



*The Routledge History of*  
**Sex and the Body**  
**1500 to the Present**

Edited by **SARAH TOULALAN**  
and **KATE FISHER**

# THE ROUTLEDGE HISTORY OF SEX AND THE BODY

*The Routledge History of Sex and the Body* provides an overview of the main themes surrounding the history of sexuality from 1500 to the present day. The history of sex and the body is an expanding field in which vibrant debate on, for instance, the history of perversions is developing. This book examines the current scholarship and looks towards future directions for the field.

The volume is divided into 14 thematic parts, which are split into two chronological chapters: 1500–1750 and 1750 to the present day. Focusing on the history of sexuality and the body in the West but also interactions with a broader globe, these thematic parts survey the major areas of debate and discussion. Covering themes such as science, identity, the gaze, courtship, reproduction, sexual violence and the importance of age and race, the volume offers a comprehensive view of the history of sex and the body. The book concludes with an afterword in which the reader is invited to consider some of the ‘tensions, problems and areas deserving further scrutiny’.

Including contributors renowned in their field of expertise, this ground-breaking collection is essential reading for all those interested in the history of sexuality and the body.

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*Sarah Toulalan and Kate Fisher*

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# INTRODUCTION

*Sarah Toulalan and Kate Fisher*

The history of love is the history of mankind, of civilization.<sup>1</sup>  
(Iwan Bloch)

For sexologists seeking to understand human sexuality and its variations (frequently from a medical perspective) at the beginning of the twentieth century, history was important. As German sex reformer Iwan Bloch argued (see quotation above) the history of civilization, and the progress of man towards higher forms of existence were fundamentally affected by changing sexual practices. Sexologists sought to demonstrate the importance of studying the history of sexuality, both because it was essential to contextualizing contemporary problems of human sexuality, but also because it was key to understanding the nature of European history (framed in terms of civilization and progress) itself. Among historians, however, the serious and scholarly investigation of sex and the body is relatively new, and its integration into mainstream historical practice even more recent.<sup>2</sup> A specialist journal devoted to the 'history of sexuality' has only been in existence for a little over 20 years. In establishing this journal, published by the University of Texas Press, the editorial board sought to shift the tradition for work on the history of sexuality to be undertaken by sexologists whose focus was predominantly medical. In 1990 this new journal, recognizing that a new approach to the study of sexuality was evolving, invited scholars from the humanities (rather than from the sciences) to come together. The journal made an explicit call in its opening edition for 'social historians, sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, psychologists, literary scholars, classicists, art and film historians (and others)' to put historically variable, social and cultural frameworks at the forefront of the analysis of sexuality.<sup>3</sup> The response was impressive, and since then the history of sexuality has developed rapidly and is now a vibrant field of scholarly activity, raising few eyebrows or concerns about its scholarly legitimacy.<sup>4</sup> This book surveys (indeed, it celebrates) the emergence of the histories of sex, sexuality and the body. Within the book the particular subjects are contextualized in the key areas of debate that have structured the field. Employing a range of theoretical and empirical approaches and perspectives, paired chapters dealing with different time periods (the first part pre-1750, the second post-1750) both assess current understanding of each topic and point to areas of neglect or questions for future research.

It is the interdisciplinary, theoretically rigorous and conceptually challenging nature of much of this work in the history of bodies and sex that makes it such a vibrant and exciting field to work in, but it also highlights the importance of accessible collections such as this one. The field is broad and covers a large variety of themes and areas. As Jeffrey Weeks has pointed out, over the past 30 years, we have seen the focus of scholarly attention

## INTRODUCTION

spread, to a point at which it is increasingly difficult to contain its remit within identifiable key themes.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Kim Phillips and Barry Reay have observed, ‘the history of sexuality is at once a history of a “category of thought”, and a history of “changing erotic practices, subjective meanings, social definitions, and patterns of regulation whose only unity lies in their common descriptor”’.<sup>6</sup> Harry Cocks and Matt Houlbrook concur: the history of sex ‘is about far more than sex itself’; indeed, they argue that ‘rather than being content to occupy a narrow and marginal sub-discipline, historians of sexuality have had greater aspirations – aspirations to write a total history of modern Western culture’.<sup>7</sup>

All this can make the landscape rather difficult for students and readers to navigate. The conceptual debate about the very nature of human sexuality and the assumptions scholars bring to its investigation provides further complications that can confuse the reader. Many students are startled to read at the beginning of their studies, for example, that sexuality has not always existed, but was instead a medical construction of human behaviour that emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century. Grappling with such unsettling ideas at the same time as confronting claims that sex and sexuality are implicated in all areas of history can at first seem daunting. This book seeks to provide a helpful route through some of the intellectual frameworks that have been used to study sex in historical contexts from 1500 to the present and to outline the key arguments that have dominated – and continue to dominate – historical debate. It will explore the conceptual frameworks contested by historians and highlight the various different contexts, situations and behaviours that have been associated with sex in times past, and the different understandings of human bodies that underpinned them.

The legacy of Foucault is threaded throughout this collection and few of the topics considered in its chapters ignore his work (though not all authors may reference him explicitly). From the outset historians’ reactions to Foucault’s various writings relevant to the history of sexuality have been ambivalent. Foucault’s lack of attention to historical specifics irked empirically focused historians and the suggestion, as Harry Cocks and Matt Houlbrook have pointed out, that the history of sexuality is invariably only a story of power was difficult to accept.<sup>8</sup> However, as these essays show, it is almost impossible to exaggerate the influence of Foucault in establishing the framework for debate in almost all areas of the historical investigation of sex and sexuality, and his work remains an important and challenging point of engagement with sex in the past. Particularly stimulating has been Foucault’s identification of a fundamental shift in thinking about sex and the body which presents the very idea of sexuality as a product of scientific thinking, increasingly dominant from the end of the nineteenth century, that had little or no purchase in earlier periods. This idea has provided a basic (although not universally accepted) framework for understanding the different meanings and significance of sexual behaviours and experiences of the body in many of the following chapters, and explored in detail by Harry Cocks in chapter 2. Foucault’s enduring legacy, as illustrated by this book, lies not so much in particular historical narratives, which are accepted or rejected, but in the establishment of a conceptual framework for thinking about the ways in which people have considered sex or understood their bodies differently in the past. Ivan Crozier, for example, provides a nuanced development of Foucault’s focus on the medical categories used to define and construct sexual types and identities, charting the ways in which such categorizations have been resisted and reworked by individuals in the pursuit of pleasure. Garthine Walker and Shani D’Cruze employ insights drawn from Foucault in the discussion of the history of rape. As D’Cruze explains, if we follow Foucault in seeing a shift from understanding sexual behaviours as acts to understanding them as governed by identities, then

conceptions of rape change as well – rape becomes psychologized, perpetrators are identified and labelled by their acts and the harm to the ‘victim’ becomes less about damage to chastity or honour but now a fundamental attack on the person and her – or his – psychological well-being.

Many treatments of the history of sexuality begin by acknowledging the difficulties historians face in finding suitable sources to chart changing sexual attitudes and behaviours. Acceptable but private, or illicit and needing to be hidden, much sexual behaviour does not leave a large paper trail documenting its contours or details. Comparatively few individuals record details of their sexual behaviour and feelings, even in the modern world. However, as this volume shows, the centrality of sex to the workings of European society ensures that a variety of relevant documents that provide insights into various sexual cultures, customs, thoughts, rules and regulations, experiences and emotions can be mined by scholars. In charting the work of earlier scholars, the essays in this volume are testament to the rich and inventive use of sources by historians and the extraordinary insights they can provide despite their limitations and lacunae.

For the reader looking for an entry point to this field a number of existing introductory volumes, textbooks and survey works already exist. For the most part these focus on particular regions, nations, and time periods.<sup>9</sup> Some works have been more ambitious in their scope, such as Robert Nye’s collection of primary sources, and key works in the recent historiography entitled simply *Sexuality*, Angus McLaren’s *Twentieth-Century Sexuality* or the double-volume collection *Sexual Cultures in Europe* edited by Franz X. Eder, Lesley Hall and Gert Hekma. Particularly impressive studies of modern European sexuality are Harry Cocks and Matt Houlbrook’s short collection of essays which consider the key themes, approaches and areas of debate in the history of sexuality in western European countries and north America since 1750. This is an extremely valuable set of well-written essays that is particularly strong on collapsing an artificial distinction between experience and ideologies and ideas, and highlighting the intimate relationship between categorizations of sex and the various ways it is experienced.<sup>10</sup> Unique in paying due attention to the whole of Europe (including the East) is Dagmar Herzog’s lively and exceptionally well-informed overview of sexuality in the twentieth century, which is remarkable in its accessible yet nuanced presentation of the complexities of European sexual history and the refusal to let the dominant framing of changes in sexual attitudes and behaviours in terms of liberation or repression structure her analysis.<sup>11</sup> For the early modern and medieval periods, Kim M. Phillips and Barry Reay’s *Sex Before Sexuality: A Premodern History* provides a sophisticated analysis of the complicated understandings of sexual behaviour in a premodern world which shared very few of the frameworks for thinking about sex with those of our modern western world, while their earlier *Sexualities in History: A Reader* (2002) brought together many key articles on the history of sexuality published in the previous decade.<sup>12</sup> Katherine Crawford’s *European Sexualities* encompasses all regions of western Europe without over-generalizing. Anna Clark’s *Desire* is a concise but engaging overview of the history of sexuality in Europe from ancient to modern times, and Stephen Garton provides a sophisticated summary of the history of the history of sexuality, across all time periods, since the first sexual histories written by sexologists.<sup>13</sup> Peter Stearns’ *Sexuality in World History* is the only serious attempt to provide a truly global and transnational perspective on sex in the past, but such a short volume inevitably focuses on rather broad shifts, what Stearns calls the ‘great transformations in sexuality’, even while it attempts to resist over-generalization.<sup>14</sup>

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This book examines a long time period, from 1500 to the present with occasional glimpses back to the late medieval and early Renaissance worlds. The nature of much academic work is such that the areas of expertise that scholars develop often reflect the conventions of historical periodization. We wished to put such periodization under the microscope, and examine continuities across time as well as the complex trajectories of historical change. Without asking scholars to write about periods whose literature they are unfamiliar with, we split the book into linked chapters covering the same theme. In structuring the book around paired chapters considering the same topic in earlier and later periods this book aims to ensure that major continuities or significant transitions are apparent, without glossing over the specifics of period, place and the complexities of change over time. In so doing, however, we are aware that we have imposed a rough (and artificial) mid-eighteenth-century division onto our map of European sexual cultures. In part this reflects the dominant historiographical idea that there is something profoundly different about the early modern and modern worlds, and which structures the framework through which scholars tend to situate themselves/be situated. Phillips and Reay also identify the mid-eighteenth century as a pivotal point in the dominant narratives of the history of sexuality, the point at which many scholars date a shift towards recognizable ‘modern’ sexuality, including a reconfiguration of women’s bodies, a new interpretation of anatomical differences between male and female, and the emergence of a phallocentric model of sex and desire.<sup>15</sup> In doing this, however, we are not seeking to accept this division – indeed many of the chapters point out the ways in which historians remain sceptical of this neat division between early modern and modern – but rather to interrogate it. By placing together chapters which look at the same theme from either side of a crude 1750 divide, the book forces us to think about the strengths and weaknesses of the periodizations which have structured the field and its development. The notions of modernity and tradition and the teleological assumptions which underpin the questions frequently asked of the past are juxtaposed, highlighting tensions and contradictions caused by the tendency of historians to work from within narrower timeframes.

In some cases, the relevance of a mid-eighteenth-century shift in attitudes towards sex and the body is deemed appropriate. Kathryn Norberg, for example, regards the mid-eighteenth century as a pivotal point in attitudes towards prostitution, a time when a variety of forces coalesce into the construction of the prostitute as a different creature – separated and isolated from ‘ordinary women’ as both a social and biological evil. In other cases an easy separation of European narratives of change into premodern and modern disintegrates, and the fragility of key trajectories of change are highlighted, as by Kate Fisher in her analysis of the historiography of marriage in chapter 18. The juxtapositions of these chapters enable a particularly productive approach to constructing histories over a long timeframe, indicating both continuities as well as both large and smaller changes over time. Each chapter is embedded in a detailed understanding of the period, written by an author who is an expert in that particular literature. Yet, each chapter directly speaks to and about longer term changes and the broad patterns of change and continuity.

Other traditions of scholarship that this book reflects (and reproduces) are more problematic. The rich historiography of the history of sexuality has its limitations. This volume is not a guide to what the history of sexuality should look like, but rather is indicative of the shape the field has taken during the past 40 years or so – it reveals its strengths and its weaknesses. The dominance of Anglo-American literature on the framework of the debates is clear, with literature on European cultures comparatively less well developed or

well known. For example, there is less scholarship available in English on eastern Europe and Russia, and what exists has not yet been fully integrated into the grand narratives of European change, although two recent works which try to trouble this historically ingrained western-centricism in sexuality studies are Lisa Downing and Robert Gillett's *Queer in Europe: Contemporary Case Studies* and Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizelińska's *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*.<sup>16</sup> Dagmar Herzog argues that the study of post-Communist sexuality is well under way, some of which looks back to the Communist period,<sup>17</sup> but we await a body of scholarship on sex and the body within the European Communist experience.<sup>18</sup> In the history of sexuality as in much of European historiography, the integration of studies of western Europe, with those of central eastern European nations is a further important undertaking. As Stefan Berger argues: 'It remains one of the most important tasks of the post-Cold War Europe to reintegrate the histories of Western and Eastern Europe.'<sup>19</sup> A rich literature also exists on Scandinavia which remains insufficiently incorporated into European narratives of sexuality.<sup>20</sup>

The geographical focus on the West (North America, Britain and continental Europe, with occasional references to Australia and New Zealand), and the rest of the world considered only from a imperial perspective – and that predominantly in the separate set of chapters on race by Jonathan Burton and Antoinette Burton – is indicative of the arbitrary and indeed unsatisfactory dominance of this framework in the development of the history of sexuality, which has allowed the ideologically based division of the world into the West and the Rest to structure the writing of history. This framework is 'imaginary', as it glosses over many of the transnational and global exchanges informing sexual cultures, attitudes and behaviours (as both Jonathan Burton and Antoinette Burton point out). But it is also at the same time self-fulfilling in constructing boundaries between cultures, attitudes and behaviours as part of the construction of sexuality itself. As Jonathan Burton succinctly puts it: 'Sexual cultures ... were never unique to particular geographies or cultures but instead were produced along criss-crossing pathways, and woven in and out of various spaces and times.'<sup>21</sup> Some other chapters, in addition to the close examinations in chapters 27 and 28, illustrate the insights that can be gained through exploring such transnational threads. Susan Vincent, in her chapter on clothing and the body in the early modern period, notes that the discovery of the new world also made itself felt in the world of costume and fashion, as exotic dress found its way into the costume books that started to be printed in the sixteenth century. The discovery of peoples of different skin colour, cultures and mores, and the development of colonialism brought new differentiations in the history of rape law where the rape of white women by black men was treated more seriously and with more severity than was the rape of indigenous women by white men.<sup>22</sup> Racialized ideas about sexual appetite and lack of chastity infused attitudes towards rape and prostitution and the spread of sexual disease. Kevin Siena notes that one of the effects of the virulent strains of venereal disease that travelled to Europe following the discovery of the new world was the demonizing of indigenous peoples, who were seen as requiring domination, through the emergence of the trope of the hypersexual native.

