” (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 116). Additionally, on friend chastisement, she suggests showing a friend “what an enemy she hath been to God and to her own reputation”. Reputation was not something to be taken lightly during the Enlightenment; as well as people uncomfortably judging you it was a large part of the credit economy. As C. Muldrew lays out in his book *The economy of obligation: the culture of credit and social relations in early modern England* (2016), as gold and silver were in short supply as the economy boomed at the beginning on the 16th century the country relied primarily on credit to keep up consumerist demands, and one’s reputation became almost as crucial as one’s capital for determining whether a debt could be paid. Additionally, if a girl was unmarried, then the reputation of both the girl and her family would be key to finding a suitable (and financially promising) husband to secure her future. Therefore, if one harmed her reputation, it would affect her and her family’s ability to acquire credit, and could seriously harm their way of life (Muldrew, 2016). Woolley describes the harm as a “stain”, meaning permanent damage, however she does later go on to suggest that someone would repair the harm with “her future exemplary modest carriage” (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 213). The harsh warnings against these actions would however suggest that this would have been a difficult task. Additionally, the reputational harm is conveyed to affect more than just the woman in question, meaning that a woman’s choice to transgress is expected not just to affect her, but that affect whole neighbourhoods. A woman is expected to refrain from

sexual or sexualised activity, limiting her agency, in order to protect the economic and social stability of herself, her family, and her neighbourhood.

The warning of damage to reputation in particular is part of an ever-present technique in the conduct literature to create a limiting structure around women's sexual agency: the use of shame. Throughout the passages I have just discussed, the emphasis is placed on what not to do and how not to act, rather than on how to act. The consequences of such actions are written in a way that aims to shame individuals who committed them, using patronising and infantilising language such as "foolish", "idle", and come under warnings of the damage done to families: young women are shamed for thinking of utilising their sexuality. The use of shame as a tool for regulating behaviour and maintaining order has been found throughout history and across every culture, as it harnesses an emotion that appears to be biologically innate to humans as an evolutionary tool to promote conformity (Wettlaufer, 2015, pp. 36-38). The religious aspects of the warnings are also part of a strong link between religious upbringings or surroundings and an increase in sexual guilt and shame, which can lead to lower levels of sexual activity, fewer partners, and less knowledge around topics such as birth control (Murray, et al., 2007). Essentially, every aspect of the discussions of pre-marital sexual expression were deliberately intended to trigger feelings of shame, which therefore limited a woman's sexual agency by making the consequences of certain choices clear and horrible, so that she would have little choice but to restrict herself. This also means that women were expected to feel shame if they did express their sexuality.

Expressing one's sexuality was also understood to come with consequences of divine condemnation. When George Hickes asked: "Would you hazard now your own Soul, and that of your Neighbour, for the Sake of a foolish Vanity?" (Hickes, 1721, p. 165), he was not just dismissing the pursuit of vanity as a fools errand, but as a sin which risked the "Soul" of herself and her community. Additionally, Woolley uses the metaphor of the biblical story of Eve and the Snake, along with other doomed women, using a story of a woman dooming humanity because of the allure of Satan to compare to women overstepping their sexual boundaries (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 117). The language of sin was used consistently throughout the Enlightenment to either advise people against actions or to reprimand past ones. Despite the reformation creating conflicting ideas of the Devil, temptation, and sin, for both Protestants and Catholics hell was still a very real place.[8] Using the language of sin creates a fear of hell, which would be an extremely effective way of limiting a woman's sexual agency, as it creates a huge consequence for transgression. Whilst it does expect a lot of agency from women in order to say no, that no may not be what they want, but the only alternative to damnation.

Likely because of this perceived threat to a woman's innocence, soul and reputation should she be thinking about or acting upon her sexuality, there is no mention of any kind of sex education, either contained within conduct literature for its readers, or in recommendations

[8] For reformation ideas on sin and hell see 'Johnstone, N. (2004) "The Protestant Devil: The Experience of Temptation in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies*. Cambridge University Press, 43(2), pp. 173–205. doi: 10.1086/380949.'

for what to teach children. One can assume due to the recommendations we have covered that this was because it was considered improper to teach of such things, at least in a text designed for young ladies, but while that does not mean it wasn't taught informally by mothers or other female relatives, it does appear that it was not discussed until at least a marriage prospect was settled. Most published works that could be considered forms of sex education were within medical journals at this time, which could be so explicit some were used as (or even intended to be) pornography, but these were circulated in prominently male upper-class spaces, not intended for female consumption (Peakman, 2012, pp. 78-86). Indeed, some erotic texts at the time based their stories on the idea that women knew nothing of the details of sexual practice. In *The School of Venus*, Katy is educated by her older cousin Francis in great detail on how to have, and enjoy, sex. Katy knows absolutely nothing at the beginning of the dialogues, even asking "is there anything to be learned, which I do not know?" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 17), and being confused that male genitals "serve to some other use besides Pissing?" (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 25). This suggests she has been kept away from even hints of what sexual activity constitutes, despite being sixteen (Millot, 1655 : 2017, p. 15). As discussed in the introduction, erotic texts are not intended to be factual reflections of life or expectations, however the common base of ignorance which the young women in erotica of this time have would suggest that it was expected that young women would have had minimal sex education at best.

