The Publicity of Female Sexuality in the Early Modern Period:
An Analysis of Reproductive Intervention Techniques

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History does not repeat itself, but it does rhyme.

- Mark Twain

Contents

Introduction

On February 4, 2016 the Center for Disease Control released a statement and corresponding infographic relaying their new position on women and alcohol. Whereas previously the CDC has advised women who are pregnant or trying to become pregnant to refrain from drinking, the February declaration suggests that any woman who is not using birth control methods and is of reproductive age should not consume alcohol.[1] Regardless of the woman's sexual activity, the CDC implies that it is irresponsible to consume alcohol while not on birth control and thus potentially fertile. Although the intent is most likely well-meaning – the CDC wishes to reduce the rate of children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders – the phrasing of the statement and corresponding infographic are problematic. By restricting alcohol to those women who are sterile or on birth control, the CDC relegates a woman's sole purpose to that of reproduction. Rather than viewing a woman as an agentic human with the ability to control her reproductive state by remaining sexually abstinent or otherwise, this declaration places a blanket restriction on alcohol for anyone who has the ability to bear life.

The CDC's statement reveals much about the way modern Americans view the role of women in society by assuming that all women want to and will have children. This view is grounded in an antiquated patriarchal structure that relegates women to the household and men to the workplace. Although American society has grown far past this structure in the last decades, the new alcohol recommendations for women hearken back to a discourse in which a woman's body and choices were the responsibility of the public. Writing about early modern England, the

[1] Center for Disease Control, "More than 3 Million US women at risk for alcohol-exposed pregnancy." Center for Disease Control and Prevention. http://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2016/p0202-alcohol-exposed-pregnancy.html (February 5, 2016).

historian Mary Fissell quotes a medical journal from 1545 which read that "Even if the woman never conceived, or never even had sexual relations, 'yet is ther no faut in nature, who hath prepared place and food to be at all times in readinesse.'"[2] This expresses the same notion that the CDC has inadvertently implied: that women's bodies are inherently created for bearing life and therefore should at all times be prepared for conception, regardless of the woman's sexual status or decision. The CDC is attempting to restrict a fertile woman's behavior to protect any potential children she may have for the good of the future community. While well-meaning, these directions imply that is it not the living woman's freedom and choice that matters to the community, but the future children she may bear in her womb.

Throughout the early modern period, a woman's life revolved around her reproductive capabilities. Marriage and childbearing were considered the most important aspects of a woman's life, the two of which were inextricably linked. The broad-reaching patriarchal society of early modern Europe condemned any sexuality present outside of marriage or inappropriately within marriage. The masculinized gaze often focused specifically on the physical female body. Because reproduction was considered the primary function of women, societal constructs and therefore laws, treatises, and literature coded the female body as explicitly sexual. Reproduction and sexual intercourse can be read as ways in which the female body opened to public view and became an object of public discussion. Treatises, court cases, and other contemporary writings depicted the intimate, sexual part of a woman's life as her sole purpose and source of power, yet also made female sexuality a point of vulnerability. Rather than a proud source of life, the pregnant, fertile body in early modern Europe was often a cog in the wheel of female oppression, perpetrated not only by men themselves, but by a masculinized society that included women.

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[2] Mary Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 33.

Bodily states such as pregnancy and the presence of sexual desire outside of wedlock upset this order, and practices of infanticide, abortion, and contraceptive use can be seen as attempts to succeed in a personal struggle, but ultimately conform to the patriarchal system. These practices were prevalent throughout early modern Britain and Germany; as such, they represent a struggle for female agency and a desire to privatize the female body by gaining control of the means of reproduction.

Chapter 1: Methodology

This thesis is an attempt to define the ways in which actions such as infanticide, child abandonment, abortion, and contraceptive use existed as methods by which women could take control of their sexuality in early modern Britain and Germany. These regions comprise the primary geographical areas of this study for several reasons. In general terms, the early modern histories of Britain and Germany are representative of a defining moment for European and world history. The social, political, and religious climates of this time period, specifically during the Protestant Reformation, led to the emergence of the modern nation-state and the colonial period.[3] However, these changes did not begin in the same way, and it is the difference in state formation that provides context for using these regions as area for study. Britain represented an increasingly centralized state with a dynastic monarch and representative parliament, while Germany, with its many principalities in the early modern period, was the epitome of a decentralized region. The differing political structures in these nations affected the ways in which treatises and laws, both examined here, were distributed and executed. Both regions witnessed the growth of social pressures and corresponding laws around issues like witchcraft and infanticide that focused on female bodies, behaviors, and sexuality. Although the study of these two regions is not a thorough depiction of the entirety of the European continent in this time period, a larger perspective of female sexuality can be gained through the study of these two differing regions. By analyzing Britain and Germany, one can draw a relationship between legal