It is to be hoped that the future of the history of sexuality will grapple with these themes more satisfactorily – as it is already increasingly doing – challenging and reworking these geographical distinctions and exploring the intersections between sexual cultures across the world. Yet in seeking to explore the state of our research into the history of sexuality and the body, the structure and framing of this book inevitably reproduces such traditions. The reader will encounter many recurring themes and issues throughout the book, too many

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for us to enumerate and discuss in this introduction. What we want to do here instead is to draw attention to just a few of the issues that emerge from the discussions set out in the chapters to follow. One of these issues is to do with the way that authors engage with recurring questions of change over time, challenging and modifying existing narrative trajectories or giving greater emphasis to continuities. In doing so, these narratives are also further enmeshed within the existing histories of bodies and sex. This can be seen, for example, in the way that historians discuss changing understandings about bodies and sex/gender: whether they disagree with Thomas Laqueur's thesis of a shift from a one-sex model of the body differentiated hierarchically and by heat to two incommensurate sexes, or challenge only the timing of such a shift in thinking about the body, nevertheless the concept is thoroughly embedded within the discussion. We also want to draw readers' attention to some new directions in research and analysis. These new directions are not only to do with new subjects that are only now beginning to be explored in greater depth by historians (such as body size and sex, for example, touched on only very briefly in passing by Sarah Toulalan in chapter 15 and, regrettably, a notable omission from this collection), but are rather concerned with shifts in focus to take greater account of a particular category of analysis such as age, for example, or heterosexuality.

Throughout this collection, it is clear that, along with Foucault, one of the most influential scholars to have informed histories of the body and sex/gender has been Thomas Laqueur. The argument of a transition from a premodern one-sex model of the body to a modern two-sex one made in his *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, published in 1990, has profoundly influenced subsequent discussions of bodies, sex and gender.<sup>23</sup> Although historians have subsequently debated and modified his thesis it nevertheless remains a cornerstone of body history, informing discussions of a very wide range of subject matters. As Lauren Kassell notes, 'Laqueur's legacy has been most enduring amongst modern historians of sex and the body for whom the transition from the one-to two-sex model serves as a sort of creation myth for binary ideas about sex difference.'<sup>24</sup> Michael Stolberg is most explicit in rejecting Laqueur's thesis, asserting that 'The major anatomists and the overwhelming majority of late medieval and early modern physicians clearly did not advocate a one-sex model. On the contrary, they stressed anatomical difference and its fatal effects on female health.'<sup>25</sup> Restricted to discussions of anatomy, ideas of physical difference according to disease have rarely featured in this debate, but as Stolberg reminds us, 'Due to the peculiar nature of their genitals and breasts, women ... suffered from many diseases which were unknown in men.' Laura Gowing argues that one-sex and two-sex models co-existed with ideas about sexual difference that were embodied from head to toe and determined by the balance of humours in the body. She further notes that Laqueur's argument that an emerging differentiation through language between male and female sexual parts from the eighteenth century indicates this increasing differentiation of bodies ignores the huge variety of vernacular and slang terms for male and female body parts that existed prior to this.<sup>26</sup> While Katherine Crawford agrees that 'The critics are not wrong', she nevertheless concedes that 'aspects of Laqueur's thesis remain persuasive,' for 'The difficulty of re-imagining the female body as anatomically specific, for instance, was stubbornly persistent, with gendered assumptions about bodies and roles seemingly limiting new approaches to understanding human anatomy.'

Ideas about the nature of seed, who produces it and what is its nature, infuse discussions of sex and the body, especially in the construction of one-sex or two sexes where homology

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necessitates female seed, but where difference in body heat affects its nature and efficacy. Ideas about female subordination, in which women are the same but inferior, meant that they therefore produced inferior seed in both quality and substance. Furthermore, as Kevin Siena argues, the shift from a one-sex to a two-sex model of reproduction, where women's production of seed disappears, facilitated the construction of models of transmission of sexual disease in which women's promiscuity could be blamed. However, Sarah Toulalan points out that understandings about the nature of seed were not only gendered, but also infused ideas about age and fitness for sexual activity and successful reproduction. Katherine Crawford's point that gendered ideas about male superiority and female inferiority were inscribed on the body and rationalized as innate characteristics can be applied equally to distinctions made by age. While gender has long been central to analysis of ideas about constructions of bodies and sex, consideration of age as a category of analysis has been slower to emerge, but needs more attention – and in conjunction with race and class as well as gender.

Histories of clothing and dress have so far only appeared on the margins of the one-sex to two-sex debate, where sex differentiation was insufficiently achieved through the body alone and its organization of sexual characteristics. But clothing too had a part to play in making visible to the outside world a person's sex and gender role. Early modern historians have noted that infancy and the early years of childhood occupied a kind of neutered space where bodies were warm and moist, not yet having solidified into the constitutional difference of cold/moist, hot/dry that differentiated women from men. Clothing thus took on an important role in differentiating between the two – which also intersected with age in the practice of breeching boys between the ages of 5 and 8, changing their clothing from the skirts of early childhood worn by both girls and boys to the breeches worn by men that served to differentiate the place in the world occupied by male and female children, and the worlds that they would go on to inhabit in future as they grew. Susan Vincent further notes, 'if garments contributed so much to the normative performance of masculinity and femininity – as glimpsed, for example, in the ritual of breeching – then the wrong clothes perverted that performance and ushered in the effeminate man and the manly woman.' Such concerns for differentiation of gender through clothing were particularly acute in relation to the hermaphrodite and the potential threat it posed to the sex/gender order. However, Vincent also points out that it was not so much an anxiety that bodies might *really* change from one sex to another with the increase or decrease of bodily heat that made bodies either masculine or feminine, but rather 'that appearances no longer clearly mirrored the truth beneath. It is the disruption of the sign that is at stake, not a fear that the sign may, upon examination, prove to be empty.'<sup>27</sup> Clothing was intimately connected to later questions of sexual rather than gender identity, as Paul Deslandes points out, where women's mannish clothing was conflated with lesbian desire.

In writing a history of bodies and sex over a long period of time one of the primary approaches that the reader might anticipate would be for chapters to set out how (and what) knowledge has expanded, or been gained, altered and 'improved'. Here we might expect a story of progression, of improvement of the human condition, as technological development – particularly – has enabled greater penetration of the interior of the body, even down to the level of cells and DNA, allowing subsequent development of new and 'better' ways of understanding and, consequently, of treating and thinking about bodies and sex. Although information of this nature is to be found within the following chapters, broader questions that authors address are to do with what constitutes knowledge and



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expertise in such matters, who has what kinds of knowledge, and how this shapes understanding. Although there is a part of this book (part VII, by Laura Gowing and Tanya Evans) that deals specifically with the questions of knowledge and experience, in practice all the chapters in the book address these questions to a greater or lesser extent. At one level everyone has some knowledge of bodies – their own and the bodies of those they come into close contact with – but what constitutes ‘expert’ knowledge, and who is able to acquire and disseminate knowledge, and to whom, has varied over time. Those authors writing about the pre-1750 period often note how in early modern Europe ‘expert’ knowledge was not limited simply to those (men) educated in formal institutions of learning and through literacy, especially Latin, the language in which learned anatomies were circulated. ‘Expert’ knowledge was the province of both this educated elite of medical practitioners but also of ordinary women to whom learned medicine was mostly closed. Through their practice of midwifery and of kitchen physick or medical care in the household – the production and administration of remedies for a very wide variety of illnesses and bodily disorders – women of lesser education and much lower down the social scale than those university-educated men who practised medicine and surgery professionally, also gained knowledge about the body, and particularly of the sexual body. Women were not only thought to be repositories of sexual knowledge and expertise, but they also had more informal networks in which such knowledge might be disseminated. Midwives were subject to ecclesiastical control in England, and to a mix of municipal, state, ecclesiastical and physician supervision in different parts of Europe in the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth, reflecting the huge importance of the Church at this time in matters of the body; the body was not simply about biology but was also thoroughly enmeshed in legal, religious, and other social and cultural beliefs and practices – as it remains today, albeit in differing proportions and ways.<sup>28</sup>

Who had better knowledge of the female body and who was therefore better qualified to manage labour became a site of contestation between female midwives and male medical practitioners who sought to increase their authority in this area and to take over as primary birth attendants, as Lianne McTavish and Helen Blackman discuss in part X. The increasing professionalization and specialization of medical practice in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the ascendancy of male practitioners and the development of obstetrics as well as other medical specialisms. However, as Lauren Kassell notes, making ‘public’ knowledge of the body, of its private parts and reproduction through the medium of print was problematic. Early modern physicians and surgeons met opposition to the publication of anatomies that included the reproductive parts of the body, as did Ambroise Paré in late sixteenth-century France and Helkiah Crooke in early seventeenth-century London. It was apparently one thing for learned physicians and surgeons to describe and discuss the organs of generation in the ‘professional’ sphere of the anatomy theatre among other learned men, but quite another to bring this knowledge into a wider ‘public’ sphere, and in the vernacular, so that potentially anybody who had access to print, whatever their station in life, level of education and occupational identity, could therefore also access and discuss it. Concern seemed to focus upon the potential ‘misuse’ of knowledge, particularly of the sexual body – that it might be used for erotic purposes, to titillate, rather than to educate and to honour God’s creation. Such concerns persisted into the twentieth century over the contents of books about sex both scholarly and intentionally erotic, and over information about contraceptives, and still erupt today in concerns about the nature and extent of sexual education in schools.

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Similar concerns, not surprisingly, also fed into anxieties about the availability and circulation of far more self-evidently erotic or pornographic material. Here the secrets of sex and generation were more obviously displayed for pleasure rather than for learning, however much an author might have denied this as his primary purpose. Before the mid-seventeenth century when cheap print became more widely available, images of the sexual body had a much more restricted circulation. Paintings or frescos painted on walls, and erotic engravings were only seen by those who were wealthy enough to be able to afford and display them (although perhaps also to servants in these wealthy households), although bawdy verse and graffiti would have circulated at the lower levels of society on the streets and in taverns. Explicitly erotic texts originated in high-class culture, in court cultures of poetry and Latin medical texts, that were limited to a minority of elite men (and some women) who were able to read texts that circulated in other languages, as Ian Moulton points out. The circulation of manuscript texts also necessarily restricted such material to elite culture. Lower down the social scale, sexual knowledge or information might be expressed socially rather than textually, so leaving fewer traces and less material for the historian to draw upon in attempting to write a history of sexual and bodily knowledge that encompasses all classes (and ages) of society. Such knowledge would have been revealed in public oral and physical exchange, in games, gestures, bawdy songs or rhymes rather than in the manuscripts and printed books to be found in private libraries and collections. Such differentiation of genres and audiences increasingly collapsed with technological advances in the twentieth century, and especially the later development and spread of the internet, making pornographic material ubiquitous and easily accessed, as Lisa Sigel discusses in chapter 12. A number of authors refer to changes in technology bringing changes in ways of knowing, understanding, thinking about and representing bodies and sex. The introduction of the printing press at the beginning of the period, and later improvements that brought about greater dissemination of (cheaper) printed matter, shifted access to imagery and other representations of bodies and sex from the purview of the educated and wealthy elites who circulated manuscript and paintings, to a more 'mass market'. Technology has also changed the nature of the representations themselves, allowing new and different images and narratives (and identifications) to emerge. The rise of print culture that first allowed the diffusion of ancient ideas about bodies and sex subsequently enabled the circulation of new ideas and the development of a secular discourse, particularly in popular literature, alongside medical treatises, as Katherine Crawford sets out in chapter 1. Such concerns about access to this kind of material and for whom it is thought to be inappropriate and potentially damaging has changed over time, becoming more narrowly focused by age today rather than by class and gender as in the past.

Who looked at whose body was also a matter not just of expertise but also of decorum. Knowledge of women's bodies and of generation had been the province of women – birth attendants and midwives – partly because it was not judged seemly for male practitioners to look at or to touch these parts of the body. Monica Green has demonstrated that gynaecology was always the province of male expertise (and Lauren Kassell shows how male medical knowledge of the menstrual cycle was considered central to making a correct diagnosis of female disorders and to provide appropriate remedies), but nevertheless, looking and touching were problematic.<sup>29</sup> As Michael Stolberg and Malcolm Nicolson both demonstrate, knowledge about bodies and the technologies devised to enable knowledge about bodies to be gained was thoroughly grounded in social and cultural 'norms' about learning on the one hand, and about looking at and touching bodies on the other. Central

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to these considerations were issues of propriety, as well as of class and gender. It may have been easier for male medical practitioners to look at and to touch a male body, though men, too, may have been reluctant to have their private parts handled by another man, in however professional a capacity. Particularly problematic were male investigations of female private parts, as Malcolm Nicolson points out: 'The stethoscope was devised because of anxieties surrounding the proper deportment of men toward women. It has its origins in gender relations.'<sup>30</sup> Such barriers may only have been overcome when bodily conditions had become so intolerable that shame and decorum were overcome by necessity. Further developments were made in the light of anxieties about class and contagion: the stethoscope could be extended to further remove the diagnosing physician from too close a physical proximity to the patient; for the sake of higher social status clients to preserve modesty and distance from lower rank surgeons and physicians, but also, in the case of lower class patients where the physician himself was reluctant to get too close, and had anxieties about contagion through contact. Nicolson also demonstrates how particular diagnostic techniques were developed as a result of particular social and cultural considerations and not because they offered any specific diagnostic advantage. For example, the positioning of a woman on her left side for examination of her private parts was advocated because it allowed the woman to remain covered by clothing and bedclothes so that she was never fully exposed to the physician's gaze. Physicians thus learned to diagnose disorders of the female reproductive parts through touch rather than by sight.

Such a distinction between sight and touch to gain knowledge of the body can be found in earlier periods, hinting at the perceived relative intrusiveness of different kinds of examination. Similarly, use of the speculum was restricted and the investigating physician attempted to use it in such a way that his view was confined to the internal organs rather than also encompassing the external privities. Thus social and gender considerations thoroughly moulded both examination of the body leading to knowledge of its workings and the development of techniques and instrumentation to allow such examination. Michael Stolberg also points to shifts in the status of medical men towards an increasing professionalization that may have contributed to a greater willingness on the part of patients to allow visual and manual examination of the body: an expectation of professional 'objectivity' and standards of behaviour mitigated feelings of shame and embarrassment, and allowed the patient to feel safe from any improper attention. Furthermore, the growth of hospitals throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century gave physicians greater access to bodies through which diagnostic practice and skills could be honed without having to give consideration to patients' feelings of shame or embarrassment; such feelings could not be ignored when patients were private and paying a physician for care – and might take their custom elsewhere if they felt that due care and attention was not being paid to their comfort. The development of a professional, 'objective', medical gaze to overcome embarrassment and consequent reluctance to allow examination and treatment of the most private parts of the body has been particularly important in emerging specialisms such as gynaecology and obstetrics, venereology, and colo-rectal medicine. The medical profession's desire to overcome feelings of shame and embarrassment in their patients and the consequent reluctance to expose oneself for examination and diagnosis seems to have gained pace in very recent years with the production of TV programmes such as *Embarrassing Bodies*, which has encouraged people with conditions affecting the genitals and processes of excretion especially (though not exclusively) to reveal them not only in the privacy of the doctor's surgery but to an audience of millions on national TV.

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Looking at the naked body was not solely a consideration of the medical professions as we have seen, but was also enmeshed in religion and politics. What is meant by ‘naked’ has varied over time: in early modern Europe it did not necessarily mean the body entirely unclothed but referred to the body in varying states of undress, as Susan Vincent points out. Paul Deslandes develops this discussion further, articulating debates in art historical scholarship about the meanings of ‘naked’ and ‘nude’ in relation to painting and the ‘idealized’ nude form. One of the major difficulties with representations of the body unclothed in art – as elsewhere – is the inability to decouple the naked body from eroticism and hence from imputations of moral depravity. Such a concern was central to those involved in promoting ‘nudism’ and who aligned ideas about health and purity, and optimizing human reproduction – including racial purity – with the body unclothed as Richard Cleminson also discusses in part II on the sexual sciences. Thus at the same time as nudist movements emphasized health and purity, distancing themselves from associations with sexual titillation and moral laxity, they were nevertheless concerned with sexual and reproductive matters. Ideas about non-European people encountered through exploration were also shaped by responses to their shamelessly unclothed bodies (to European Christian eyes) which were understood as indicative of sexual depravity.