The impact of this on female sexual agency is huge. Not only is sex education a large factor in empowering individuals in their sexuality, but abstinence-only sex education, which appears to be what was expected to be given to young women during the Enlightenment due to the lack of discussion, has been shown to have no affect on unplanned pregnancies, as well as not decreasing rates of sexual intercourse (Kohler, et al., 2008). What it does do however is fail to give young people the information to be able to make their own free decisions on their sexual practices. By not expecting or promoting sex education for young women, it means that young women were not expected to be made aware of their sexual agency, or given information on how to safely and comfortably have sex either while young or when married. If we consider agency as the ability to choose, then women were not expected to know their choices. This is therefore one of the largest restrictions on how women were expected to express their sexual agency.

Like with sex education, I could find no reference in conduct literature (unless we count George Hickes' possible innuendo) to female masturbation. This is most likely for the same reason; don't tell people about it and they won't think to do it. It is also possible that warnings were not given because, as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, masturbation was not just a sin or an act with severe social consequences, but during the early eighteenth century was believed to cause serious and harmful medical conditions, such as enlarged clitorises, epilepsy, sores, and for some men death from weakening (Peakman, 2012, pp. 15-17). Therefore, even though it is a common activity for youth, conduct literature writers perhaps assumed that the common knowledge of the physical harm it could cause would be off putting enough, and so expected women to not even consider it. It is certainly not because it was not considered possible, as there are many

references in pornography. This is therefore another example of women not being expected to fully express their sexual agency and see themselves as independent sexual beings.

There was not an ignorance amongst writers and publishers to the more liberal trends that scholars have focussed on appearing, but as I argued in the introduction to this chapter, things happening did not necessarily mean society expected them to happen or was happy when they did. For example, there was clear disapproval of the particular tendency for people being sexually active before marriage. In *A Treatise Concerning the Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed*, a pamphlet published in 1727, writer and author Daniel Defoe laments at the practice, and urges readers to condemn it. He recognises the argument that "Promise of Marriage is Marriage in the Abstract", but calls it "a scandalous Defence of a scandalous Offence" and the people who advocate for it "Advocates for Lewdness" (Defoe, 1727, p. 272). This is not just because of the "confusion" engagements being treated as marriages would cause, but also that it is a huge sin, and an "Offence against God" (Defoe, 1727, p. 272). This declaration against the practice actually constitutes a full chapter in his treatise: twenty pages, so it is clearly a pressing issue (Defoe, 1727, pp. 272-292). Whilst one mans' proclamations isn't enough to judge society's values, this denouncement, as well as there being no mention of pre-marital sex (and many messages to limit types of contact with men) in conduct literature, it is safe to assume that whilst the practice may have been "growing Popular" (Defoe, 1727, p. 272), it was not supported or expected for proper women to take part.

In conclusion, women were expected to, if possible, be unaware of their sexuality and sexual agency, and at most to use their sexual agency to say no. This was ensured through a culture of shame, which reminded them frequently of the consequences of sexual expression, which were predominantly sin and a ruined reputation. Women were expected to be on high alert at all times to ensure that they were guarding their innocence from anything attempting to take it, be it suggestive thoughts or men, and they were expected to refrain from anything suggestive in their language or clothing in order to avoid attracting them. Expressing oneself even vaguely sexually was seen as immature and silly, and there was a high level of suggestion that women were not expected to know their own minds, or be able to make sensible decisions, as without guidance they could be controlled by others. The consequences of a transgression could impact those around her as well as herself. Ultimately, women were expected to be asexual beings until marriage.