[3] This is not an exclusive theory. Thomas Ertman writes in his 1997 book *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1997) that "what set the early modern West apart from other great civilizations was the combination of a distinctive polity…and a dynamic market economy which permitted a breakthrough to self-sustaining growth and hence escape from periods of Malthusian crises." Brian Downing continues on this train of thought with his *Military Revolution and Political Change: Origins of Democracy and Autocracy in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1992). Finally, Elizabeth Eisenstein reports on a specific technology that she argues contributed in large part the process of nation-building in this period in her work *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

mandates and methods of social control. Although these two regions differed in matters of centralization and certainly legal structures, they shared similar laws regarding female sexuality that were dictated by social mores.

This paper examines a number of different source materials, the first of which is broadsides. Because they were written for more popular audiences, broadsides often contained more sensational headlines and content than other primary sources. They displayed the unusual stories that might grab the attention of the passerby. As such, many of the broadsides contained flamboyant headlines and large grotesque pictures to advertise the story. These pictures and stories provide numerous layers of analysis. Their contents can be judged on the basis of gender, class, and authoritarian lines. Historians of gender have often noted that the crimes displayed by these broadsides were specifically female in nature, which highlights the gendered and sexualized nature of these crimes. Similar to online news outlets, broadsides must be read with caution, since, like any other archival material, they are historically, socially, and politically situated. They were written with a certain intent to inform the common person, not the educated or even completely literate, and may not always reveal the entire truth of the story. Regardless of this need for critical analysis, they can reveal much about the expectations of the time.

In addition to broadsides, legal treatises also reveal much about the position of women's sexuality in the early modern period. These treatises often defined very specific parameters of the law. The wording of these treatises was morally charged and often centered on the natural state of the female subject as pure, while the infraction of the law was a grave disturbance of moral conduct. The majority of treatises and acts used in this study emerge from the English and

Scottish legal systems because of their nature as centralized or centralizing states with far reaching penal codes.[4]

A final source of primary material comes from numerous collections of writings on witchcraft. The witchcraft documents demonstrate much about the accusations, trials, and widespread beliefs about witches' practices. In all of these, women's sexuality comes to the forefront. Worship and belief in the devil represented such a contrast to the expected feminine ideal as a mother and wife that these typically "proper" sexual roles were inverted. In place of these roles, particularly in Germany, women were often portrayed as the wife or concubine of the devil, participating in obscene sexual relations and potentially birthing the children of the devil. Such beliefs, which often resulted in actual confessions of invented crimes, reveal an intense preoccupation with female sexuality. Writings on witchcraft provide an important and illuminating focal point for understanding early modern perceptions of female sexuality.

Finally, much of this study is grounded in feminist theory regarding the social and cultural structure of the early modern period. In particular, this study has been shaped by the work of historians like Lyndal Roper and Ulinka Rublack, who integrate gender as a tool of analysis in their writings, drawing from the feminist theory of Simone de Beauvoir and others.[5]

This thesis examines female sexuality and the forces that sought to bind it in early modern Europe. As such, it is essential to define some terms that will frequently be used to dissect this phenomena. When used in this study, "patriarchal" does not merely apply to a family

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[4] It is fervently debating as to what extent Scotland can be considered a centralized state in the early modern period. Julian Goodare in his "The Nobility and the Absolutist State in Scotland, 1584-1638,"(1993) argues that with Charles I's Acts of Revocation in 1625, the nobility was brought well under control of the Scottish crown and was forced to submit to them, strengthening the cause of the king. However, because of the disparate peoples in the highlands that were not truly under complete control of the crown, other scholars such as Brian Levack and Christina Larner have debated the extent to which early modern Scotland can be declared centralized.

[5] In particular, de Beauvoir's book, *The Second Sex* (Random House, 2015), is seen as the foundational work for feminist theory.

structure in which the male is the head of the house. Patriarchal in this context defines the extent to which a male-dominated society has far reaching effects on female lives. The patriarchy/patriarchal refers to the vast system of male leadership and privilege on the European continent, resulting in a second-class status for women or non-heteronormative people. While a discussion of the effects of the patriarchy on European history is beyond the scope of this paper, the identification of a patriarchal structure is essential to an analysis of female sexuality in the early modern period. In this paper, "patriarchal" can describe any system or instance in which men have the authority to dictate not only the physical control and rule of a system, but the moral, legal, and social dictates of it. Thus this applies to female sexuality in Europe because the dictates regarding sexual behavior, whether they were social, religious, or legal, were all defined by male-dominated rule in which females did not participate.[6] Although this study focuses on how women struggled with the limits placed on their sexuality, the larger struggle was one of patriarchal control of the physical female form. This was patriarchy at its most physically obvious in that its effects impacted the actual female body through pregnancy or an endeavor to prevent a pregnancy. The prevailing patriarchy provided the backdrop for the entire conflict of female sexuality in early modern Europe.