Numerous chapters point to one of the clearest shifts in understandings about bodies and how they worked (including sex and reproduction) that began to take place from the late seventeenth century and which picked up pace during the eighteenth century. Early modern knowledge and understanding based upon the classical humoural model of the body was gradually displaced by more modern conceptualizations, although new discoveries and theorizations were initially often incorporated into the humoural framework. This shift in understanding was not completed by the end of the eighteenth century, neither was it so rapid as historians have often suggested, as humoural ideas continued to inform newer understandings into the nineteenth century, and also remained in language and descriptions of temperament into the twentieth century. As new discoveries and theories about bodies shifted understandings, older ideas about heat and cold nevertheless lingered, albeit in a far less dominant fashion than previously. The humoural model of the body was still informing understandings of sex and conception into the later eighteenth century, where infertility from cold was still a key idea. Julie-Marie Strange notes that in the eighteenth century this model of the body was beginning to be replaced by ‘mechanistic paradigms of bodies that ran on vital energy, transmitted via a complex nervous system’. However, there were nevertheless continuities. Strange also notes that ‘the dominant medical paradigm of sexed bodies in this period was preoccupied with fertility’, as Toulalan argues it had been in early modern Europe, and hence ‘to demonstrate modern medicine’s tendency to imagine sexed bodies in relation to reproductive destinies’. There is further continuity also in the tendency, as Strange remarks, ‘to pathologize the female body against an assumed masculine norm’.<sup>31</sup> Just as in early modern times the female body was measured against and found inferior to a normative male body, this continued, albeit in different forms, into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>32</sup>

With regard to sex, the normative body is also a sexually mature body, but one that is also potentially reproductively capable; one that is post-pubescent but not yet ‘too old’. However, whereas in early modern Europe pre-pubescent bodies were understood to be characterized by a lack of sexuality – of unreadiness for sex and therefore unsuitability to engage in sexual activity – by the nineteenth century little girls were not always regarded in this way. Strange notes that despite a new tendency to idealize the child and childhood

and to separate pre-from post-pubescent children, some pre-pubescent girls might not be thought exempt from sexualization, particularly poor, working-class girls who were perceived as liable to be lacking in morality, at risk of incestuous relationships or to be enticed or coerced into prostitution. Such anxieties manifested themselves in concerns about prostitution and a 'white slave trade' of girls for sex and the raising of the age of consent, initially to 13 and then to 16. However, as Kathryn Norberg points out, no evidence has been found that girls younger than 16 were involved in prostitution, and the average age was usually around 25.

Ideas about bodies and how they work changed again in the early twentieth century with the discovery of hormones and the development of endocrinology. Helen Blackman and Julie-Marie Strange both note that understandings of menstruation now changed from being understood as precipitated by nerves to hormones. With this understanding came other developments such as the ability to control conception through the use of hormones and the contraceptive pill that had broader social implications for female liberty from childbearing and their greater participation in economic life, as Tanya Evans discusses in chapter 14. However, there were nevertheless continuities in perceptions of bodies at times of sexual development. Puberty and adolescence continued to be understood as a transitional period of danger and difficulty that was fraught with pitfalls, although now couched in different terms and concerns, such as, for example, cultures of consumption.<sup>33</sup>

Understandings of, and attitudes towards, old age and sex also changed over time. Whereas Toulalan identified cultures of mockery towards the old, particularly to do with sexuality, Strange noted a change 'from ridicule to investing maturity with dignity'. Another shift identified as occurring from the late eighteenth century was in the management of menopause as a time of life. While early modern medicine identified it as bringing bodily changes and often causing illness, from the late eighteenth century medical men began to think about it as a time of life that needed to be managed, though there was some continuity in the perception that it heralded increasing decrepitude and the withering of not only the reproductive function but also the reproductive organs. But from the nineteenth and into the twentieth century these were regarded as not just physical changes, but also changes to temperament and behaviour. It was thought that such psychological and behavioural changes could amount to as much as insanity, making this a particularly difficult and dangerous time for women. Whereas older women's sexual desires were ridiculed and cause for stereotyping in the figure of the early modern 'lusty widow', now such desires were indicative of pathology. As in the earlier period, though, such desires were problematic because they decoupled sex from maternity, suggesting persistence in perceptions of women's bodies as bound up with their fertility and reproductive role.

As will be apparent from the previous discussion, a significant issue raised by a number of authors is that more attention needs to be paid to age as a category of analysis in the histories of the body and sexuality, alongside considerations of gender, class and race. This argument underpins part VIII on life cycles but also features elsewhere. It is most directly addressed by Randolph Trumbach who argues that in early modern Europe sexual relations were organized around age: 'In 1500 in western societies sexual desire was as likely to be organized by differences in age as by differences in gender.'<sup>34</sup> Although Ivan Crozier does not specifically do so, arguing for a realignment of thinking about sex around acts rather than identities ('focusing on bodies and the sexual pleasures for which they are used is a way out of the categorical imperative that still haunts us with the use of labels first constructed by nineteenth-century sexologists'<sup>35</sup>), he nevertheless raises the issue in his

discussion of masochism and conceptions of sexual flagellation. A behaviour that was understood in the early modern period in somatic terms as producing pleasure, and so enabling intercourse and orgasm in older men who had difficulties in achieving physical congress, was transformed by the late nineteenth century into one that was understood through psychological mechanisms for transforming pain into pleasure. Understandings about sexual behaviours might therefore be re-aligned around age categories (older men) as much as by the type of sexual activity itself. Age also intersects with race, as we see in part XIV by Jonathan Burton and Antoinette Burton, where the bodies of those living in hotter climes were understood to mature sexually earlier than colder European bodies, and where the practice of child marriage contributed to perceptions of Asian men as 'failed men'.<sup>36</sup>

The chapters by Toulalan and Strange that examine ideas about sexual development and decline also argue for an organization of sexuality around fertility and reproduction, where age necessarily becomes foregrounded as it governs readiness and capacity for sexual and reproductive life. The centrality of fertility and reproduction to these ideas about sexual development and decline thus necessarily restricts their discussions to sex between male and female, precluding consideration of same-sex sexual behaviours as non-reproductive. Trumbach's discussion, however, focuses upon same-sex sexual encounters and argues specifically for an early modern organization of same-sex sexual behaviour around age for both men and women, where older men sought relations with boys, women with girls: 'sexual behavior between males and between females was in both cases organized predominantly by differences in age, men with boys and women with girls.' Scholars are alert to the necessity of considering questions about class, gender and race in their analyses of bodies and sex, but have not yet integrated age as a category of analysis in quite the same way. Yet age has fundamentally conditioned thinking about bodies and sex. As Stephen Robertson has pointed out, 'Against the tendency to restrict the concern with age to the history of childhood, we have to be alert to its broader resonance. Ideas about age were not only located in the legal system ... they flowed to that site from medicine, psychology, education, and popular culture, fields that had been permeated by a consciousness of age.'<sup>37</sup>

Trumbach argues that 'The sexual passivity of the adolescent boy was acceptable because he had not yet become a man.'<sup>38</sup> Becoming a man was, as Toulalan shows, bound up with the physical development of the male body where achieving manhood was to achieve fully functioning reproductive capacity in the ability to not only ejaculate seed, but seed that was 'prolific', hot and vigorous, and able to spark new life. Trumbach notes that the sodomy practised by men in early modern Florence was strictly organized by age with the active, penetrating role being almost always taken by a man older than his passive, penetrated partner, very rarely the reverse, as 'it was taken as a normal part of human development that when a beard had grown on an individual male, he was able to change from passive boy to active man'. He also points out this age differential in contemporary plays which frequently included references to sodomy, where nearly all such references or scenes were 'structured by differences in age between an adult man and an adolescent boy'. Furthermore, most, though not all, transvestite prostitutes were likely to have been adolescent boys who could pass as 'maids', often drawn from the ranks of young enlisted soldiers and drummer boys, aged 14 to 16, from the London regiments. Similarly, paintings also eroticized the body of the boy: 'The body of the naked adolescent male, and men's desire for that body, was central to that art.'<sup>39</sup> Due to the paucity of sources we can

be less certain that women's same-sex sexual relationships were organized in similar ways, but in pornography and erotica, as both Ian Moulton and Kathryn Norberg point out, female same-sex sexual activities were frequently represented as an older woman initiating a younger girl into the pleasures of sex. Trumbach argues that it is not unlikely that the same organization by age may have applied in Europe as other studies for other parts of the world have shown that such sexual cultures were not unknown.

Various essays in this collection show that age was also a key category in cultures of knowledge, intersecting with gender, at least as they were represented in pornography and erotica, where, as we have seen above, sexual knowledge was passed – or at least represented as passed – from older, experienced woman to young, inexperienced girl. Older women were regarded as repositories of sexual and reproductive knowledge, serving on juries of matrons to establish virginity, impotence or pregnancy. Norberg, as we have seen, has noted that the average age of the early modern prostitute was around 25, and despite contemporary rhetoric, girls below the age of 16 have not been identified. It would therefore seem that pre-pubescent girls did not engage in selling sex – or were not sold for sex by others – suggesting that sexual readiness was a precondition for prostitution, as it appears to have been for marriage; Martin Ingram similarly notes that 'very young marriages were uncommon' in north-west Europe, with couples usually waiting until they had sufficient resources to set up a new household except among wealthier, higher class families where earlier alliances might be forged for political or economic advantage.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, age (as well as marital status) influenced attitudes towards and reactions to rape (noted by both Walker and D'Cruze), where the rape of minors under the age of consent – and usually therefore pre-pubescent until it was raised in stages from 12 to 16 in the late nineteenth century – was generally prosecuted more keenly and more likely to achieve conviction. However, as previously noted, in the nineteenth century some children, especially girls, were understood to 'display premature and precocious sexuality' so that they might be seducers and blackmailers of respectable men.<sup>41</sup> This kind of negative construction of the girl-child was, however, inflected by class where only working-class girls were likely to display such behaviour. Concerns about children and sex have emerged again in the late twentieth century with child sexual abuse and paedophilia seeming to receive disproportionate media coverage: 'By 2000 the psychopathic rapist-murderer of children was the quintessential monster.' Cases of abduction and abuse that are sensationalized have raised public concerns, and the growth of the internet has allowed greater production and dissemination of pornographic materials involving children to an unprecedented level. Studies have indicated that the consumption of child pornography is not confined to stereotypical pathologized 'monsters', but can be found at all levels of society.<sup>42</sup> Age has thus emerged as a key category of analysis to which historians of bodies and sex need to pay attention as much as they do to gender, class and race.

Barry Reay and Kim Philips have recently argued convincingly that historians have underplayed the extent to which heterosexuality also has a history and has been variously constructed over time and place. Ian Moulton in this volume further points out that the privileging of heterosexuality in representations of bodies and sex has continued until at least the late twentieth century. In erotic and pornographic representation heterosexual sexual encounters were the norm, with homosexual sex generally treated as an aberration and harshly condemned. Lisa Sigel notes that the proliferation of differing kinds of erotic representation, not only homosexual, is a relatively recent development. The primary frame of reference for sex and sexual pleasure was marriage and the production of children,

and this did not really change until the late twentieth century. Sexual pleasure within marriage was understood as an important part of binding a couple together and ensuring the stability and endurance of marriage, and hence of wider society, particularly through children and inheritance: 'Marriage law, sodomy law, the distinction between licit and illicit sexual activities, even the distinction between what was sex and what was not, all depended on the relation of a given practice to the possibility of procreation.'<sup>43</sup> This can also be seen in attitudes towards sexual activity throughout the life cycle, where sex at either the beginning or the end was problematic as it was non-procreative sex – pre-menarche for girls, or not yet sufficiently procreative male seed (and female in the two-seed model before the eighteenth century) and post-menopause or in many older men whose seed became less potent as they aged. Such concerns with sex and the possibility of procreation meant that successful conjugal sexual relations was promoted as other expressions of sexual desire were increasingly attacked or constructed as deleterious to both sexual health and health more generally, and, from the nineteenth century, pathologized. Thus Harry Cocks concludes that 'sexual infractions tended to follow the modern pattern of moving from being treated first as sins, then as crimes and finally as diseases or psychological disorders'.<sup>44</sup> The separation of marriage from reproduction and property transmission is a modern – late twentieth-century – shift that has come with reliable contraception to separate sex from reproduction, with easier divorce so that marriage is a dissoluble contract, and with changes in inheritance practices so that wealth and property are no longer necessarily retained within the family but can legitimately be willed elsewhere, to extra-familial persons, organizations and even non-human legatees. Such an examination of the varieties of ways that heterosexuality has been constructed owes much, Harry Cocks points out, to queer theory which suggests that 'we reject the apparent self-evidence of modern sexual categories and identities, and that we pay attention to the specific ways in which each society creates rules about sex and the body'.<sup>45</sup>

Modern historians of the body, working within a predominantly secular tradition – especially one where biology underpins understanding of how bodies work and reproduce (reproduction is now taught in schools in biology lessons) – has often obscured the extent to which religion was enmeshed with understandings about bodies and shaped and constrained experience of sex. Several authors remind us how religious ideas have shaped sexual morality and discipline throughout western European history, and continue to do so despite the rise of secular thought about the body and sexuality. Martin Ingram identifies a shift from religious to secular sexual discipline towards the end of the seventeenth century as the 'coercive power' of the church courts waned, but religious bodies as well as individuals motivated by Christian morality continued to be involved in moral campaigns for sexual regulation, as is apparent through the attempts to deal with venereal disease and prostitution in the nineteenth century that Maria Luddy and Lesley Hall discuss in chapters 22 and 26. Increasing globalization and emigration in more recent decades has thrown conflict between religious and secular approaches to the body and sex into greater relief, reminding historians of the continuing importance of religion in shaping perceptions and attitudes.

In early modern Europe, not only was the body understood first and foremost as exemplary of God's handiwork – the microcosm in which the workings of the universe were displayed – and sex intended to reproduce the species as 'He' had intended, but when 'natural' explanations for bodily disorders reached their limits, spiritual or diabolical ones came to the fore. This can be seen especially, Lauren Kassell argues, in the disorder



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of hysteria, or 'suffocation of the mother' where the womb was thought to wander and bring out various symptoms including breathing difficulties as it pressed on the breathing passages. When natural remedies were unable to relieve symptoms and sufferings then diabolical causes could be suspected, with cure having spiritual remedies – prayer and fasting. In representations of the body, religion too had an impact upon its interpretations: anti-Catholic erotica, for example, was interpreted differently in Catholic countries than in Protestant ones – a legitimate criticism of an unacceptable faith in England but an unacceptable attack on the status quo in France. However, Kathryn Norberg argues that Catholic and Protestant attitudes towards prostitutes were similar, but after the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation, Catholic attitudes became more strict. While arguing that prostitutes might be saved through repentance, Catholic theologians nevertheless also argued for the abolition of brothels and the condemnation of prostitution, anxious that they might be regarded as less 'righteous' than their intolerant Protestant brothers. Both Catholic and Protestant authorities found it impossible completely to remove prostitution and so resorted to limiting it to certain areas as far as was possible. Maria Luddy's discussion of the 'wrens of the Curragh', however, demonstrates the harsh treatment and lack of tolerance shown towards these women, and the shelters in which they lived, by the Catholic clergy. The idea of regulation and toleration of prostitution gained new ground in the nineteenth century but was now based upon medical rather than moral reasons, regarding it as a growing health issue. It was believed that prostitutes spread venereal disease and therefore that regulation and treatment of prostitutes would reduce the number of cases, particularly among the military whose strength was depleted through illness, as Lesley Hall also shows in more detail in her discussion of the Contagious Diseases Acts.

Religion too was implicated in understanding the advent of the new sexual disease to Europe: it had been sent by God to punish sinners and it has been argued that it contributed to more stringent moral policing in the era of reformations, and to the declining toleration of brothels and regulated prostitution that had been characteristic of the medieval period: 'Whereas medieval prostitutes had been seen to offer a kind of necessary service, providing an outlet for unmarried men, saving respectable wives and daughters from sexual predation, they were increasingly portrayed as a threat.'<sup>46</sup> The division between Protestant and Catholic Europe was also apparent in differing attitudes towards treatment of the disease and of those suffering from it. Catholic teaching allowed for redemption through good works while that of Protestants emphasized salvation through faith alone. Catholic institutions for the care of those suffering from venereal diseases thus placed emphasis on moral and spiritual redemption as well as physical care and cure, while Protestants focused only upon physical healing. Kevin Siena argues that this may have also led to a more forgiving attitude towards those with the disease, where sinners might be welcomed 'back into the fold' and 'even diseased prostitutes might be forgiven, albeit within a very constrained institution'.<sup>47</sup> However, as Lesley Hall points out, attempts to regulate prostitution in the nineteenth century to prevent the spread of sexual disease were also perceived as an affront to Christian morality in 'rendering vice safe'.