Chapter 3- Marriage

One of the major aspects of the so-called 'sexual revolution' that is hotly debated are the rapidly changing conventions of marriage, and the effects this had on women in particular. Primarily, the process of getting married itself became more rigid, being shaped into a more regulated process of formal recognition rather than previous private commitments due to the church (both Protestant and Catholic) trying to maintain more control over unwanted or illegitimate activity (Clark, 2014, p. 38). This also came with the protestant church placing more emphasis on marriage as a convention, seeing it as a virtuous way of engaging in sexual activity as opposed to the Catholic valuation of celibacy which emphasised total abstinence. Marriage became a holy way to fulfil one's sexual desires. Along with these changes, the family was seen as microcosm of patriarchal authority, with the fathers (or husbands) as the "governors" or "pastors" of their families, acting as whole as a "little commonwealth" (Berkowitz, 2012, p. 192). Yet, at the same time the Enlightenment created a growing ideal of romantic love, and free choice of partner appeared to be normalised (Clark, 2014, p. 49). With the choice and living of marriage including sex at the forefront, both who you choose to have it with and then how you choose to have it when wed, it is extremely pertinent to this study of sexual agency.

Many scholars have focussed on the causes and impact of these changes, with the leading voice remaining Lawrence Stone in his book *The Family, Sex and Marriage In England 1500-1800* (1979). Within this text Stone analyses the changing conventions of marriage framed by social status, within which he concludes that the upper classes were slower on the uptake to these new marriage ideas of romantic love, and the middling sort adapted fast (Stone, 1979, pp. 407-428). However, he fails to properly investigate the expectations of this new territory. More recent scholars have begun to study the impact of these new structures on the behaviours of both women on men, such as Anna Clark who focussed on the church and public motivations for structuring marriage and new laws, and the statistical or anecdotal results of these changes in marriage including the average age of matrimony increasing and new-found freedoms in flirtation (Clark, 2014, pp. 38-41). Overall, revisionist and feminist historians have begun to investigate changes in behaviour for women and young people in marriage practices, using court and parish records to do so. However, there is a difference between what people were doing, and what society was comfortable with. In this chapter I will be focussing on the expectations society had on the behaviours and feelings of women around marriage, examining conduct literature and similar print that was primarily aimed at women (or those with guardianship of them) to understand what agency a woman was expected and preferred to have, rather than the reality of their behaviour.

It is also crucial to not discuss marriage without acknowledging the fact married women were under the condition of "coverture", a legal practice which did not distinguish women as individual actors, meaning that their possessions, economic transactions, and contacts, were all owned or carried out in their husband's names (Bailey, 2003). Whilst some historians such as Joanne Bailey have argued that concepts such as the "Law of Agency" allowed this to be bypassed, and assert that many women could actually benefit from the protections of coverture, I would argue that the principles behind its existence would still

have had a huge impact on perceptions of female agency by themselves and society, and would lead to a greater necessity to both choose and maintain a good marriage (Bailey, 2003, p. 368). We must therefore keep this in mind as the background of the expectations presented in literature.

One area where women's agency (for the most part) was expected and encouraged was in choosing a husband. This may be, as Leah Astbury suggested, because of the scientific idea that compatibility was crucial for fertility, which was obviously a driving force behind marriage in the first place (Astbury, 2020, p. 524). Lawrence Stone also argued that love marriage was increasing through the middle classes at a high speed, but suggested that the poor did not adapt due to requirements of financial stability, and the rich still arranged marriages for status (Stone, 1979, pp. 407-428). Historians have debated to what extent women had free choice in their partner since Stone's assertion, and this section will investigate if women were expected and told to have such agency by the literature aimed at them, or if a proper English lady was directed to marry for external reasons such as family or status.

This is an area where the gender of the author appears to make a fair difference in the kinds of advice and expectations they set out. Somewhat unsurprisingly, writings by women emphasise making a good choice of partner at the forefront of their advice. Within *The Gentlewoman's Companion*, Hannah Woolley writes a section titled "Of the guidance of a Ladies love and fancy", which is specifically aimed at how to appropriately manage one's attractions and pursuit. In essence, the whole chapter can be boiled down to one idea; that a bad marriage can ruin a whole life, and so one must consider their own feelings more than a fleeting fancy or an expected match. She urges "Whatever you do be not induced to marry one you have either abhorrency or loathing to; for it is neither affluence of estate, potency of friends, nor highness of descent can allay the insufferable grief for a loathed bed" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 125). It is clear from this that she considers this choice one of the utmost importance, and it is something which should be done based on strong feelings of like (or love).

