

Early Modern Science of Sex: Workshop Schedule

Monday 11 July		
1200 - 1300	Arrivals and Lunch	
1300 - 1310	Welcome	
1310 - 1445	James Parente	Sex Education in the Early Modern Netherlands: Translating Ovid's <i>Ars amatoria</i>
	Nigel Smith	Abused Lovers and Women's Seed: Sexual-Political Practice and (Radical) Reformed Religion, 1650-1700
1445 - 1515	BREAK	
1515 - 1730	Karen Hollewand	Sex, scholars and the female body
	Paige Donaghy	Solitary Sex and Fatherless Conceptions: Medical Theories of Single Women's 'Self-Generation', 1560-1700
	Clorinda Donato	Under the Knife: Sex, Surgery, Gender, and Performativity in Eighteenth-Century Italy
1730 - 1740	End of day 1 round-up	
1900	DINNER for Workshop Participants	
Tuesday 12 July		
0930 - 1100	Jennifer Evans	'soe much payne he coud not indure it': pain and men's sexual health in early modern England.
	Tim Reinke-Williams	Recording masturbation in male-authored early modern British life-writings
1100 - 1130	BREAK	
1130 - 1300	Ruben Verwaal	Semen in Flux: Gonorrhoea in Eighteenth-Century Medicine
	Kit Heyam	Sexual Knowledge and Print Culture in Early Modern England
1300 - 1315	Round-up workshop themes	
1315 - 1415	LUNCH and end of workshop	

Abstracts

James Parente, *University of Minnesota*

Sex Education in the Early Modern Netherlands: Translating Ovid's *Ars amatoria*

Nigel Smith, *Princeton University*

Abused Lovers and Women's Seed: Sexual-Political Practice and (Radical) Reformed Religion, 1650-1700

Karen Hollewand, *University of Groningen*

Sex, scholars and the female body

Paige Donaghy, *University of Queensland*

Solitary Sex and Fatherless Conceptions: Medical Theories of Single Women's 'Self-Generation', 1560-1700

In early modern Europe, women sometimes appeared pregnant, only to give birth to formless lumps of flesh, or to carry their pregnancies for many years. This condition was known at this time as 'false conceptions', 'moles' or 'molae', a type of conception and pregnancy that medical scholars believed was created from sexual intercourse between men and women. Many medical practitioners and scholars, however, also argued that women could produce these false conceptions by themselves, without having sex with men. Like hens that produced eggs alone, medical philosophers suggested that single women generated these formless conceptions through their own solitary sexual activity. This theory of women's parthenogenesis, which I call the 'self-generation' theory, was as we might expect, heavily contested in early modern medicine and philosophy, chiefly because it removed men from the processes of generation. In this paper, I outline the origins and key debates of these theories. I explore two case studies to demonstrate how the issues of single women's false conceptions encouraged medical practitioners to engage with these self-generation theories: first, the case of Spanish physician Amatus Lusitanus, and his treatment of an Italian nun's mola; and second, Dutch anatomist Jan Baptist van Lamzweerde's work, which sought to dispel negative social ideas about single women who experienced false conceptions. Although these theories have been overlooked by historians, I argue that they reveal much about medical philosophers' approaches to sex and generation, as well as the ways false conceptions were understood culturally.

Clorinda Donato, *California State University, Long Beach*

Under the Knife: Sex, Surgery, Gender, and Performativity in Eighteenth-Century Italy

Eighteenth-century anatomists and surgeons operated on the genitalia of men and women often against their will, removing the organs of generation for science and art, with scandal and sensationalism resulting from the narration of the deed across any number of media representations. This paper juxtaposes the science of anatomist Giovanni Bianchi's excision of the

hymen of the transgendered Catterina Vizzani-Giovanni Bordoni after her/his death with the surgical interventions that emasculated presumably unwitting young boys for the sake of art to reveal how these seemingly divergent interventions shared a common perspective about the body, sexual function, gender identity, and performativity.