Authors in this volume invite us to think about bodies not just as they may have been differently 'constructed' at different times but also – and more importantly – about the significances of different bodies, the ideas and cultural valences that they embody, at different times. As Richard Cleminson points out, 'The body of an aristocratic Englishman in the late 1700s was understood to be subject to, literally to embody, different mechanisms

and finalities, particularly in respect of the mind, than the body of a black slave in a European colony.' He goes on, 'The truths thus apparently derived from the body participate in narratives that construct overlapping boundaries between health and ill health, the pathological and the normal, the sexually deviant and the sexually normative and the hierarchy of races and sexes.'<sup>48</sup> We may only 'know' bodies therefore through situating them in the specificities of time and place, and the particularities of societies and cultures. Thus the use of terms and categories is highlighted throughout this volume as problematic. Not only can they be anachronistic but they also serve to obscure different understandings in different times and places. Ian Moulton notes succinctly that 'if sexuality has a history at all, it consists precisely in the different and changing ways that various sexual acts are culturally represented, categorized, and understood'.<sup>49</sup> This is particularly applicable to discussions of sexual representations, as both Ian Moulton and Lisa Sigel remark. Historians have spent a lot of time debating the meaning of particular terms – pornography, erotica, obscenity – but the early modern period had no single term to categorize texts or images that were sexual in nature, but rather a variety of different terms with varying meanings. Similarly, the meanings of words for sexual categories also change over time and place. The word 'gay' is an obvious case in point – used in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to denote a woman who was a prostitute, or 'upon the town', it is now used to denote homosexuality, a significant shift in meaning over time.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are still seen as pivotal times of change in how the body and sex were understood. Kathryn Norberg pinpoints the mid-eighteenth century as a pivotal point in attitudes towards prostitution changing as they were seen as the primary means of transmission of venereal disease that was understood to be undermining public health; not only the health of the men who frequented prostitutes but also that of 'honest' married women who were infected by a husband: 'The French worried that syphilis was undermining the French population because it killed babies and rendered adults infertile. The future of France, not just a rake's health, was now at risk.'<sup>50</sup> Norberg also argues that it was then that prostitutes came to be seen as fundamentally different to other women, whereas earlier the early modern sexually voracious woman was likely to commit adultery, fornication or fall into prostitution to satisfy her lust. As women came to be understood rather as maternal and domestic, the prostitute became a different creature, separated and isolated from 'ordinary' women as both a social and a biological evil.

Explaining the timing of change and what it meant is also found to be problematic. In particular, as Garthine Walker remarks in the conclusion to her discussion of rape and sexual violence in early modern Europe, the same explanation – 'the emergence of modern sensibilities' – has been found for two different changes taking place at the same time: a reduction of prosecutions for child rape in England and a new recognition of its occurrence and a need to deal with it in France.<sup>51</sup> Similarly in terms of punishment, removing the death penalty is seen in terms of modernization, but in some places it was imposed in the eighteenth century for rape, thus contradicting such arguments. Moreover, as Shani D'Cruze continues, if taking rape seriously as a crime against the person is an indicator of modernization where violence, including sexual violence, is taken more seriously, then sexual violence cannot always be seen to follow this trend as it continued to be ignored or its seriousness downplayed. However, again following Foucault, the key point of change is the late nineteenth century and sexological developments: the categorization of sexual 'types' and the development of ideas about 'perversion'. With reference to rape, 'Sexology privileged and naturalized a model of sexual practice based on sharp gender dichotomies,

where masculinity was the active, aggressive principle.’ This meant that some sexual violence became hidden within ‘normal’ heterosexual practice, and was only distinguished as pathological when violence became extreme or when it was directed towards ‘inappropriate’ victims such as children. Although clearly not a new phenomenon, a much more recent concern has arisen about the use of sexual violence in war as part of ‘the spectrum of torture, killing and mutilation visited on defeated and often civilian populations’.<sup>52</sup> Here rape becomes a bonding mechanism for combatants and is deliberately used as a means of social, cultural and ethnic destruction, fracturing social bonds and patrilineal descent to further defeat weakened states. Rape, then, does not fit so neatly into arguments about progress and modernization.

The following chapters thus encourage the reader to think about both how the field has been shaped so far – the ideas that have informed understandings about bodies and sex in the past – and those that are now emerging to shape future research and the questions we ask about the past. The book concludes with a short afterword by Lisa Downing that invites the reader to consider some of the ‘tensions, problems and areas deserving further scrutiny’ that emerged in her reading of the book. It also looks at the historical analyses in the chapters that follow in the light of some contemporary thinking and debates about sex, gender and the body, reminding us that history is never just about the past.

### Notes

- 1 Iwan Bloch, *The Sexual Life of Our Time: In Its Relations To Modern Civilization*, London: Rebman, 1909; translated from the German *Das Sexualleben unserer Zeit in seinen Beziehungen zur modernen Kultur*, Berlin: Marcus Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1906.
- 2 Peter Stearns argues in *Sexuality in World History* that ‘serious work on the history of sex is only a few decades old’. Peter Stearns, *Sexuality in World History*, New York and London: Routledge, 2009, p. 1.
- 3 *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1:1, 1990.
- 4 Many early works were self-consciously pioneering and positioned themselves on the margins of legitimate or respectable historical activity. Many of these works comment on the place of the history of sex and sexuality as at the margins of respectable academic work.
- 5 Jeffrey Weeks, ‘Sexuality and History Revisited’ in Kim M. Phillips and Barry Reay, *Sexualities in History: A Reader*, New York and London: Routledge, 2001, pp. 27–41.
- 6 Phillips and Reay, ‘Introduction’ in *Sexualities in History*, p. 4.
- 7 Harry Cocks and Matt Houlbrook, ‘Introduction’ in *The Modern History of Sexuality*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005, pp. 1–18 (16, 3). This point is explored by Sigel in chapter 6.
- 8 Cocks and Houlbrook, ‘Introduction’, p. 9.
- 9 There are far too many to list here. For those looking at British history, in the modern period, Jeffrey Weeks’ remarkably enduring *Sex Politics and Society*, first published in 1981 and revised and reissued in 1989, remains an essential starting point. It has been joined by others including Lesley Hall, *Sex Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000. For earlier periods see (for example) Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others*, London: Routledge, 2005; Katherine Crawford, *Sexual Cultures of the French Renaissance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010; Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700–1800*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997.
- 10 Cocks and Houlbrook, *The Modern History of Sexuality*.
- 11 Dagmar Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe: A Twentieth Century History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- 12 Kim M. Phillips and Barry Reay, *Sex Before Sexuality: A Premodern History*, Cambridge: Polity, 2011.
- 13 Anna Clark, *Desire: A History of European Sexuality*, London: Routledge, 2008. See also her *The History of Sexuality in Europe: a Sourcebook and Reader*, New York: Routledge, 2010.

- 14 Stearns, *Sexuality in World History*.
- 15 See especially Tim Hitchcock, 'Re-defining Sex in Eighteenth Century England', *History Workshop Journal* 41, 1996, pp. 73–92.
- 16 Their focus is, however, more contemporary than historical. Lisa Downing and Robert Gillett (eds), *Queer in Europe: Contemporary Case Studies*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2011, and Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska, *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2011. We are grateful to Lisa Downing for pointing us towards these two works.
- 17 Studies of the post-communist period in Russia and eastern/central Europe include Aleksandar Štulhofer and Theo Sandfort (eds), *Sexuality and Gender in Postcommunist Eastern Europe and Russia*, New York: The Haworth Press, 2005; Janet Elise Johnson and Jean C. Robinson, *Living Gender after Communism*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007; Igor S. Kon, *The Sexual Revolution in Russia: From the Age of the Czars to Today*, New York: The Free Press, 1995; Judit Takács, '(Homo)Sexual Politics: Theory and Practice' in Miklós Hadas and Miklós Vörös (eds), *Ambiguous Identities in the New Europe*, Budapest: Republika Circle, 1997, pp. 93–103.
- 18 Although see Kulpa and Mizielińska, *De-Centring Western Sexualities*. Dan Healey's *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001) is a notable exception, in his words, 'the first full-length study of same-sex love in any period of Russian or Soviet history'.
- 19 Stefan Berger, *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007, p. xxvi.
- 20 A very small indication of the wealth of writing on Scandinavia includes the following on early modern Sweden: Jonas Liliequist, 'Masculinity and Virility – Representations of Male Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Sweden' in Anu Korhonen and Kate Lowe (eds), *The Problem with Ribs: Women, Men and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, 2007, pp. 57–81, and Liliequist, 'Peasants Against Nature: Crossing the Boundaries Between Man and Animal in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Sweden', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1:3, 1991, pp. 393–423. For modern Sweden see, for example: Jens Rydström, "'Sodomitical Sins are Threefold": Typologies of Bestiality, Masturbation, and Homosexuality in Sweden, 1880–1950', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, 2000, pp. 240–76, and his *Sinners and Citizens: Bestiality and Homosexuality in Sweden, 1880–1950*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003. On prostitution and sexuality see, for example: Yvonne Svanström, 'Criminalising the John: A Swedish Gender Model?' in Joyce Outshoorn (ed.), *The Politics of Prostitution: Women's Movements, Democratic States and the Globalisation of Sex Commerce*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 225–44, and Svanström, *Policing Public Women: The Regulation of Prostitution in Stockholm, 1812–1820*, Stockholm: Atlas Akkademi, 2000; Anna Lundberg, 'Passing the "Black Judgement": Swedish social policy on venereal disease in the early twentieth century' in Roger Davidson and Lesley A. Hall (eds), *Sex, Sin, and Suffering: Venereal Disease and European Society Since 1870*, London: Routledge, 2001, pp. 21–43. Davidson and Hall's edited volume is exemplary in its coverage of Europe, including essays on Sweden and Russia as well as Italy, Spain and Germany.
- 21 Jonathan Burton, chapter 27.
- 22 Karen Vieira Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest: The Gendered Genesis of Spanish American Society, 1500–1600*, Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2005, p. 95; John F. Chuchiak, 'The sins of the fathers: Franciscan friars, parish priests, and the sexual conquest of the Yucatec Maya, 1545–1808', *Ethnohistory* 54, 2007, pp. 69–127; Matthew Restall, *The Maya World: Yucatec Culture and Society, 1550–1850*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- 23 As also has Judith Butler, referenced by a number of contributors but not discussed here. See her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge, 1990; *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, New York: Routledge, 1993.
- 24 Kassell, chapter 3.
- 25 Stolberg, chapter 5. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990; Michael Stolberg, 'A Woman Down to her Bones: The Anatomy of Sexual Difference in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries', *Isis* 94, 2003, pp. 274–99; Katherine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection*, New York: Zone Books, 2006.
- 26 Gowing, chapter 13.
- 27 Vincent, chapter 9.

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- 28 Doreen Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 24–25.
- 29 Monica H. Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- 30 Nicolson, chapter 6.
- 31 Strange, chapter 16.
- 32 See Ornella Moscucci, *The Science of Woman: Gynaecology and Gender in England, 1800–1929*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; Geoffrey Chamberlain, *From Witchcraft to Wisdom: A History of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, London: RCOG Press, 2007; Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- 33 See Strange, chapter 16.
- 34 Trumbach, chapter 7.
- 35 Crozier, chapter 8.
- 36 Antoinette Burton, chapter 28.
- 37 Stephen Robertson, *Crimes against Children: Sexual Violence and Legal Culture in New York City, 1880–1960*, Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005, p. 133.
- 38 Trumbach, chapter 7.
- 39 Trumbach, chapter 7.
- 40 Ingram, chapter 17.
- 41 Strange, chapter 16.
- 42 D'Cruze, chapter 24.
- 43 Moulton, chapter 11.
- 44 Cocks, chapter 2.
- 45 Cocks, chapter 2.
- 46 Siena, chapter 25.
- 47 Siena, chapter 25.
- 48 Cleminson, chapter 4.
- 49 Moulton, chapter 11.
- 50 Norberg, chapter 21.
- 51 Walker, chapter 23.
- 52 Dagmar Herzog (ed.), *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009, p. 4.

## Part I

# STUDYING THE BODY AND SEXUALITY



# THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE TEXTUAL

Approaches to the study of the body and  
sexuality, 1500–1750

*Katherine Crawford*

The sex advice manual, *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, advised readers: 'When the Husband commeth into his Wives Chamber, he must entertain her with all kind of dalliance, wanton behaviour, and allurements to Venery, but if he perceive her to be slow and more cold, he must cherish, embrace, and tickle her ... intermixing more wanton Kisses with wanton Words and Speeches, handling her Secret Parts and Dugs, that she may take fire and be inflamed to Venery.'<sup>1</sup> *Aristotle's Masterpiece* was not by Aristotle, but it was something of a masterpiece. It was, with adaptations for the changing times, a best seller until well into the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Aimed at a popular audience, *Aristotle's Masterpiece* exemplifies several of the salient developments in the shifting understandings of the study of the body and sexuality that began in the Renaissance, and also provides a good focus for understanding the ways in which the study of the history of sex and the body have developed in the past 30 years of scholarship. *Aristotle's Masterpiece* exemplifies the complicated and contested developments in thinking about sex and sexuality, challenging the assumption that sex before the 'Enlightenment' period of the seventeenth/eighteenth century was 'playful', 'uninhibited', or unmedicalized. First, *Aristotle's Masterpiece* shows the effects of the rise of secular thought about the body and sexuality that took place during the period referred to as the Renaissance (including developments such as the spread of print culture and the recovery of Antiquity) in undermining earlier presumptions about corporeal knowledge. Second, it highlights the contradictory impulses such shifts created in which the expanding language about sexuality encountered attempts to define, control, and regulate 'proper' sexuality. Finally, in its reliance on sensory experience and a fundamental trust in the reliability of the body to behave as nature intended, *Aristotle's Masterpiece* echoes the new corporeal and sexual regime of the European Enlightenment.

Despite all that it can reveal about the culture of its day, a text like *Aristotle's Masterpiece* has only recently come to the attention of scholars, as a result of methodological and conceptual changes in approaches to history. The study of sex and the body has emerged and transformed since the 1970s. The field has been dominated in particular by Michel Foucault's work, despite his relatively low interest in early modernity. However, as we shall see, Foucault established a set of conceptual and methodological frameworks that have proved extremely stimulating, while painting a particular image of the medieval and early



modern worlds which historians have spent considerable energy revising, modifying and challenging. Since the 1970s, following the work of Foucault and others, a whole new range of sources for thinking about the medieval and early modern periods have come to dominate studies along with new ways of interrogating more familiar sources. In the 1970s, the shift away from high politics and toward the history of everyday life and ordinary people prompted inquiries into the history of the family, the history of women, and to a degree, the history of sexuality. After all, families continue because of sex, and women, historians found, were largely defined in terms of their sexual status as virgins, wives, widows, nuns, or prostitutes, just to name the more common iterations.<sup>3</sup> Second, historians of women, coming out of the social tradition, filled in empirical data about women's lives and formulated narratives about sexually inflected practices.

This chapter explores the compelling intellectual framework for studying sex and the body provided by Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1978). It examines the body of critical historical works, which, while indebted to Foucault's conceptual challenges, reworked his idea that the Renaissance was a period when sexuality, as an attribute of the person, was absent and the mechanisms for controlling behaviour were based on acts and not on identities, in a way which meant that behaviour itself could be viewed as less inhibited and more playful. In recent work, the Renaissance is revealed as a period of intense debate about sexual matters that drew upon, for example, ancient texts and medical models of male and female nature. In particular, the idea that such understandings of sex enabled a form of 'sexual freedom' has been revised and the important ways in which sexuality was policed have been stressed. A focus on *Aristotle's Masterpiece* provides an exceptionally clear route through these themes, highlighting the ways in which the shifting understandings of sex and the body in the period 1500–1750 did not follow Foucault's model. Rather, the text illustrates the ways in which the 'Renaissance' ushered in a period of new contestations around sex and the body, new forms of control, and new anxieties: configurations of sex which were both a form of science and an art at the same time.