This emphasis on choice also encourages focus on a man's moral and personal character, not his status. She highlights the story of Themistocles, an Athenian politician, who said with regards to his daughter that "he had rather have a man without money than money without a man" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 124). Whilst on the surface this seems like an indication that love matches and free choice were becoming more acceptable between classes, she goes on to hazard that disparity in age, descent and fortune breeds "dislike", "contempt" and "discontent" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 125). She does however go on to give proactive advice for dealing with said differences, based in understanding the other's journey. She also specifically relays that "It is a common saying, That as Poverty goes in at one door Love goes out at the other" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 125), yet instructs the reader to ignore this, suggesting that there is beginning to be a break from expectations of same-wealth marriages. Ultimately however, the bulk of the advice for dealing with these differences is mainly tailored towards the woman being accepting and understanding, whatever his

condition, while there is nothing on what he should do (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, pp. 125-126). This suggests that, while marriage was expected to be a choice and becoming a more diverse one, class differences still played a huge role in understandings of that decision, and could limit a woman's agency both in how she should choose a partner and the life she was expected to have in that marriage.

Male writers give similar advice on making a proper choice, though are often much less forgiving of unfavourable qualities than female writers. Perhaps because it is targeted towards families, or perhaps because of the higher status of the target audience, choice is emphasised much less within George Hickes' version of *Instructions for the Education of a Daughter*. One of the only mentions in the main part of the text that covers marriage prospects states (after condemning the idea of beauty) "Beauty can't be hurtful, if it serve at least to marry a Daughter advantageously. But how will it serve to this, unless it be upheld by Merit and Vertue: She can expect no other than a Young Fop for her Husband, with whom she is certain to be most Unhappy" (Hickes, 1721, p. 162). Whilst this does not discount there being any choice on the woman's part, it does both mitigate this agency and give a reframing on the purpose of that choice, making it one for benefiting family rather than the bride.

This is clear in how the initial point is worded: "serve to marry a Daughter advantageously." (Hickes, 1721, p. 162). Firstly, this phrase appears to suggest that the reader would be the one marrying off the daughter, which suggests a very low level of intention or action for the woman herself. The purpose is also clear; she must marry for some advantage. We can imply that this advantage is a growth in status, presumably for the family as well as the daughter. This was certainly not an uncommon intention, traditionally all aristocratic marriages were for dynastic goals, be it the uniting of titles or the production of good heirs, and even amongst the middling ranks a productive marriage could increase the families reputation, and therefore lines of credit (Clark, 2014, pp. 49-50). That being said, there is still clearly concern for the daughter's wellbeing; they do not want her with an inappropriate match as it would make her unhappy. Of course, this text is targeted at a much higher status of person than those previously mentioned. Lawrence Stone suggested that higher social classes were much later to adopt the new ways of love marriages, and this texts would show truth in that (Stone, 1979, p. 414). Early-Modern Historian Anthony Fletcher has also suggested that family lineage was still crucial to men's honour during this period, and therefore ensuring the continuity of a strong family line would be key to a parent's concerns around a daughter's marriage (Fletcher, 1995, pp. 126-127).

Author Daniel Defoe exhibits high levels of concern for freedom of marriage choice in his pamphlet, *A Treatise Concerning the Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed*, published in London in 1727. He begins his commentary in much the same way as the authors of conduct literature; by emphasising that "Matrimony should be the Effect of a free and previous Choice in the Persons Marrying" (Defoe, 1727, p. 166). He then suggests that children, as independent beings, do not have to follow their parents' orders in who to marry (though with the addendum that is they are choosing someone wrong for them the parents should forbid it) (Defoe, 1727, pp. 167-168). However, this then leads to a sharp judgement and

condemnation of certain kinds of women exhibiting agency in choosing to marry at all, not just choosing who they marry. He discusses at length how if a woman past fertile age decides to marry, then it is for nothing more than to engage in sexual activity, and is therefore "Matrimonial Whoredom", and "open declared Lewdness" (Defoe, 1727, pp. 231-233). This denouncement not only denies older women agency in being able to marry, as they will be judged if they do, but also denies that a woman could marry for any reason but children or to have sex, which is an extreme reduction of expected female feelings.
Defoe also suggests strongly that a high-class woman should not marry below her status, simply because she will grow to resent the position; treating her husband's servants "as if they were Dogs" (Defoe, 1727, p. 253) and eventually "With this Elevation of Pride, concerning Blood and Family, she treats her Husband with the utmost Distain" (Defoe, 1727, p. 255). The latter part re-emphasises Fletcher's point on the importance of family lineage, and clearly this was a pressing concern for all marriages at an elevated social status (Fletcher, 1995, pp. 126-127). Defoe's declarations show that agency must not only be considered in the question of who to marry, but if to marry, and clearly there was still some issues with regards to the choice to marry, particularly for women. Whilst his condemnation does fall on older women however, it does place the agency for choosing to marry onto them, which, while negative, is an indication of expected choice.