Jennifer Evans, *University of Hertfordshire*

‘soe much payne he could not indure it’: pain and men’s sexual health in early modern England

It has been suggested that the comparative rarity of genitourinary conditions meant that they were relatively unimportant to men’s constructions of their identities. However, these conditions were important in shaping men’s identities as patients because disorders affecting the testicles, and genital region, were conceived of as distinctly painful ailments. Men’s genitourinary disorders represented an experience of pain particular to men and created a distinctly male emotional community of pain. The pain of these conditions was experienced as a moment of crisis. Pain in some cases could not be ignored and disrupted the ability to work, sleep, engage in expected daily activities. Pain shaped experiences of illness and recovery. Moreover, it shaped relationships with family, community, and medical practitioners. Pain forced men to make decisions about their activities, health and care that could simultaneously strain relationships and reinforce notions of dutiful care required from kin and community. Men did show forbearance, but pain was a deciding factor in seeking medical help, it was utilised as a powerful tool for articulating medical needs. These needs were met by physicians and surgeons who were acutely alive to the painful nature of men’s sexual health problems and strove to mitigate pain as a chief sign of the efficacy of their treatments.

Tim Reinke-Williams, *University of Northampton*

Recording masturbation in male-authored early modern British life-writings

This paper forms part of a chapter from my forthcoming monograph, *Leaky Bodies: Manhood, Sex and Power in Early Modern England*. Using evidence from diaries and commonplace books of nine male authors dating from the late sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century. Moving beyond debates about whether moral and medical concerns about masturbation increased in the decades around 1700, the paper analyses how and why these men, all broadly speaking from the middle-ranks of society, recorded and conceptualised their non-reproductive sexual ejaculations. Analysing frequency and length of descriptions of auto-erotic activities in these such demonstrates that, while some of the authors recorded their sense of shame in succumbing to their physical desires, others incorporated references to their intimate physical actions within accounts of heterosexual sociable interactions, or noted them as part of attempts to monitor, maintain and improve their physical and mental health. The small sample size means attempts to argue for significant temporal continuities or changes need to be cautious, but the overall history which the evidence points towards is one in which individual moral outlooks and social practices, framed by engagement with religious and scientific teachings, did more than moral panics about masturbation to shape how these men recorded and conceptualised autoeroticism.

Ruben Verwaal, *Durham University*

Semen in Flux: Gonorrhoea in Eighteenth-Century Medicine

At the *Sex and Science* workshop in Amsterdam in 2019, I demonstrated that exploring the materiality of semen can reveal important insights in early modern studies of sex. Investigating where semen originated and how it was produced, medical men supported the claim that semen fulfilled vital roles in the health and virility of male bodies. But beyond sensing and debating the properties of semen to reveal its central functions, semen also played a crucial part in understanding venereal diseases like gonorrhoea. In fact, I argue that investigations relating to semen and gonorrhoea helped formalise pathology as a separate discipline in the eighteenth century. Medical historians have often characterised disease theory in this period by two inventions: morbid anatomy and nosology (i.e., the classification of symptoms into coherent taxonomies). But while observations of symptoms and body parts focused on the effects and end results of disease, they provided no indication as to the possible cause of a disease. Physician and chemist Hieronymus Gaubius (1708–1775), therefore, developed a new disease theory, which was based on the chemistry of fluids. By exploring semen and gonorrhoea in relation to pathology, I argue that chemistry helped explain the causes of disease, and hence furthered the establishment of a new pathology. It fostered a new understanding of disease by dissemination across Europe.

Kit Heyam, *Queen Mary, University of London*

Sexual Knowledge and Print Culture in Early Modern England

Sexual knowledge and print culture in early modern England

This paper argues that what early modern people knew, understood and felt about sex was shaped by print culture. Using the case study of vernacular medical books, I show that the commercial, legal, moral and discursive aspects of the print marketplace played a significant role in constructing the early modern science of sex. As publishers responded to commercial demands by shaping the material book and its paratexts, writers responded to the legal and moral stakes of publication – combined with the lingering stigma of print. Together, they shaped the way that sexual content was framed and read.

Vernacular medical books, I argue, represent a locus of tension between publishers and writers. For publishers, vernacular content represented a commercial opportunity in its wide accessibility; for writers, vernacular content – and especially the sexual content of medical books – posed a risk of unsanctioned reading and use. At a deeper, discursive level, there was also a tension between writers' and translators' attempts to exonerate themselves of the charge that their vernacular publications put women's bodies on open display, and the language used by publishers to advertise vernacular content on title pages, which drew on a semantic field of common, general accessibility and disclosure of 'secrets'. These tensions, I argue, shaped the nature of the sexual knowledge that was made available by early modern medical books – reminding us to understand the early modern science of sex as a textual and material production, which cannot be entirely disentangled from the print marketplace for which it was produced and in which it circulated.