Foucault argued that discourse, made up of both language and silences around language, constituted a technology of power. In the case of sexuality, discourse was largely organized by and around such institutional structures as the church, the state, the family, and 'science'.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the understanding of power as a matter of discourse, Foucault argued two central premises that continue to motivate historical scholarship and are of particular importance for this chapter. As Harry Cocks explores in greater detail in the companion chapter to this one, Foucault maintained that sexual identity was a product of modernity and prompted by the rise of interest in sexuality as a matter of population politics and 'morality'. In early modernity, individuals committed sexual 'acts' but did not regard their sexual behaviour as constituting their identity. In contrast, a modern person defined himself (for Foucault, the subject in question was almost always male) by reference to his sexual behaviour. Terms like 'homosexual' came to have meaning as identity categories as never before. Second, Foucault argued that the distinction between the science and art of sex (*scientia sexualis* and *ars erotica*) was crucial for understanding how people obfuscated around sex. The development of scientific language around the biology of reproduction and the medicine of sex led to the articulation of sexual knowledge as 'fact'. The modern west, he maintained, sought to understand sex as a matter of truth generated through confession. Other cultures (Rome in the past and the 'East' broadly construed) understood sexual knowledge in terms of sensual pleasure. Where western subjects

understood sex as constraint, those in the East accepted pleasure without separating 'good' sexual acts from 'bad' ones.

Provocative as these claims were, Foucault asserted them more than proved them. Lacking empirical precision, Foucault's work was both the target of historians and an inspiration to them.<sup>5</sup> Historical study of sexuality prompted by Foucault has attempted to fill the empirical gaps, challenged aspects of Foucault's chronology, and inspired inquiry into patterns of meaning with respect to sexuality and sexual behaviour. For example, scholars have highlighted important Renaissance texts which challenged Judaeo-Christian assumptions about sex long before the period Foucault highlighted as significant. The Renaissance is conventionally understood as an intellectual movement that recuperated ancient texts and spread knowledge of Antiquity through the teaching and learning of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew texts. Less conventionally, scholars have found that many of these texts considered sexual matters.<sup>6</sup> In 1417, Poggio Bracciolini unearthed a manuscript of the *De rerum natura* by Lucretius. For the first time since the sixth century, significant remains devoted to supporting the philosophy of Epicurus became available in the west. Lucretius' poem was published in 1473, and the surviving letters of Epicurus appeared in print in 1533. Epicurus inspired supporters initially. Bartholomaeus De Sacchi Platina's *De honesta voluptate* focused on pleasures of the body with special attention to coralling desire so that it did not cause discomfort by allowing pleasures to control the body.<sup>7</sup> Lorenzo Valla wrote *De voluptate* in defence of Epicurean ideas, and his notion that pleasure rather than virtue was the highest good caused him to be regarded askance by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.<sup>8</sup> For Thomas Creech, Epicurean pleasure was a travesty. Of Epicurus, Creech warns: 'Sometimes his Books declare him a most loose and dissolute Voluptuary', while Lucretius was devoted to, 'his share in sensual Pleasures'.<sup>9</sup> The Epicurean rejection of notions of the divine and immortality of the soul that could be cast as compatible with Christian ethics meant that the emphasis on corporeal pleasure caused tremendous discomfort.

These sorts of discourses did not figure in Foucault's account. He had little to say about the Renaissance. He thought the crucial development toward modern sexuality occurred in the seventeenth century with the rise of auricular confession. In his narrative, the practice of describing the self in confession, of understanding sexual acts as expressed in language, produced the internalization of sexual norms. A more relaxed, playful attitude toward sex, he argued, gave way to the modern practice of disciplining the self. Indeed, there are plenty of examples that suggest this process of identification through confession did occur. A transcript of proceedings by the Inquisition in Mexico reveals how confession could work in dramatic terms. Marina de San Miguel came to the attention of the Inquisition in 1598. When asked why she had been arrested, Marina initially offered minor transgressions of church law. The officials remained unimpressed until Marina seemed to fall into a trance and then explained she had a vision of assisting Christ releasing souls from Purgatory. Still, Marina's story did not satisfy, and she was enjoined to examine her conscience. Left to do so for six weeks, Marina requested an interview. And the dam broke. She had engaged in sexual relations with several men and another *beata*. She had masturbated and looked at her genitals with a mirror. As for her spiritual trance, that was a fake, she said. She just wanted to maintain her reputation for piety, and both the trance before witnesses and denying her sexual depravity (as she now saw it) were part of her effort to do so. Marina defended herself by arguing that she did not intend to sin, and that her actions were accordingly not sinful. The Inquisition did not agree, and Marina was convicted.<sup>10</sup> While

the process of turning Marina's experiences into 'sin' and 'crime' through confession illustrates aspects of Foucault's point about the power of discourse to create identity, it undermines his assertion that sex was more playful and uninhibited. Marina knew to hide her sexual experiences, recognized that revealing them would be dangerous, and discovered that the Inquisition understood her desire to hide as evidence of her knowledge that she was in fact guilty, regardless of her intentions.

Marina's self-protection is not surprising. Contrary to what Foucault implies, discourse about sex and the body had been prominent in the west since Antiquity. Aristotelian logic and ancient physiology organized ideas about sexuality and the body derived from presumptions about men and women. Aristotle's philosophy with respect to sex was articulated most fully in *De generatione animalium* (On the Generation of Animals). Among Aristotle's assertions was the idea that only men produce seed necessary to reproduce human life. Aristotle reasoned that men were superior, and since nature created everything for a purpose – a *telos* – men must provide the important parts in procreation. Seed for Aristotle meant the soul and principal characteristics. Women provided the locus for generation (the womb) and the basic matter to enable the foetus to develop. These were inferior aspects in Aristotle's view, in which all things have four causes: material, formal, efficient, and final. Material causes are the most basic; formal causes (and the male contribution was the formal cause) were more advanced and therefore more important. The key difference was humoral, Aristotle believed. Every person had a 'complexion', which was the balance of their humours. Each humour (blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile) had a quality (dry, wet, hot, or cold). Based on the four basic elements (earth, water, fire, and air), the humours had qualities that reflected the balance of elements of which they were composed. The balance could be altered by environment, diet, and physical activity, but in general, women were colder and wetter, while men were hotter and dryer. While there were functional differences between male and female bodies, in humoral terms, all bodies were on a spectrum from hot to cold and dry to wet.

Aristotelian ideas continued to dominate through the Middle Ages. Despite the concerns of Christian ascetics, sexuality remained a lively issue and debates about sex and the body peppered the intellectual exchanges of scholastics. As Joan Cadden notes, problems raised by ancient physicians and natural philosophers motivated much scholastic discussion.<sup>11</sup> With Constantine the African's (c. 1020–87) translations of Islamic medical texts that brought the Graeco-Arabic medical corpus into the Latin west, basic truisms about sexuality came into the learned tradition.<sup>12</sup> Constantine reiterated the notion elaborated in the Greek medical tradition of the Hippocratic corpus and by the highly influential Roman physician Galen (131–201) that physical pleasure provided humans with a motive for intercourse so that the species would not die out.<sup>13</sup> Discussions of the gendering of corporeal pleasure regularly appeared in scholastic texts. Constantine maintained that women derived greater pleasure from intercourse because they were both expelling their own sperm and receiving the male's.<sup>14</sup> William of Conches in the *Dragmaticon* followed Constantine's lead. William wondered why women have greater sexual heat even though they are cooler in complexion. He answered that women derive pleasure from both emission and reception of seed.<sup>15</sup> Petrus de Abano Pativinus opined that men have more intense pleasure, while women enjoy a more extensive version. Petrus noted that encounters with the penis (*virge*) give women 'great delectation'.<sup>16</sup> Hildegard of Bingen insisted that men have more focused pleasure, while women have more diffuse experience of it.<sup>17</sup> The examples could be multiplied, with interlocutors turning questions of physiology, pleasure,

and desire over and over within a fundamentally Aristotelian and humoural frame.<sup>18</sup> The discourse of sexuality and the body, in short, was abundantly present long before modernity.

The discoveries and recoveries of the Renaissance, of which the revival of Epicurus was just one, threatened entrenched beliefs about the body and sexuality built up by scholastic debate. As Julia Haig Gaisser has indicated, the rediscovery of Catullus caused all kinds of trouble with his sexually explicit, often raunchy poems.<sup>19</sup> The explicit erotics of the poems attributed to Anacreon prompted one editor to suppress poems he found offensive and to rearrange the collection to downplay others.<sup>20</sup> Plato, James Hankins has noted, was bowdlerized to render his ideas about marriage and homosexuality in suitable form.<sup>21</sup> Ovid, never lost in the west but often grossly distorted to make him palatable for Christians, appeared in Renaissance commentaries with the sexually titillating bits no longer allegorized into oblivion.<sup>22</sup> As more accurate versions of ancient texts emerged, both the volume of voices at odds with Christian beliefs and the development of more sophisticated methods for understanding the ancient context gradually undermined earlier certainties about sexuality and the body.

Ideas that conflicted with Christian sexual mores did not immediately destroy the Aristotelian synthesis or the humoural system. Old debates continued to appear in popular medical literature. The relative roles of male and female in reproduction, for instance, still exercised commentators. Thomas Vicary emphasized mutual contribution: '[A]s the Renet and Milke make the Cheese, so both the Sparme of man and woman make the generation of Embreon.'<sup>23</sup> Nicholas Culpeper describes not mutuality but competition: 'The reason why sometimes a *Male* is conceived, sometimes a *Female*, is, The strength of the Seed; for if the Mans Seed be strongest, A Male is conceived; if the Womans, a Female: The greater light obscures the lesser by the same rule; and that is the reason weakling men get most Girls, if they get any.'<sup>24</sup> Manuals devoted to facilitating procreation through teaching basic physiology, instruction in foreplay, and maintaining sexual health routinely addressed questions of pleasure as well as function.

The mix of distinctions between men and women and the propensity to see all human beings on a humoural spectrum has prompted debate among historians about early modern understandings of the sexed body. Emphasizing the continued dominance of Galenic medicine with its foundation in the humours, Thomas Laqueur has argued that Europeans largely understood male and female bodies as emanations of one sex along a spectrum. The differences between men and women were of degree (hotter vs. colder; dryer vs. moister) rather than of kind. This way of thinking, Laqueur argues, led to the presumption among anatomists that the female body was an inverted version of the male body (Aristotelian teleology again prevails in making the male the standard, which the female fails to attain). Anatomists following Galen described the uterus as an inverted penis, and the ovaries as female testicles that remained inside the body because the female lacked sufficient heat to push them out. The homologies worked intellectually for the most part, Laqueur notes, and problems such as the clitoris (in the homology argument, it was redundant) were simply overlooked.<sup>25</sup> While there is much that is compelling about Laqueur's argument, historians have pointed to several areas in which the presumptive dominance of the one-sex model must be questioned. Laura Gowing argues from extensive archival work that men and women recognized difference experientially.<sup>26</sup> Karen Harvey has found that Laqueur's central period of representational change, the eighteenth century, is actually marked by extensive continuity in the representation of bodies, and the female

body in particular.<sup>27</sup> Katharine Park and Robert Nye dissent on the grounds that multiple, often competing notions of human physiology coexisted.<sup>28</sup> The critics are not wrong, but aspects of Laqueur's thesis remain persuasive. The difficulty of re-imagining the female body as anatomically specific, for instance, was stubbornly persistent, with gendered assumptions about bodies and roles seemingly limiting new approaches to understanding human anatomy.

But the infusion of 'new' texts and the development of textual practices that yielded more reliable information about Antiquity did facilitate questioning of paradigms about the body and sexuality. Take, for instance, the 'rediscovery' of the clitoris. Several anatomists 'found' the clitoris: Charles Estienne identified it in 1545; Gabriele Falloppia claimed he had spotted it first in a treatise written in 1550 and published in 1561; Realdo Colombo argued for priority, publishing his 'discovery' in 1559. Katharine Park recounts these assertions as part of her argument that the clitoris, understood as functionally duplicative of the penis, prompted discussion of women as necessarily hermaphroditic. This both undermined the presumptive gender hierarchy of traditional anatomy and encouraged fantasies about female sexuality.<sup>29</sup> Detailed anatomical study in general moved beyond the wisdom of the ancients, with attention to sexual anatomy eventually countering ancient axioms, including the belief that the womb could move about inside a woman and strangle her if her humours were unbalanced.<sup>30</sup> More texts, better texts, and an understanding of Antiquity as rooted in its specific time and place encouraged Renaissance inquiries to move beyond the truisms about the body and sexuality that had long prevailed.

The infusion of new ideas and new understandings of old ideas about sexuality and the body played into two related developments: the rise of print culture and the elaboration of secular discourse about corporeal matters. As Mary Fissell has found, popular medical tracts, pamphlets, and books provided information in both words and pictures for the less literate.<sup>31</sup> Images of male and female reproductive parts, examples of foetal mishaps, and descriptions of healthy vs. diseased bodies became available even for those for whom reading was not an option. For the growing number of the literate, Latinate culture gradually gave way to vernacular literatures, of which *Aristotle's Masterpiece* was but one example. Books of all sorts advised people on sexual matters. Jacques Guillemeau told readers that a man might recognize if his wife had conceived, 'If he [the husband] finde an extraordinarie contentment in the companie of his Wife; and if he feele at the same time a kind of sucking or drawing at the end of his yard.'<sup>32</sup> Advice on how to assure that the woman will carry to term, ways to control unusual appetites during pregnancy, and warnings about when it is acceptable to have intercourse before the child is born. In his advice, Giovanni Marinello explained about optimal positions for achieving pregnancy, the importance of moderation in coitus, and how to select a partner based on physiological compatibility.<sup>33</sup> Eucharius Roesslin advised copiously on sexual dysfunction, with explanations made more vivid by the addition of images derived from the anatomical studies of Vesalius.<sup>34</sup> Michele Savonarola emphasized that venereal relations are 'escrementi utili' [exceedingly useful], and not just to keep the human race afloat. Coitus can help with conditions such as melancholy, retention of urine for men, and retention of menses for women. Sex must be moderate, but its therapeutic value was not to be denied.<sup>35</sup> Savonarola, and indeed all the popular medical texts, made a point of asserting that procreative sex was congruent with Christian teaching, but the texts make scant reference to God amidst elaborate discussions of sexual techniques and the physiology of male and female sex organs.

The Renaissance altered perceptions of the body, expanded knowledge of ancient sexuality, and undermined the dominant understandings of physiology and sexuality. These changes did not go unnoticed or unanswered, and Foucault was not quite correct in positing early modern freedom around sexuality. Historians have found that rulers and ruling bodies installed new and newly intense disciplinary structures around sexuality supported by moralists bent on conveying the notion that social order rested on sexual propriety. One of the areas of heightened interest was the policing of sodomy. Officials treated sodomy as a sin, occasionally executing men (female sodomy was another matter), usually for what we would recognize as male homosexual intercourse.<sup>36</sup> Several jurisdictions in which fines or jail sentences had sufficed as punishment for those convicted of sodomy opted to make it a capital crime. Venice made such a change in 1464. In 1532, the Holy Roman Empire declared same-sex sodomy by either men or women a capital crime. Municipalities in the Empire followed the lead from the centre, and confessional preference does not seem to have made a difference. England made ‘buggery’ a capital crime in 1533, but declined to include women in its provisions when the law was revised in 1548. Examples could be multiplied, and the rhetoric accompanying sodomy took on apocalyptic proportions. Venetian authorities hinted that the survival of the city depended on catching perpetrators:

To eliminate the vice of sodomy from this our city is worth every concern and as there are many women who consent to this vice and are broken in the rear parts and also many boys are so broken and all these are treated, yet still none of the accused and their deeds go unpunished; therefore, because it is wise to honor God, just as blows with weapons are denounced to the Signori di Notte [by medical practitioners], so too those who are broken in those parts be they boys or women are to be denounced.<sup>37</sup>

The promulgation of harsh laws and efforts to publicize them indicated that sexual expression had its limits.