Additionally, whilst considering the difference of texts by men with regards to marriage advice, it is important to note that *The Gentlewomans Companion*, whilst covered in this thesis as a female-written text, has somewhat disputed authorship; some attribute the text (or most of it) to a male publisher, Dorman Newman. This is partially because the text is much more structured, as well as the prose itself being more Latinate, than Hannah Woolley tended to use (Albano, 2001, p. 16). Woolley was a very popular author at the time, and it is not outside of the realms of possibility that a publisher may have taken advantage and used the name to generate sales (Albano, 2001, p. 15). However, this changes the analysis of the text quite significantly. When attributing it to Woolley, we can read the advice as that of a woman who has seen (and experienced first-hand) how marriage affects women and is therefore more likely to slightly alter tradition to help advance her readers. Woolley herself was also known for her aims to increase the status of individual women, so this would explain her overall conclusions of aspects such as class being a more flexible part of the choice. However, were this text written by a male publisher, it lends itself to be more of an upholding of status quo, as a basic reading of the text suggests, as well as making it a male expectation for behaviour (which, given the patriarchal nature of society at the time, is therefore a more societal view).

Even if we consider the book to be written by Woolley, it still has slightly less encouraging advice for servants. Whilst her passages for gentlewomen encourage free choice, her passage for "all Maidens, who desire to be Chamber-Maids to persons of Quality" advises against relationships with a fellow servant. She states, "consider how you must live; by inconsiderately marrying you may have one joyful meeting, and ever after a sorrowful living, and have time to repent of your rash matching" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 205). This is a very strong warning for something which should seem acceptable; one may assume that servants would marry other servants. However, around this time the results of Elizabethan Poor Laws

were leading to wider panic on the burden of poor families, to the extent that many poor people were prevented from marrying for fear of their offspring adding more expense, or unwed poor mothers be expelled from towns (Dabhoiwala, 2013, pp. 28-30). Perhaps Hannah Woolley was merely continuing her advice to increase social standing of ladies, and warning these women genuinely for their own good. However, it still constitutes a major restriction in marital and agency, specifically for poorer women in servitude.

Clearly, the idea of a woman having choice over who she marries (and therefore in turn who she has sex with) was becoming much more commonplace as a suggestion, and love was becoming a more crucial part of the conversation. However, it is important to remember just because this level of agency was becoming normalised in advice books, it does not mean that it was a common motivation. Also, social status, age, or religious difference were still a hindrance in who one was recommended to spend their life with, which limited agency of women more than a wholly free choice. It was also perhaps emphasised as a crucial choice because of the limited agency women had once they were married. Additionally, Lawrence's assertion of a difference in perceptions of love marriages does hold in conduct literature, as that which was aimed at upper class individuals is targeted towards parents of daughters rather than the women themselves, whereas texts aimed at women are much more grounded in the middling sort.

Navigating the sex itself is a topic that is rarely (if ever) touched on in published advice for women, even when concerning procreation, and therefore it is difficult to discern how much agency women are actually advised and expected to have in terms of consensual marital sex. Scholars have also not focussed on this area a lot with regards to marriage, possibly due to this lack of sources. Most sexual content was produced in the medical field instead, or is more generally targeted at those having sex rather than specifically married people (presumably because there was a hope that those having sex would be married, whether this was the case or not). That being said, we can extrapolate specifically marital expectations from other references to concepts such as fertility and subordination.

One large indication in these texts that women may not be expected to have much agency in the bedroom is the emphasis on obedience and duty. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, married women were subject to coverture. Whilst this was primarily a legal concept, the consequences of this appeared to have spilled into day-to-day life and consequently into sexual relations. In *The Gentlewoman's Companion*, this appears first when Woolley is telling her reader how to treat her husband if he is older, and she says, "his Bed you must so honour, as not to let an unchaste thought defile it" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 126). Firstly, this brings up the interesting idea that one can have unchaste thoughts even within a marriage bed. It seems that despite marriage becoming an acceptable Christian alternative to celibacy, this still had limits (Berkowitz, 2012, p. 192). Tellingly on the topic of agency however, it is notably referred to as "his bed" which she must "honour", implying that women should defer to her husband's wishes when it comes to the bedroom, and therefore to sexual relations.

She then writes a full chapter called “Of Marriage, and the duty of a Wife to her Husband” (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 134). This title is fairly self-explanatory, but the implication of an existing ‘duty’ to one’s husband, which I would suggest would include a sexual duty, continues throughout the chapter. She describes inferiority and superiority as being “two Essentials in Marriage”, and because of this “Undoubtedly the Husband hath power over the Wife, and the Wife ought to be subject to the Husband in all things” (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 134). Whilst this does not explicitly mention sex, “all things” would presumably include intimacy. If this is the case, it is obviously a huge restriction of female sexual agency within marriage, as well as frankly being an absence of consent which I have discussed more specifically in an earlier chapter. Woolley does clarify that this power is greater than people often use, which is an indication that women may have had more agency within their choices during marriage with regards to areas such as economic freedom and sex, but she does still state that this power is moderate compared to other parts of the world or in the past (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, pp. 134-135), suggesting she does not see it as unreasonable, and as it has been asserted by scholars that she pretty much maintains the status-quo in her writing it is safe to assume society does not expect any different.