Throughout this work, "masculinized society" and the "societal gaze" refer to the ways in which a society had internalized patriarchal dictates and projected them outward. A masculinized society alludes to the premise that a person does not have to be male in order to reinforce the patriarchy. To put this in terms of the early modern period, women, particularly older women, played a large part in reinforcing social norms regarding pregnancy, even through

[6] Lyndal Roper identifies these themes in her work *Oedipus and the Devil* (Routledge Press, 2014), in which she shows that women's sexuality was perpetually bound with their religious and social purity. Ulinka Rublack displays the legal prosecutions of this systematic patriarchy in her book, *The Crimes of Women in Early Modern Germany* (Clarendon Press, 1999).

punishing those who did not conform to those norms. Other women would report, judge, or shame women who practiced deviant sexuality, even though the forms of deviant sexuality were defined by men. This did not make the definitions of proper sexuality any less patriarchal. Conceptions of proper sexuality were defined in ways far more detrimental to women and skewed to benefit men, but these ideas had been so firmly embedded into society that they were enforced by society at all angles. The societal norms had been firmly masculinized in that they helped to implement the patriarchal order. Thus a sexually deviant woman was not only subject to discipline from a judge and jury of men, but a larger social context that included her female peers.

Finally, after a discussion of the broad ranging facets of patriarchal influence, it is clear that women in the early modern period did not face judgment from only one side. Rather, they dealt with systematic oppression from all sides. Such systematic oppression complicates the discussion of female sexuality in this period. There was no one clear answer or solution for this rather intractable situation, merely a series of bargains that could reduce pressure from some angles. This study, therefore, in no way implies that child abandonment, infanticide, or abortion were guilt-free, unproblematic, or even exemplary means by which females could harness sexuality. Rather, they were all extreme endeavors to find some means of control in a time that offered very little stability for those who were often single women. Systematic oppression means that the choices women took were often the lesser of two evils, often choosing one bad option over another in an effort to seek stability.

Chapter 2: Desperate Measures - Attempts to Control Reproduction

Abortion

From a modern perspective, when one thinks of terminating or relieving the burden of an unwanted pregnancy, abortion is the logical answer. Whatever the moral arguments behind this practice, it is generally considered a safe, simple medical operation. Reproductive intervention in the early modern period, however, could not have been further from this. The religious and social atmosphere surrounding reproduction legally prevented women from controlling their reproductive system through contraceptives or termination of pregnancy. Even if they had been legally sanctioned, the medical technology was not able to easily terminate the pregnancy in the way modern readers think it to be possible. However, this clearly did not prevent these actual practices from taking place. Attempting to discuss and evaluate methods of reproductive intervention is far more difficult than assessing the number of abortion procedures that took place within a single year. Because of the lack of medical control or even knowledge of the reproductive system, the lines distinguishing one method of reproductive termination from another were blurred. There are generally considered to have been three different designations in the early modern period – contraceptive use, abortion, or infanticide. However, as discussed below, the use of contraceptives, abortion practices, and the natural phenomenon of miscarriage were often impossible to discern from one another. Furthermore, a fourth option of child abandonment also existed, but only within certain parameters. This paper will explore each of these options in order to dissect why and for what reason women chose to intervene in their reproductive process in the early modern period.

Abortion in the early modern period is defined by Jeffrey Richter as "the removal of the fetus before the onset of labor."[7] It was distinguished from miscarriage by the intent to destroy the fetus, rather than the natural rejection of the fetus by the body. It was further differentiated from the use of contraceptives, in theory, by the actual presence of a fetus. In the early modern period, the womb was not considered to contain life until the fetus had actually "quickened" or moved within the womb, typically in the fourth month of pregnancy.[8] Thus, abortion was defined as the intentional termination of the pregnancy after the quickening. Although the numbers differed slightly across Germany and Britain, abortion was typically correlated with "urban areas, high wages, high population-growth rates, and the employment of women in domestic service or trade and industry…"[9] Such correlations will be broken down below to identify the reasons why women resorted to abortion in the early modern period.