The results of such efforts were mixed. States gained or appropriated a great deal of power over sexuality, and while they did not choose to exercise it in many instances, the coercive threat remained. Portuguese officials investigated over 4,000 cases of sodomy between 1587 and 1794, but only executed 30 individuals out of 400 cases brought to trial. Geneva was more likely to execute if matters got to trial: 12 sodomy trials (several with multiple defendants) led to nine executions, three banishments, and 12 sentences for corporal punishment.<sup>38</sup> As Maria R. Boes has argued, the draconian quality of the law meant that denunciations were less, rather than more, common. Cases in Frankfurt, she found, only reached a crisis point when the accused sodomite additionally outraged the general social order.<sup>39</sup> The state may have refrained for the most part, but as Gayle Rubin pointed out, the dangers of regulating sexuality always fall most heavily on the most vulnerable.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, official condemnation gave sanction to stigmatizing ‘deviant’ sexuality of all kinds. By way of early modern example, the Society for the Reformation of Manners in England led campaigns against ‘sodomites’ and prostitutes, with occasional jabs at adulteresses, unmarried pregnant girls, and libertines. Denouncing London’s ‘molly-houses’ (establishments where men looking to enjoy sexual encounters with other men met), Ned Ward revealed the gendered background of his hatred for sodomites:

There was a particular Gang of *Sodomitical* Wretches in this town, who call themselves the *Mollies*, and are so far degenerated from all masculine deportment, or manly exercise, that they rather fancy themselves women, imitating all the little vanities that custom has reconciled to the female sex, affecting to speak, walk, tattle, curtsy, cry, scold, and mimic all manner of effeminacy, that ever has fallen within their several observations.<sup>41</sup>

Ward's vitriol, and the efforts of the Society and its various continental cousins to eradicate sexual deviance, indicate that sexual norms were considered to be under threat.

At the same time, the very visibility of 'deviant' sexuality and contestation over definitions of proper bodily comportment suggest that the 'moralists' had something of a point. The spread of print culture had multiple effects on the public discussion of sexuality, of which three will serve as examples. First, among traditional literary domains, some poets wrote exceedingly sexual poetry. The most famous exemplar was Pietro Aretino (1492–1556), who penned sonnets to accompany engravings that imitated classical models. Despite the patina of respectability in their design, the engravings were sexually explicit images with visible erections and unmistakable signs of physical pleasure. Aretino's raunchy poems deepened the scandalous potential of the engravings by praising anal sex, repeatedly using profanity in his rhyme schemes, and celebrating non-procreative, areligious sexual intentionality.<sup>42</sup> Aretino was notorious, famous, and wealthy for his literary activities, and a veritable flood of obscene poetry soon appeared. The range of sexual material was vast. A poem like 'A un soupçonné de sodomie' [To One Suspected of Sodomy] worked by suggestion:

Antoine, je ne sçai pourquoi  
Tu écris souvent au femmes,  
Mais je sçai que pas une d'elles  
N'a point affaire avecques toy.<sup>43</sup>

[Antoine, I do not know why/you write often to women/But I know why none of them/Have had relations with you].

Other poems were far more explicit, as one which included the lines: 'Je sçai que vous dirés que le Grand Juppiter/Ne fait rien dans le Ciel que Culs et Cons fouter' [I know that you say that Great Jupiter/Does nothing in Heaven but fuck asses and cunts].<sup>44</sup> Love poetry with references to consummation, satires of aspiring lovers on the make, jokes about flagging penises and sagging breasts, attacks on monks and priests and nuns for lascivious behaviour, ribald accounts of lecherous virgins, mock praise for successful copulation, mock praise for failed copulation, mock praise for self-pleasuring, and wicked denunciations of sexual pretence abound. John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, died young (at 33), but left a reasonable collection of obscene poetry, including 'Signior Dildo', 'The Disabled Debauchee', 'To His Mistress', and 'A Song of a Young Lady to Her Ancient Lover', to suggest a few of his themes. Rochester excoriated marriage routinely, and satirized sexual and social mores.<sup>45</sup> As with all print culture, the learned few were the primary consumers, but similar themes and material in popular ballads and poetry suggest that sexually explicit poetry had points of contact at several levels of society.

Prose erotica also provided lessons about sexuality and the body.<sup>46</sup> Among the many forms of prose erotica that appeared were texts that purported to reveal older women

teaching younger ones about sex. *The School of Venus* (1680) features Katherine teaching the innocent Frances by means of extended conversations about genitals, coitus, and sexual games.<sup>47</sup> The educational dynamic is apparent between Tullia and Octavia in *A Dialogue Between A Married Lady and A Maid* (1740) as well.<sup>48</sup> Both pieces invoke Antiquity throughout, with references to Priapus, Juvenal, and debauched Roman emperors drawing on the Renaissance recovery of knowledge about the ancient past. In a different vein, the experienced Sister Angelica tutors Sister Agnes in all things sexual in *Venus in the Cloister* (1725).<sup>49</sup> The implicit anti-clericalism of featuring over-sexed nuns was in part an excuse for voyeuristic accounts of extensive sexual activity behind convent walls. Lesbianism features in all these texts, providing titillation and possibly education for interested readers. Another genre, the 'whore biography', often included a lesbian episode as part of the 'life' story of a woman who becomes a prostitute and 'describes' her sexual adventures. John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* (1750) is perhaps the most famous example of this mode of providing sexual information in a titillating format.<sup>50</sup> Even the public discussion of venereal disease could provide erotic information. Precisely as Foucault suggested, condemnations of venereal disease in medical texts were part of a proliferation of sexual debate and discussion. Works like John Marten's 1704 *Treatise of all the Degrees and Symptoms of the Venereal Disease in Both Sexes* invited voyeuristic examination of the self and one's sexual partners in order to prevent encounters that might lead to infection.<sup>51</sup>

Nor was sex only in print. Libertines on stage provided models of lives organized around the pursuit of sexual pleasure. As with the literature on venereal disease, the official intention was to condemn libertine sexual practices. But the theatre also put them on display. Maximillian Novak has argued that Théophile de Viau (1590–1626) formulated the basic premises of libertinism, which were the rejection of social conventions and a preference for bodily experience rather than reliance on traditional learning and knowledge.<sup>52</sup> The intellectual framework of libertinism was Epicurean. After rejecting Aristotle, Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655) turned to Epicurus to explain the organization of matter in terms of atoms as the basic building blocks of all things. Epicurus, as we have seen, was morally dubious in Christian Europe because of his insistence that the highest good is pleasure. Gassendi downplayed the moral implications, but he could not alter the fact that Epicurus understood pleasure in entirely self-regarding terms.<sup>53</sup> The value of pleasure is that it informs reason and prudence: that which provides pleasure to the self is good.<sup>54</sup> Although a Catholic priest, Gassendi associated with a group of free thinkers and libertines in Paris, including Pierre Charron and François Luillier.<sup>55</sup> The ideas propounded by Gassendi and his fellows appeared on stage in several guises. In France, Molière's *Dom Juan ou le Festin de Pierre* premiered in 1665 at the Palais-Royal. Dom Juan was the French version of the Spanish Don Juan, and Molière's play was one of several that highlighted social hypocrisy. Despite the properly moralizing ending with the nefarious Dom Juan consigned to hell for his flouting of religious belief, the play was initially withdrawn after 15 performances because of objections to the free-thinking main character who regularly seduces and marries women to their ruin. As Molière's experience indicated, contemporaries were not blind to the potential dangers of portraying libertines on stage even if the depictions were highly negative. Thomas Shadwell's *The Libertine* (1675) features the character of Don John advocating that life should be devoted to pleasure: 'My business is my pleasure: that end I will always compass without scrupling the means. There is no right or wrong but what conduces or hinders pleasure.'<sup>56</sup> For Don John and his friends, sexual pleasure is high on the list. Don Antonio impregnated both of his sisters, and Don



Lopez is excited by the thought of sexual conquest. For his part, Don John kills Octavio to gain access to Maria. Don Antonio expresses the horrific logic of libertine pleasure: 'She'll endure a rape gallantly. I love resistance: it endears the pleasure.'<sup>57</sup> Don John seduces and drops women wherever he goes, and kills any who challenge him to live up to his promises.<sup>58</sup> The Epicurean emphasis on pleasure is evident, although the frenzied sequence of dangerous encounters was hardly in keeping with Epicurus' notions of pleasure. Don John is meant to be sufficiently monstrous to be off-putting: Shadwell's preface to the printed version included the disclaimer, 'I hope that the severest reader will not be offended at the representation of those vices on which they will see a dreadful punishment inflicted', but Don John's attitude of entitlement remained plainly on display.<sup>59</sup>

Epicurean libertinism, no matter how altered on stage, figured centrally in the development of new paradigms relative to sexuality and the body in the Enlightenment. Rejecting the reverence for the past and the reliance on tradition (whether religious or emerging out of pagan Antiquity), Enlightenment philosophers turned to the natural world as the basis for their truth.<sup>60</sup> Epicurus' materialism – all things are made of atoms that obey basic physical laws – fit with aspects of Enlightenment philosophy that emphasized understanding the world through sensory experience and rational judgement. Materialism appealed to those who rejected organized religion as superstition because the idea that matter obeyed the dictates of nature obviated the need for an active, anthropomorphic god.<sup>61</sup> The effects of such thinking on understandings of sexuality and the body were several. The willingness to think of bodies as matter facilitated reconsideration of the humoral system. Biology moved forward on many fronts, but among them, William Harvey's finding that all animals produced eggs and Antonie van Leeuwenhoek's turning his microscope on male seed to discover sperm moved human anatomy toward understanding two separate biological sexes. Laqueur has argued that the development of language for and representations of female sexual organs as distinct from male ones indicates the intellectual separation into two sexes.<sup>62</sup> Laqueur is right in that modern perceptions of the body usually see it as two distinct, incommensurate sexes, both of whom are required for procreation. He grants less space to the persistence of humoral ideas about bodies, not the least of which is the recurrence of the term 'human' rather than 'male' and 'female' in a variety of contexts.

From a different perspective, the instantiation of sexual incommensurability that Laqueur highlights was very much in place by the middle of the eighteenth century. In much Enlightenment thought, 'nature' made men and women different, and thus, social differences were 'natural' as well. A panoply of corollaries about bodies and sexuality followed in the form of social logic of sexual differentiation. Thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant maintained that men, being rational and stronger, belonged in public capacities while weaker, 'naturally' irrational women were properly domestic.<sup>63</sup> Instead of believing that women's weakness made them sexually voracious and lascivious, the idea became that women were sexually vulnerable. The image of prostitutes as victims of unscrupulous men became a staple of moral discourse and informed efforts to address prostitution. Institutions such as the Magdalen Hospital in London, founded in 1758, tried to rehabilitate 'fallen' women and girls on the assumption that they were seduced and abandoned.<sup>64</sup> If women became victims because of sex, same-sex sexuality became more than a crime against nature – it became unnatural. The lieutenant-general of police in Paris deliberately set about entrapping men seeking sex with other men under Louis XV.<sup>65</sup> In Holland, officials stepped up prosecutions of women engaged in sexual

activities with other women.<sup>66</sup> In 1828, England passed a law making prosecution of male homosexual sodomy much easier to pursue. Domestic heterosexuality, resting on presumptions about male and female bodies as constitutionally different, was both the ‘natural’ norm and apparently in constant need of protection against ‘unnatural’ alternatives.

To a degree, the above characterization of eighteenth-century sexuality seems to end up back in Foucault’s chronology in which modernity is more restrictive about sex than the seventeenth century. But one argument of this chapter is that interrogating Foucault’s framework reveals a rather different picture of how the study of sexuality and the body developed in early modern Europe. Instead of a period of comparative sexual freedom preceding modern sexual identity, the Renaissance dislocated the presumptive sexual order. The study of sexual practices in ancient texts, the development of knowledge that exceeded the limits of Antiquity, and the broadening of access to information about sex and bodies disrupted aspects of accepted belief. This set the stage for contestation over the meanings of sex and the sexed body. Disciplinary practices emerging in law were met with evasion since it seems implausible that framers of laws against sodomy, for instance, expected sodomites to remain unmolested unless they made other kinds of trouble. At the same time, the spectre of punishment for sexual misconduct prompted self-protective group creation in urban molly-houses, while the lack of enforcement prompted moralists and the activists they inspired to attack ‘deviants’. The self-conscious sexual profligacy of libertine drama points to another reaction, in which (mostly) men of privilege denied the disciplinary mechanisms around sex entirely. This is not a world of sexual freedom even for libertines. Contestation over sexuality and the body took new and newly complex forms beginning in the Renaissance.

Moreover, the Enlightenment shift away from reflecting on the textual tradition that marked the Renaissance and toward ‘nature’ as the baseline reference point for ‘truth’ was not such a clear or decisive break with the past. Enlightenment thinkers inherited much from the Renaissance, including conflicting ideas about how sexuality and the body could be understood and addressed in cultural practice. Enlightenment libertines reworked the idea of sexual pleasure by reference to nature, but Renaissance developments enabled the formulation of that position. Epicurean ideas recovered in the Renaissance were among those that informed Enlightenment ideas about the ‘natural’ pleasures of sex. The Enlightenment revisions of understanding of the body in scientific terms also owed much to the prolonged discussions of sexuality and the body in the literature spawned by the expansion of print culture. To return for a moment to a text that encompasses several of the impulses around the study of sex, *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* can be understood as an exemplar of *scientia sexualis*: it tells readers how to procreate and implicitly – by telling them what to do – it indicates what should not be done. But *Aristotle’s Masterpiece* is also *ars erotica* in a way. Like many texts of the past it might not ‘work’ for us as a prompt book, if you will, but who is to say that it did not work like that for someone else? To put it another way, ‘bad’ sexual acts can be mighty ‘good’, and knowledge of the body and its sexual possibilities are often both at once.

## Notes

- 1 Anon., *Aristotle’s Masterpiece, or, The Secrets of Generation Displayed in All the Parts Thereof*, London: J. How, 1684, p. 189. Nicolas Venette’s *Tableau de l’amour conjugal* (first published in France in 1686) was only slightly less popular.

- 2 Roy Porter and Lesley Hall, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650–1950*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995, pp. 33–64, discusses the textual history of *Aristotle's Masterpiece*.
- 3 On social history and the family, see, for instance, Tamara K. Hareven, 'The History of the Family and the Complexity of Social Change', *American Historical Review* 96:1, 1991, pp. 95–124. This essay is especially helpful for tracing the various influences and developments in the history of the family through the 1980s. Hareven lays out the debates and points of controversy within family history studies evenly and lucidly. For a longer view, see Peter N. Stearns, 'Social History Present and Future', *Journal of Social History* 37:1, 2003, pp. 9–19.
- 4 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978 [1976]. Initially, Foucault planned six volumes, but completed only two more before his death, and these represented a shift from the original plan he had articulated. The completed volumes addressed sexuality in ancient Greece and Rome.
- 5 Examples abound throughout this chapter, but for direct engagement with Foucault on questions pertaining to the body, see, for instance, Colin Jones and Roy Porter (eds), *Reassessing Foucault: Power, Medicine and the Body*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994.
- 6 The term 'Renaissance' is controversial. See William Caferro, *Contesting the Renaissance*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011, for a multifaceted discussion. Nonetheless, I retain it as having some useful meaning, even as I acknowledge that much of what the Renaissance was about was rote language learning and the development of a secularly trained administrative class. See Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to Humanities: The Institutionalizing of the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.
- 7 The text circulated in the late fifteenth century, but it is accessible in a modern reprint as B. Platinae Cremonensis, *De Honestae Voluptate, De Ratione Victus*, Cologne: Eucharii, 1529.
- 8 Lorenzo Valla, *On Pleasure. De voluptate*, trans. A. Kent Hieatt and Maristella Lorch, intro. Maristella de Panizza Lorch, New York: Abaris Books, 1977. Originally published in 1431 and reworked under different titles and with variations thereafter.
- 9 Lucretius, *Titus Lucretius Carus His Six Books of Epicurean Philosophy, Done into English Verse, with Notes*, trans. Thomas Creech, 3rd edn, London: Thomas Sawbridge, 1683, sigs. a1v, a2v. The first edition appeared in 1682. Creech reiterates his concerns. See, for instance, 'the Wantonness of the *Epicureans* is as Notorious' (p. 1) and 'Epicurean Principles are Pernicious to Societies' (p. 50) in the midst of a section on meanings of pleasure.
- 10 Jacqueline Holler, 'The Spiritual and Physical Ecstasies of a Sixteenth-Century *Beata*: Marina de San Miguel Confesses Before the Mexican Inquisition Mexico, 1598' in *Colonial Lives: Documents on Latin American History, 1550–1850*, ed. Geoffrey Spurling and Richard Boyer, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 77–100.
- 11 Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. See also Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. Matthew Adamson, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988; Mary Frances Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and Its Commentaries*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990; and Brian Lawn, *The Salernitan Questions: An Introduction to the History of Medieval and Renaissance Problem Literature*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963.
- 12 See *Constantine the African and Ali ibn al'Abbas al-Magus: The Pantegni and Related Texts*, ed. Charles Burnett and Danielle Jacquart, Leiden and New York: Brill, 1994.
- 13 Paul Delany, 'Constantinus Africanus' *De coitu*: A Translation', *Chaucer Review* 4, 1969, pp. 55–65.
- 14 Constantine the African, *Pantegni*, fol. 28rb. The question of whether female sperm was actually seed created much consternation among medieval scholastics and medical writers. Aristotle said that women did not produce seed; the Hippocratic corpus indicated that they sort of did. See Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, pp. 25, 34, 62, 79, 97, and 200–201. Cadden treats both ancient and medieval iterations of the issue.
- 15 William of Conches, *A Dialogue on Natural Philosophy, Dragmaticon Philosophiae*, trans. and intro. Italo Ronca and Matthew Curr, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997, p. 135.
- 16 Petrus de Abano Pativinus, *Conciliator differentiarum philosophorum et precipue medicorum*, Venice: Luce Antony Junta Fiorentini, 1526, fol. 49v–50v. Differentia 34. The first printed edition was in 1476.