Daniel Defoe does briefly discuss sex directly in his treatise, specifically with regards to sex during pregnancy. He compares the idea of approaching a pregnant woman for sex to approaching an animal; “No Park-Keepers […] would dare come near them in their Rutting-time” (Defoe, 1727, pp. 295-296). This suggests a level of viciousness from pregnant women, which with regards to agency can be seen in two ways; either it shows that Defoe expects women to be clearly defensive of themselves and to be able to express their non-desire, which is a large act of agency; or he expects the woman in question to be uncontrollable, unable to express what one may consider sensible emotions, which denies women their agency. He does also specifically condemn those who may use sodomy to have sex during pregnancy, evoking the language of sin to make it clear it is a big no (Defoe, 1727, p. 297). This language of sin is also used at the beginning of his treatise when he is discussing the purpose of the document, where he states “They that think the Marriage-bed cannot be defiled but by Adultery, will greatly differ from me; and ‘tis my Business to prove they are mistaken” (Defoe, 1727, p. 21). From this, and Woolley’s discussion of unchaste thoughts, it is clear that whilst marriage was seen by the Protestant church as a sin-free alternative to chastity, there were still restrictions on how far that sexual freedom extended.

One area where historians have asserted that women are given a lot of agency however is in receiving sexual pleasure, due to the idea of fertility held in the Early Modern Period. As covered in the first chapter, it was believed that the female orgasm produced a “seed”, which was necessary to combine with male sperm to create an embryo. An absence of orgasm was also thought to create a sickness which could lead to an uncontrolled “longing for males” (Rousseau, 2014, pp. 140-141). It has therefore become a fairly accepted historical idea that women enjoyed a lot of control and pleasure within the marital bed. However, in recent years revisionists such as Leah Astbury have begun to challenge this idea. Astbury suggests that while orgasms in women were held as valuable for fertility, this did not give women any more agency, and in fact placed the burden of reproduction almost entirely on them. This therefore restricted her agency in other ways, such as in food,

entertainment, and even what emotions she could be permitted to experience (Astbury, 2020). This idea, that agency in one area can lead to a restriction of agency in another, is an important issue to note, and highlights that whilst we are discussing sexual agency in this paper it does not in any way represent all agency that women held or were expected to hold at this time.

Whilst sex is very rarely (if ever) explicitly mentioned in conduct books, from these and similar sources it is clear there was an expectation that sexual agency in the marital bed begins and ends with the men, with female pleasure being a happy happenstance of the scientific understanding of fertility. There is also an implication of a 'duty' to have sex when the husband wants, and to have sex at all, though in the right ways so as not to defile one's bed. However, just because women were not expected to have full control over that sphere, it does not mean that they did not have any within their physical lives.

One area of marriage where women had very impacted agency was in the conflict of extra-marital affairs, as well as in the possibility of having their own illicit relations. It is important to note that this was a time where sexual reputation was everything. As Anna Clark put it, everyone relied on "obtaining credit from a network of kin", essentially meaning one's ability to procure business opportunities or favours relied on an impression of good character from one's community. Sexual reputation was a key part of this, as it showed someone to be of good Christian character, and women bore the brunt of this, with the language, attackers, and victims of sexual slander being primarily women (Poos, 1995, pp. 586-587). Therefore, extra-marital affairs were more than simply a marital issue, but a societal, legal, and economic one that had impacts far beyond individual feelings. Additionally, during the Enlightenment the idea of "libertinism" was becoming popular particularly in the upper classes; it was a celebration of sexual desire which often led to a rebellion against church or political views of the ideals of monogamy, using the ideas of divine retribution to "justify their own debauchery" (Clark, 2014, pp. 51-52). Essentially, particularly well-educated men developed a philosophical excuse to sleep with any woman they could, and it is clear that this came with a greater expectation and normalisation of extra-marital affairs.

The subject of extra-marital affairs is brought up in conduct literature in the same tone as all other marital problems, suggesting that the likelihood of having such an affair was assumed to be fairly high, regardless of status.