- 17 Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, ed. Paul Kaiser, Leipzig: Teubner, 1903, pp. 76–77.
- 18 The epitome of such discussions is Albert the Great, *Questions Concerning Aristotle's On Animals*, trans. Irvn M. Resnick and Kenneth F. Kitchell, Jr., Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008. See especially pp. 185–202, Book V, which addressed human reproduction, but also Book I, Q. 13, 'Why all animals except the human are very noisy during intercourse', and Q. 39, which maintains that big feet in a man are good because they indicate a large penis, but a woman with big feet has a big womb, which is apparently very bad.
- 19 Julia Haig Gaisser, *Catullus and his Renaissance Readers*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- 20 *Anacreonis Teii Odae. Ab Henrico Stephano luce et Latinitate nunc primum donatae*, Paris: Henri Estienne, 1554.
- 21 James Hankins, *Plato in the Renaissance*, 2 vols, Leiden and New York: Brill, 1990, vol. 1, pp. 70, 80, 137–38.
- 22 Katherine Crawford, *The Sexual Culture of the French Renaissance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, ch. 1.
- 23 Thomas Vicary, *The English-mans Treasure: with the true Anatomie of Mans bodie*, London: George Robinson for Iohn Perin, 1587, p. 50.
- 24 Nicholas Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives: Or, A Guide for Women, In their Conception, Bearing and Suckling their Children*, London: Peter Cole, 1651, p. 57.
- 25 Thomas W. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- 26 Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003.
- 27 Karen Harvey, 'The Substance of Sexual Difference: Change and Persistence in Representations of the Body in Eighteenth-Century England', *Gender and History* 14:2, 2002, pp. 202–23.
- 28 Katharine Park and Robert Nye, 'Destiny is Anatomy', *New Republic* 18:2, 1991, pp. 53–57.
- 29 Katharine Park, 'The Rediscovery of the Clitoris' in David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (eds), *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, New York and London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 170–93.
- 30 Strangulation by the womb appears in the Hippocratic corpus along with suggested remedies to restore the womb to its proper position. Plato also expresses support for the idea.
- 31 Mary Fissell, 'Readers, Texts, and Contexts: Vernacular Works in Early Modern England' in Roy Porter (ed.), *The Popularization of Medicine, 1650–1850*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 72–96.
- 32 Jacques Guillemeau, *The Happy Deliverie of Women*, London: Hatfield, 1612, p. 3.
- 33 Giovanni Marinello, *Le Medicine Partenenti alle infermità delle donne*, Venice: Gio. Bonfadino & Compagni, 1610.
- 34 Eucharius Roesslin, *The birth of mankinde, otherwise named the Womans Booke. Set forth in English by Thomas Raynalde Phisition, and by him corrected, and augmented*, London: Thomas Adams, 1604. The original English version appeared in 1512. Raynalde supplied the Vesalius images.
- 35 Michele Savonarola, *Libro della natura et virtu delle cose, che nutriscono, & delle cose non naturali, Con alcune osservationi per conservar la sanità, & alcuni quesiti bellissimi da notare*, Venice: Domenico & Gio. Battista Guerra, 1576, p. 261. See also pp. 265–66, 270–71.
- 36 Sodomy meant any non-procreative sex, including masturbation, anal penetration, oral sex, same-sex encounters, and bestiality.
- 37 Quoted Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex, Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 117–18.
- 38 For a more detailed discussion, see Katherine Crawford, *European Sexualities, 1400–1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 155–62.
- 39 Maria R. Boes, 'On Trial for Sodomy in Early Modern Germany' in Tom Betteridge (ed.), *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002, pp. 27–45.
- 40 Gayle Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality' in Carole S. Vance (ed.), *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, London: Pandora, 1992, pp. 267–93.
- 41 Ned Ward, *History of the London Clubs*, London: n.p., 1709, p. 284.
- 42 For the sonnets in Italian and with an English translation, see Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. Talvacchia lays

- out the circumstances around the production of the sonnets and provides cogent analysis of their content.
- 43 *Le Cabinet secret du Parnasse. Recueil de poésies libres, rares ou peu connues, pour servir de Supplément aux Oeuvres dites complètes des poètes français*, ed. Louis Perceau, 3 vols, Paris: Au Cabinet du Livre, 1928, vol. 1, p. 235. This modern collection represents a small but reasonably representative sample of the sexual poetry that appeared in print in France. I have counted 16 separate collections, most of which went into multiple editions. Many poems appear repeatedly, sometimes with attribution.
  - 44 Bibliothèque nationale de France MS n.a.f. 6888, 128.
  - 45 John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, *The Complete Poems*, ed. David M. Vieth, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
  - 46 There has been much debate over whether such texts are erotica or pornography. For a summary, see Crawford, *Sexual Culture*, pp. 174–76. For English early modern pornography, see especially Sarah Toulalan, *Imagining Sex: Pornography and Bodies in Seventeenth-Century England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. For Italian counterpoints, see David O. Frantz, *Festum Voluptatis: A Study of Renaissance Erotica*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989. For an insightful corrective to the ahistorical tendency in feminist criticism regarding pornography, see Manuela Mourão, ‘The Representation of Female Desire in Early Modern Pornographic Texts, 1660–1745’, *Signs* 24, 1999, pp. 573–602, which contends that early modern pornography is not necessarily oppressive to women and thus can be used to challenge the view of women as powerless victims posited by anti-pornography feminists. See also chapter 11 by Ian Moulton in this volume.
  - 47 Anon., *The School of Venus, or the Ladies Delight, Reduced into Rules of Practice*, London[?]: n.p., 1680. The title page acknowledges the French original, *L’Ecole des Filles*.
  - 48 Nicolas Chorier, *A Dialogue Between A Married Lady and A Maid*, London: n.p., 1740. The English edition is an abridgement of Chorier’s *Satyra sotadica*, 1660.
  - 49 Anon., *Venus in the Cloister: or, The Nun in her Smock*, London: n.p., 1725. The French original was *Venus dans le cloître, ou la religieuse en chemise* by Jean Barrin, 1683. The English publisher was probably Edmund Curll, who specialized in publishing erotica and pornography.
  - 50 John Cleland, *Fanny Hill: or, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, ed. Peter Wagner, London: Penguin, 1986. For a sense of the range and extent of this literature, see Julie Peakman (ed.), *Whore Biographies, 1700–1825*, 8 vols, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006–7. Part I includes biographies of English prostitutes, both famous and obscure. Part II features courtesans’ autobiographies, which reveal much about what the women thought about gender issues around sale of sex. Attitudes toward chastity, promiscuity, men, and the double standard recur. These volumes are well presented, and much of the material has been unavailable in unexpurgated form.
  - 51 Roy Porter, ‘“Laying Aside Any Private Advantage”: John Marten and Venereal Disease’ in Linda E. Merians (ed.), *The Secret Malady: Venereal Disease in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France*, Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1996, pp. 51–67.
  - 52 Maximillian E. Novak, ‘Libertinism and Sexuality’ in Susan J. Owen (ed.), *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, pp. 53–68; see p. 55. Viau paid dearly for his beliefs, falling foul of Louis XIII and dying young after spending two years in the Conciergerie prison.
  - 53 Pierre Gassendi, *De vita et moribus Epicuri libri octo*, Lyons: Guillaume Barbier, 1647; *Syntagma philosophiae Epicuri cum refutationibus dogmatum quae contra fidem christianam ab eo asserta sunt*, Lyon: Guillaume Barbier, 1649; and *Animaadversiones in decimum librum Diogenis Laertii*, Lyon: Guillaume Barbier, 1649.
  - 54 Epicurus, ‘Letter to Menoeceus’ in *The Essential Epicurus: Letters, Principal Doctrines, Vatican Sayings, and Fragments*, trans. and intro. Eugene O’Connor, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1993, p. 65.
  - 55 René Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle*, Paris: Slatkine, 2000, pp. 127–29; Lisa Tunick Sarasohn, ‘Epicureanism and the Creation of a Privatist Ethic in Early Seventeenth-Century France’ in Margaret J. Osler (ed.), *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquility*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 175–96.
  - 56 Thomas Shadwell, *The Libertine* in Deborah Payne Fisk (ed.), *Four Restoration Libertine Plays*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 1.1, ll., pp. 123–25.

- 57 To be fair, Don Lopez is not only about sex: he killed his older brother to appropriate his inheritance. See Shadwell, *The Libertine*, 1.1, ll., pp. 65–74. For the rape comment, see 2.1, ll., pp. 328–29.
- 58 See, for instance, Shadwell, *The Libertine*, 1.1, ll., pp. 108–13; 2.1, ll., pp. 165–380; 4.1, ll., pp. 1–231.
- 59 Shadwell, *The Libertine*, preface, ll., pp. 14–16. While I make no claims to be able to trace influence from stage to street, the cultural context does seem telling. Randolph Trumbach has argued that a popular form of libertinism is visible in the historical records of crime in seventeenth-century London. See *Sex and the Gender Revolution, Vol. 1*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998, pp. 90–111. See also Lawrence Stone, ‘Libertine Sexuality in Post-Restoration England: Group Sex and Flagellation among the Middling Sort in Norwich in 1706–7’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, 1992, pp. 511–26.
- 60 This is a tremendous condensation of a complicated intellectual movement. For a sense of the range of questions and answers raised by Enlightenment thinkers, see Jonathan I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670–1752*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- 61 Some Enlightenment thinkers were more adamant about materialist atheism than others. Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709–51), for instance, was outspoken in his materialist-based atheism, as is apparent in his *L’Homme Machine* (1748). In contrast, François-Marie Arouet Voltaire (1694–1778) was representative of a more common line of thought, which maintained that belief in the divine was not at odds with understanding the natural world. Organized religion, however, was worthy of nothing but scorn. See, for instance, the entries in his *Philosophical Dictionary* under ‘Atheism’, ‘Devout’, ‘Ecclesiastical Ministry’, ‘Faith’, ‘God’, ‘Mohammedans’, ‘Religion’, ‘Sect’, and ‘Theist’.
- 62 Laqueur, *Making Sex*, ch. 5.
- 63 See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education* (1762), Book 5; Immanuel Kant refers to women as ‘the fair sex’ in ‘What is Enlightenment?’ (1784) and elaborates on the differences between men as noble and women as beautiful.
- 64 See also Timothy J. Gilfoyle, ‘Prostitutes in History: From Parables of Pornography to Metaphors of Modernity’, *The American Historical Review* 104:1, 1999, pp. 117–41, which argues that the regulation of prostitution goes hand-in-hand with the expansion of state power.
- 65 Michel Rey, ‘Police and Sodomy in Eighteenth-Century Paris: From Sin to Disorder’ in Kent Gerard and Gert Hekma (eds), *The Pursuit of Sodomy: Male Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe*, New York: Haworth Press, 1989, pp. 129–46.
- 66 Theo van der Meer, ‘Tribades on Trial: Female Same-Sex Offenders in Late Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1:3, 1991, pp. 424–45.

# APPROACHES TO THE HISTORY OF SEXUALITY SINCE 1750

*Harry G. Cocks*

The history of modern sexuality is about sexual behaviour but not only that. It also deals with the changing way that sexuality is constituted as a field of knowledge and a set of power relations. It therefore sets itself the complex task of trying to examine the way in which dominant conceptions of sexuality interact with personal identity and the self. It asks two key questions: first, is there something distinctive about the way bodies and desires are thought about and experienced in the modern period, and second, does the way that sexuality is represented, thought about and described affect the way it is experienced, and if so, how? There are several answers to this question, the broad outlines of which I will set out below. Perhaps the dominant response of historians is to assume that there is a direct link between moral and social rules and the actual experience of the body. However, there are many others who dispute this, and suggest that there is something constant about sexual behaviour and identity across cultures and time periods. There are also a number of viewpoints in between and refinements of these broad positions. In general, though, the idea that there is something distinctive about modern sexuality has survived decades of critical scrutiny.

## **What is sexuality?**

The modern history of sexuality can only really be understood if we appreciate that the word 'sexuality' has a specific modern meaning. When we in the contemporary West talk about sexuality, we are using it as an umbrella term to refer to behaviour, orientation, identity, desire, anatomy and other matters that relate to individuality. However, within that, we usually assume that its primary significance relates to personal identity. It is possible to say that you have 'a sexuality', by which we mean a form of sexual orientation or a type of personal identity and we often also imply that it has some kind of (often mysterious) relationship to anatomy and psychology. Sexuality also refers to a field of knowledge that inquires into this relationship between sexual behaviour and individual identity and encompasses most of the 'psy' sciences – psychology and psychiatry, as well as related fields like psychoanalysis, criminology or social policy. Part of the point of the psy sciences is to investigate the relationship between sexual behaviour and psychological health, to inquire into what makes us well or badly adjusted to social norms.

Sexual behaviour or identity has not always been understood in this way. It was only in the 1890s, when sexual and psychological science were emerging, that the word 'sexuality'

took on its key modern meaning. In the eighteenth century, the term 'sexuality' was used in a scientific sense to refer to the reproductive capacity of an organism, especially of plants, and until well into the twentieth century 'sex' was used not to discuss behaviour, but to refer to anatomical characteristics (the differences between the sexes).<sup>1</sup> The term 'sexuality' was not the term employed to refer to the body and its desires. Sexual behaviour and feeling was essentially disaggregated into categories like the 'natural passions', morals, marriage, or the collection of medieval sins known as 'luxuria', which refer mainly to forms of fornication such as non-missionary-position sex or sodomy. Our use of the word 'sexuality' assumes that it is a coherent field of knowledge all to itself, and can in fact be removed from the context in which it appears and studied as a thing in itself.

By contrast, in the medieval and early modern periods, sexual behaviour and attitudes towards it could not be disentangled from their immediate context. They mattered because of their relationships to social questions like reproduction, marriage, property, morals, patronage, religion or kinship. Similarly, if you wanted to inquire into the nature of sexual behaviour or psychology, you would have to see it in relation to these questions and deal just as much with them as with matters of behaviour or inclination. If one looks at any history of morals or behaviour, the development of the modern way of thinking can be followed. In pre-industrial peasant societies or less complex tribal groupings, for instance, the history of marriage has been inseparable from the transmission of property, reproduction, or issues of status and alliance. In the modern period, however, and especially in western Europe and America since 1900, marriage (or any long-term partnership) has increasingly come to be seen as a form of dissoluble contract between equals, the significance of which lies primarily in their mutual emotional satisfaction. The other meanings of marriage still matter of course, especially outside the global north, but we recognize that they are in many ways subordinate to psychological health and adjustment. Love, as the historian Stephanie Coontz puts it, has conquered marriage across the world.<sup>2</sup>

Central to the history of modern sexuality, then, in my view is the attempt to show how this specific idea of sexuality emerged and how it affected the way people behaved and thought of themselves. In short, how did it become possible for sexuality to be notionally separated from the wider context of kinship, reproduction, alliance or inheritance, to be constituted as a separate domain of knowledge? To ask this question is not to say that sexual behaviour in the modern world has no relevance for these wider questions – in many ways we know that it does. But the set of assumptions that goes with 'sexuality' understood in this way is of course a kind of willing fiction. We know that sex and the body have a political and social significance that exceeds questions of personal identity, but we often assume that this is not the case. Part of the point of a history of sexuality is to resist that fiction, to show again that sexuality does have a broader relevance, and to restore the earlier idea that desire does have an ethical and political significance.

### **Explaining modern sexuality**

One of the key questions posed by historians is how this meaning of 'sexuality' – what we might call the modern way of treating, experiencing and understanding the body and its desires – developed. It is often said that the historians who aim to answer this question can be called a broadly 'social constructionist' school, in that they assume that the body and its desires do alter in profound ways according to the social and moral rules which seek to govern them. However, we should bear in mind that there are other historians who



disagree with the idea that sexuality is either thought of or experienced differently by different societies. They argue that sexual behaviour, attitudes and categories are fixed in some way, probably by our biological make-up, and that as a result they are transhistorical or always roughly the same throughout history. In this 'essentialist' view, the nature of personal experience and psychology is also broadly the same through the ages, while the categories that we use to describe individuals – gay, straight, bisexual – can be plausibly applied to any period. We can call this position an 'essentialist' one, in that it suggests that there is something essential about sexual desire and behaviour that is always the same and does not alter fundamentally – only the meanings attributed to it change. This view has been taken up recently by those associated with evolutionary explanations of human behaviour and I will explain all these in greater detail below.

This characterization of the history of sexuality as a war between essentialism and social constructionism is, however, somewhat crude – in particular it ignores the fact that there are many different gradations of each position and that neither is as straightforward as it sounds. For instance, there are broadly two distinct ways of understanding what modern sexuality is. They are both often seen as social constructionist in approach; they are however quite different from each other. Both assume that there is something distinctive about modern sexuality, but they draw very different conclusions about personal identity and experience from that premise. Put simply, one suggests that modern ideas of sexuality resulted from the rise and expansion of personal freedom, and that the sphere of sexual freedom has expanded correspondingly. In that reading, sexuality has been progressively 'liberated'. The second position, associated with the French theorist and historian Michel Foucault and his followers, argues (in broad terms) that sexuality represents an arena for the play of power relations in which states and their agencies seek to administer and direct sexual behaviour.

The first position argues that since the eighteenth century there has been a vast increase in the sphere of personal freedom and people have simply had more time to devote to themselves. As communal social forms have declined, the individual has gained a new primacy. In this view, the long-term decline in working hours, the corresponding expansion of leisure time, the development of publicly funded education, health and welfare systems and of mechanical contraception, the rise of print and other media devoted to discussing social and political questions, the expansion of democracy and related developments all helped to create a space in which personal identity and individual wants mattered more than ever before, and could also be examined at length. In this view, sexuality which was once repressed and controlled, punished, or regarded as sinful could increasingly be expressed. As the modern world saw an expansion in the sphere of liberty, so there was a corresponding decline in the communal and collective ties that bound pre-industrial society. Symptoms of these changes can be seen in the rise of individualism as an ideology, as well as in changes to the intimate sphere, for example, in the idea of marriage primarily as an emotional tie between equal partners, in the smaller modern family, in gay rights, women's rights and a broad rhetoric of sexual freedom.<sup>3</sup>

This interpretation tends to assume two things that, as we will see, are often criticized, and which also in fact link this approach to the conceptual framework found in the 'essentialist' school. First, that sexual freedoms have expanded in a more or less linear fashion – there are more of them, and we are less repressed as every century passes – and second, that the only thing that changes about sex is the nature of its expression – the experience itself is always roughly the same. The latter reading has often been dubbed the

'hydraulic' view as it assumes that sex – like water – can only ever be channelled or diverted; its essence cannot be significantly altered. It can be either repressed or dammed up, or released and set free. As the great social historian Lawrence Stone put it, the modern period was characterized by 'remarkable release of the libido'.<sup>4</sup> If you assume that sex in the past was repressed in this way, then the corresponding assumption is that there is a 'normal' level to which sexual behaviour will naturally gravitate. Some historians argue that this is what has happened since the eighteenth century, suggesting that previously outlawed sexual behaviour has been allowed and encouraged. So in that sense, this version of modern history assumes that modern sexuality is different, but only in the respect that there is more of it, and that it has therefore become more important in people's lives.<sup>5</sup>

Even though in this view sexuality changes, and is 'socially constructed' in a simple sense in that it follows moral rules, it does not usually assume that the actual experience of desire changes that much. So what exactly does it mean to say something is 'socially constructed'? First of all, it is important to realize that the idea that sexuality, gender and the body are altered in their essence by cultural rules is not a recent, or late twentieth-century view. The 'common-sense' view of the body and its desires as essentially the same across cultures was popular, but never entirely dominant, even in early histories of sexual behaviour and attitudes. In fact it was frequently asserted to the contrary, even by eighteenth-century writers, that behaviour and gender was in some way 'socially constructed'. The eighteenth-century collector Richard Payne Knight (1751–1824), for instance, who wrote a treatise on ancient fertility rituals (and has some claim to be one of the first historians of sexuality), argued both ways. Although he suggested that sensibility (feeling or emotion) was essentially transhistorical ('Men, considered collectively, are at all times the same animals, employing the same organs, and endowed with the same faculties'), he also conceded that their 'passions, prejudices and conceptions' would be 'directed to various ends, and modified in various ways, by the variety of external circumstances operating upon them'.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, early feminist writings such as *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft argued that women's apparently weak and passive nature owed more to social rules than their physical make-up.

Payne Knight's assumption that 'external circumstances' affect the passions in a variety of ways can be taken as a succinct summary of the case for the idea of the body as a social construction. He suggests that rules and customs do have an effect on experience and sensibility, but is unable to specify exactly what it is. Similarly, modern social constructionists suggest that the way in which something is understood or described will have an effect on how it is experienced – but then often struggle to describe the minute processes that could show exactly how that might work. This uncertainty means that within the idea of 'social constructionism' there may be a 'weak' version of the argument and a 'strong' one. The 'weak' version states that social-cultural rules and mores have some kind of effect which mainly relates to either the release or repression of desires. The 'strong' position, on the other hand, points out that desire is not merely released or repressed, but constantly shaped, and the entire process has a profound effect on personal identity. Therefore, simply saying something is socially or culturally constructed is clearly only the beginning of the argument. One needs to determine in a detailed way how exactly this process of 'construction' happens, if at all.<sup>7</sup> How are bodily desires enmeshed within the manifold complexity that we call culture and society? Can we draw out individual examples of how this 'construction' might happen?

### Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*

One of the major approaches to the history of sexuality, that associated with Michel Foucault, has tried to address this problem by taking this 'strong' position. Although, as we have seen, the idea of the body as a social construction was not new, Foucault's writings broadened out the question of how bodies and societies interact into a much wider analysis of changing power relations in modern western societies, and as such offered a revelatory account of the history of sexuality. As we have already said, conventional histories of modern western societies have tended to outline the growth of liberty and personal freedom. As Foucault points out in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), state power in early modern Europe was exemplified by spectacular, violent and public forms of terror such as execution or torture that acted in an exemplary way to demonstrate the overwhelming power of the sovereign, and hence the state. Most historians would suggest that over the course of the next two centuries, the terrifying power of the state gave way to more pluralistic societies (in which power might be held by a variety of people and institutions), alongside the rise of modern forms of democracy, individualism and a growing sphere of personal autonomy, in which individuals were seen as the bearers of universal rights. The rise of these freedoms seems to show modern societies progressing from forms of government which relied on primitive terror to ones that rest on the active consent of those governed. While Foucault does not explicitly disagree with this account, he suggests that while one form of power declined, another – what he calls 'biopower' – emerged; one that was more suitable to governing a notionally free population. The threat of endless terror from either the state (torture, execution, physical punishment) or God (the fires of Hell) was replaced by continual measurement and monitoring.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, states like Britain began to take a systematic interest in the size and quality of their population for the first time. This led in turn, Foucault suggests, to an interest in the health of that population, and to various measures to encourage public health. Put simply, biopower describes this attempt on the part of the state and its agencies to measure, map, administer or direct the natural forces of life and death. An interest in sexual behaviour is part and parcel of these inquiries, and therefore is a central aspect of the rise of biopower. For instance, one of the key ways of measuring population was via the birth rate, which itself was dependent on sexual behaviour in (and outside of) marriage. States that sought to measure their population and its health therefore automatically took a broad interest in sexual behaviour and morality.

It is important to note, however, that biopower in Foucault's account does not involve repression or coercion and is more like a set of administrative processes. Such processes required extensive statistical and medical knowledge of society: only armed with information could the business of life be directly managed. This kind of number-crunching was first done by groups outside the remit of the state but was gradually taken over by it; states began to develop mechanisms for measuring birth rates and maternal health (and their 'normal' distribution), the capacities of individuals as workers, parents or children, or rates of disease and mortality. The development of such knowledge can be seen in the emergence across nineteenth-century Europe of attempts to count populations and to map their natural characteristics – a sign of which was the establishment by the British state of the General Register Office in 1836 in order to collate all such statistics. As a consequence of this interest in population and public health, the question of whether someone behaved 'normally' in sexual terms became a matter of pressing social concern. The result during

the course of the nineteenth century was a series of investigations into sexual behaviour, culminating in the application of scientific methods to its study – the rise of what Foucault calls *scientia sexualis* (sexual science).

This, Foucault says, is where the modern preoccupation with sexuality comes from – the rise of biopower as an administrative process. Foucault also identifies one of the specific ways in which *scientia sexualis* was devised – that is, through the emergence of a broad field of inquiry that we can call sexology. At the end of the nineteenth century, Foucault suggests, a number of medical, scientific, legal, psychiatric and other writers began to inquire into the nature of sexual behaviour. Some of this began with the state or those allied to it. One of the first people to write systematically about sexual normality and abnormality was the Austrian doctor Richard von Krafft-Ebing, who in his work with the Viennese police came across a wide variety of sex offenders. He compiled his inquiries into the most comprehensive account of sexual behaviour then written, entitled *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886). Others, such as the German writer Karl Ulrichs, who wanted to remove the social stigma from homosexuality and argued for its legalization in the German states, came up with further new ways to categorize sexual behaviour. More followed these examples, applying this method of categorization and drawing upon individual case studies. This work was popularized in Britain in the 1890s by progressive thinkers like the doctor and writer Havelock Ellis, who began to publish his own encyclopedia of sexual behaviour in 1895, his collaborator John Addington Symonds, and most successfully, by the socialist Edward Carpenter.

Sexology like that pioneered by Krafft-Ebing generally applied a specific method. This was the categorization of different classes of sexual behaviour and psychology, along with the investigation of individual case histories – what Foucault calls the ‘specification’ of different types of sexual desire. Inquiries like this looked back into an individual’s past to find the roots of his or her behaviour in childhood, or examined their subject’s anatomy for equally telling signs of ‘inversion’ – the physical symptoms of effeminacy in a man or manliness in a woman. These investigations, Foucault says, symbolize a new way of seeing the body and its desires – they show an entirely new concept of ‘sexuality’ coming into being, one that defines it as the mysterious mainspring of the personality, the core of the self.

For Foucault, ‘sexuality’ has a particular meaning. It is not the same as the entirety of all biological drives and urges, and neither is it merely equivalent to the capacities and pleasures of the body. In addition to those things, ‘sexuality’ refers to a way of knowing (‘the will to knowledge’) which assumes that individual psychology can be read from sexual behaviour or anatomy, and that these things will always be in some way homologous – an assumption found in most sexological texts. Foucault resists the attempt to set out causes for these developments in the usual way of historians, and for this reason students often find him puzzling. Instead, his interest is in the coalescence of a particular way of thinking, acting and being, an apparatus of thought and action with its own set of powerful assumptions, its own internal unity, rules and patterns – what Foucault calls a discourse.

Thus the discourse of sexuality emerged from biopower and sexology and its development is symbolized by four key areas of thought that developed in part from the increasing professionalization of medicine and science in the nineteenth century. More doctors and scientists simply meant more inquiries into the physical body, and Foucault sees this process producing four vital elements of *scientia sexualis*. First, the medical notion that women

were especially prone to hysteria as the result of their reproductive organs (the ‘hysterization of women’s bodies’); second, the supervision of children’s sexuality (‘the pedagogization of children’s sex’), such as the control and scrutiny of masturbatory tendencies or precocious sexual behaviour; third, the centrality of reproductive fertility to a social body (‘the socialization of procreative behaviour’); and finally the ‘psychiatrization of perverse pleasure’, that is, the specification, supervision and treatment of different kinds of sexual ‘abnormality’.<sup>8</sup> Sexuality is not, then, a ‘natural given’, and neither is it a biological or psychological secret at the heart of the self which is gradually uncovered. It is instead ‘a great surface network’ covering the body, its place in the world, and the ways of knowing about it.<sup>9</sup> Medical, legal and other networks of surveillance and supervision created a desire to both ‘extort’ the truth of the body from their subjects and patients, and a corresponding need to continually ‘confess’ the truth of one’s self.

The rise of ‘sexuality’ in this sense is marked by a series of apparent ‘inventions’. In the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, modern medicine produced the notion of the hysterical woman and the adolescent masturbator as particular characters with specific psychological and anatomical characteristics, while the state’s interest in public health compelled it to examine ‘normal’ rates of marriage, birth and death, and inquiries into criminality produced the idea that the sexual pervert was not merely the perpetrator of particular (illicit) sex acts, but a type of person with a telling anatomy and psychology – no longer merely criminal, but ‘the pervert’, ‘the paedophile’ or ‘the homosexual’. As the historian Chris Waters has pointed out, the entire modern vocabulary of perversion and sexual abnormality began to be created at this time – one that coined terms like sexual perversion (1885), masochism, sadism and paedophilia (all 1890). By the end of the century each of these, Robert Nye suggests, ‘had crystallized into distinct types, each with its own symptomatology, archive of clinical cases, and small army of medical and legal specialists devoted to studying, curing or punishing them’.<sup>10</sup>

One reason that this transition, from acts to types, is significant is that it represents what Foucault calls the ‘government of individualization’. What we often assume to be natural, private processes involving the simple exercise of autonomy and free choice, Foucault says, are in fact the objects of rule in many different ways. For instance, many forms of legislation, custom and tradition try to prevent people from committing certain sexual acts, and to regulate, maintain and encourage others regarded as useful and good, such as the prudent marriages imagined by early Victorian thinkers in Britain, or the large families beloved of pro-natalist or fascist regimes. Specific programmes designed to bring these ends about are what Foucault calls ‘biopolitics’. Inherent to these programmes are statistical and scientific notions of what constitutes normal behaviour – a process Foucault calls ‘normalization’ as it encourages individuals to measure themselves against the same standards. These forms of biopower and ‘normalization’ are employed not to merely control and suppress, but to try and bring into being certain types of person. Instead of seeing sexuality as being repressed by these forces, Foucault describes a decentred network of power that attempts to shape it, and that is creative and inventive, not automatically authoritarian or destructive. For instance, many democracies that adopted pro-natalist biopolitics tried in the twentieth century to encourage motherhood partly by establishing a positive maternal identity and linking it to racial health and progress. This was not only fostered by the state, but also by pressure groups and campaigns unaffiliated to the state. This is an example, Foucault concludes, of how power works in the modern world – it tries to create useful and productive individuals through a series of incentives, boundaries,