In *The Gentlewoman's Companion*, advice to women against having an affair themselves is strongly tied to the idea of obedience to their husband, especially as the title of the section is "Of Marriage, and the duty of a Wife to her Husband". She suggests "That Woman that will entertain mean and low thoughts of her Husband, will be easily induced to love another, whom she ought not to affect" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 135), and that this esteem should be based in obedience. She also makes it clear that "You must be mindful of what you promised your husband in Marriage […] honour and obey, and love no mans company better than his" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 136). It is clear that in order to be a good wife,

one must be obedient, and with that comes not having a relationship (even something non-sexual) with any other man. It is less of a crime of passion than one of insubordination. This not only places the burden of a healthy relationship onto the woman; that she should keep good thoughts and not stray rather than he should show lovable qualities; but it also suggests that the agency held by a woman to cheat or not cheat is attributed to a willingness to submit, rather than any genuine feelings towards her husband or another man.

The blame for inappropriate relations also falls on the woman regardless of class differences in Woolley's advice. In the section "Of a young Gentlewoman's deportment to her Governess and Servants in the Family", she advises her reader to be "courteous" to servants of her parent's, but "not over-familiar with any of them, lest they grow rude and saucy with you" (Woolley, 1675 : 2001, p. 85). This can be read in multiple ways; it is a suggestion against allowing servants too much familiarity as subordination is key to the household structure, but the specific language is 'saucy', which adds the more sexual tone. Here, despite the girl being of a higher social class than her servants, it is still the fact that the responsibility to prevent any unchaste relations or thoughts are on her, even when it is not her making moves towards them. Rather than a denial of her own agency (as it is suggesting she has agency over those in the household), this is attributing someone else's to her in a negative context, meaning that women at this time were not only restricted in their own actions, but held responsible for others, regardless of social status or age differences.

The advice on extra-marital affairs in George Hickes's work actually comes in the tracts which follow the main work, specifically in "Instructions for a Young Princess" (Hickes, 1721, p. 254). This is perhaps telling itself, as the rich did have normalised affairs much later than the middling sort (Stone, 1979, p. 329), though of course it may simply be because this is directly aimed at the woman herself, rather than her guardians. Regardless, the advice is very telling of the amount of control a woman was supposed to have over her marriage. She is essentially told to not react to her husband straying, so as to not lose his respect of her. To break down some of the language used, she is first told the advice is for if her husband is "not so faithful to you as he ought" (Hickes, 1721, p. 267), which implies that there is a certain level of unfaithfulness that is acceptable. She is then told that while she should react so as to not seem indifferent, she should not be "too sharp and violent" and should instead "endeavour to bring him back to you by gentle means" (Hickes, 1721, p. 267).

This not only places the burden of good behaviour on her, restricting her reactions to not upset him, but it also makes maintaining a good relationship her duty, as she must bring him back to her. Additionally, the phrase "if you must lose his Heart, you lose not his Esteem" (Hickes, 1721, p. 267) implies that whilst we have seen love within marriages being emphasised more, it is not necessary for one to continue. This is probably because only the rich could afford to divorce, and whilst it was possible it was extremely rare, with only 131 requests made from 1670-1799, with only 17 passing (Smith, 2014, p. 124). Ultimately, it was easier to simply get on with life.

Later in the text the princess is also told that "men often go further than we intended" (Hickes, 1721, p. 269), and so to ensure men do not become inappropriate after a friendly

meeting it is best “to have no particular Intimacy with such Friends as may be suspected” (Hickes, 1721, p. 270). He does not discourage any correspondence with men, rather that when doing so one much be cautious. This once again puts the burden of men’s actions onto the woman, restricting her agency by attributing another’s to her. It also places actual affairs into the same category as suspicion, which shows how strongly the idea of sexual reputation controlled action.

All of this actually suggests there was a high level of agency expected of women in the case of extra-marital affairs, but in the sense that they were expected and advised to have a high level of control over their emotions and reactions, and to carefully prioritise their relationship and stability over any desired outburst.

To conclude this chapter, it is evident that the level of agency women were expected to have in choosing their marriages was increasing and becoming much more acceptable during this period. However, this did not mean that they had total free-reign in that choice, as issues such as family lineage, social status, and age were still held as important restrictions. Additionally, women were still duty-bound to provide levels of sexual satisfaction to their husbands, and it was considered a personal failing, as well as a hazard of the job, if he decided to find that satisfaction elsewhere. Women were given a high amount of agency in their emotional control, but were not only being restricted in their own sexual agency but held responsible for the actions of agency of others.

Conclusion

As with most history, conclusions are rarely simple yes or no answers to the questions we have asked. Expectations of women's sexual agency during the long eighteenth century weren't as simple as having lots or having none; there was a minefield of complex rules that depended upon her class, age, marital status, and who she kept company with. They were also set by many different facets of society but agreed on these premises, including erotic writers and both male and female conduct literature authors. However, the expectations were strict enough to maintain my assertion that this was not particularly a time of sexual revolution that birthed a "modern mind-set" (Dabhoiwala, 2013, p. 2), at least for the majority of women, and the studies that have shown this have ignored many of the nuances of satirical erotica or subtle wording in conduct literature that ultimately still placed much of the control with men. Generally, women were expected to have sexual agency in their ability to restrain themselves. When married, this could extend to expressing their sexuality to satisfying male desire, and their personal enjoyment, while celebrated, was assumed as a result of this.

Questions around sexual agency, particularly before the last 20 years, are still often unexplored, and there are many avenues that this research could continue to focus on. Firstly, as mentioned in the introduction, the agency (including sexual agency) of women of colour is still very unexplored outside of colonialism and fetishization, and hopefully with more sources being analysed and a growing focus on non-white experiences this can become a more thriving research area. Additionally, sexuality of disabled people has barely been studied in any capacity, and examining history would be a very good avenue into exploring this subject further, and into learning how society can continue to give more agency to these individuals.

Within women's general sex life expectations are hard to find, as conduct literature does not discuss such a lewd or explicit subject. Words such as 'duty' imply a certain lack of choice in how she often she was expected to perform, but sex itself was never discussed, which itself suggests that it was not for women to be thinking about (an obvious limit on agency). Looking to erotica for a clearer picture of expectations in the bedroom, one finds that at the very least women were expected to enjoy the encounter, but it is still clear that it was primarily for male pleasure, especially with regards to pain and regularity. Women were to be passive tools, and were understood to like it if based on nothing more than satisfying her love.

With sections of conduct literature that are directly targeted at young unmarried women or their caregivers, the expectations around sexuality are much clearer. Emphasis in guidance for young women and their caregivers was that protection of a girls innocence (often code for virginity or sexual experience) was crucial, both to protect her eternal soul and the reputation (and therefore business and patronage prospects) of her family. This was asserted through distressingly violent metaphors invoking images of poisoning and other physical assault. In order to avoid such corruption, unmarried women were expected to act with the upmost modesty, including avoidance of makeup and fashion, moderating

conversations with men, and above all they should have little to no knowledge of the processes of sex.

The main (if not the only) person a woman was expected to have sex with was her husband, so how much agency she was expected to have in the choice of spouse is pretty central to how much sexual agency she was expected to have, as one of the first choices is who to have sex with. Women's choice was actually highly emphasised within the courtship process, and it was becoming more commonly believed that spouses should like each other and live as equals. However, the choice still came with many strong suggestions as to how one should decide, suggesting that whilst there was choice, good women who wanted healthy marriages should still pick a particular kind of man: one with similar financial status, no religious differences, and of a similar age.

Once married however, expectations once again turn against women having much agency. The concept 'duty' was highly emphasised; both to keep one's husband satisfied and to produce children. The burden of fertility was almost entirely on a women, and struggling to conceive would reflect poorly on her rather than the family. If a husband was to stray and have an affair women were supposed to restrain their emotions; to understand that it was her fault and to lash out would only push him further away. Essentially, maintaining a healthy marriage was the female responsibility, required to ensure emotions stayed positive and all marital relations were satisfactory.

Overall, expectations of female sexual agency were somewhat more liberal than one may expect, particularly when looking at expectations around pleasure and desire. However, women were still by no means in charge of perceptions of themselves as sexual beings, and sex was still seen as reserved to a carefully chosen appropriate husband, when and how he desired, and preferably for procreation or to maintain the marriage. This expectation of appropriate relations and tactical celibacy also came with enforced modesty in order to ensure nobody could assume she was having sex outside of the narrow boundaries set for her, which included monitoring how she could speak to men, make up and clothes she wore, and what topics she could discuss with friends or learn about when young.

Therefore, whilst this period may have been asserted to be a sexual revolution, in practice the ideals of a modest woman remained essentially the same as centuries prior. There were some more liberal ideas of romantic love and sexual enjoyment creeping in, but innocence was still praised as a high virtue, and the changes which began to come up from action were pretty quickly dismissed as horrific by writers and societal leaders.

Sex is slowly becoming a more accepted subject in mainstream historiography, and this is extremely important for our understandings of individuals in the past. Having sex is one of the most base instincts of humanity, and it's limitation and regulation says everything about a society, from its views on gender to its religious control and understandings of science. This is why studying sex in a historical context is so key, and combining it with the study of agency will allow us to form a clearer picture of the lives of people in the long eighteenth century, and to better understand our own societal limitations.

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