These abortions were not the medicalized procedure that one thinks of in modern society. Rather, they were a series of attempts to shock the body and induce a miscarriage. Many of these methods blend with what could also be interpreted as contraceptives or abortifacients that induced miscarriage through eating herbs or drinking potions. There were other means to shock the body as well. Bloodletting, a common trend in early modern medicine, was shown to induce miscarriage in extreme amounts.[10] Other more violent methods of abortion are largely missing from the historical archive, but they can be partly discerned from the proscribed advice for pregnant women. Whereas most midwife manuals would suggest that women avoid shocks, falls, and large bouts of passion, methods of abortion might include such things as intentional

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[7] Jeffrey Richter, "Infanticide, Child Abandonment, and Abortion in Imperial Germany." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28 (1998), 511.
[8] Julia Epstein. "The Pregnant Imagination, Women's Bodies, and Fetal Rights," *Inventing Maternity: Politics, Science and Literature, 1650-1865*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1999), 112.
[9] Richter, "Infanticide, Child Abandonment, and Abortion in Imperial Germany," 540.
[10] Caitlin Scott, "Birth Control and Conceptions of Pregnancy in Seventeenth-Century England," (Warwick: University of Warwick Press, 2013), 78.

falls, wrapping clothing very tight around the belly, and intentionally becoming emotionally distressed.[11] Abortion rarely consisted of specific attempts to internally disrupt the fetus, but focused on outward shocks that could induce miscarriage. No matter how women chose to terminate their pregnancy, it is more important to discuss why this choice was necessary to begin with.

The early modern period was one of intense growth and urbanization as technology such as agricultural techniques and textile production continued to develop and raise the standard of living. As such, many women moved into urban areas from the rural countryside to find employment. This employment was usually in the domestic service trade. Here is where the trouble often began. A young woman living in the household of a married couple was often subject to advances made by the older married man.[12] If she happened to become pregnant during her employment and was found out, her position would be terminated, and she would be left on the streets, unable to return to her home for fear of repercussions. As such, women who found themselves the pregnant victims of these unwanted advances often turned to abortions to hide their pregnancies. As abortion became illegal in the German principalities in 1532 and in Britain around the same time, these women also had to hide the proof of their crime from the law, or risk a much more serious charge.[13] Previously, abortion was not necessarily legal, but there was no law specifically forbidding it. The appearance of specific laws regarding abortion indicates either rates of abortion or concern for it rose in the sixteenth century to extent that it became part of the codified law structure.[14]

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[11] Scott, "Birth Control and Conceptions of Pregnancy in Seventeenth-Century England," 80.
[12] Bernard Capp, "The Double Standard Revisited: Plebeian Women and Male Sexual Reputation in Early Modern England," *Past & Present* 162 (London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 71-72.
[13] Ulinka Rublack. "The Public Body: Policing Abortion in Early Modern Germany," *Gender Relations in German History: Power, Agency, and Experience from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 59.
[14] Jeffrey S. Richter, "Infanticide, Child Abandonment, and Abortion in Imperial Germany," 550.

However, prosecuting abortion was very difficult and often did not culminate in a guilty verdict. Very few women were specifically tried for abortion because it was easily confused with miscarriages, which often occurred in the early stages of pregnancy. Rather, many of those who were charged with abortion originally were tried for infanticide, but the charge was lowered to abortion if no hard evidence could be procured.[15] Abortions occupied an interesting legal framework in that multiple people could be charged with the crime. This stemmed from cases in which a domestic servant's employer, and also the child's father, was thought to have helped procure the abortion for her to prevent his own divorce and public shaming.[16] This case inspired the later "Offences against the Person Act" in 1837, which reads:

> Whosoever, with intent to procure the miscarriage of any woman, shall unlawfully administer to her or cause to be taken by her any poison or other noxious thing, or shall unlawfully use any instrument or other means whatsoever, with the like intent, shall be guilty of a felony, and, being convicted thereof, shall be liable, at the discretion of the court, to be transported beyond the seas for the term of his or her natural life of such person, or for any term less than fifteen years, or to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding three years.[17]

While this law was not clear on the terms of punishment, it is evident that the intentional destruction of a pregnancy was considered taboo enough to constitute exile from the community. This law seems to have been directed particularly toward a third party attempting to procure the abortion for the woman, rather than attempting it herself. Although 1837 is significantly later in terms of the early modern period, this law reflected the culmination of the effects of urbanization on the frequency of abortion that began in the early modern period. As city populations increased along with the number of unwanted pregnancies, surveillance and inspection of the woman's body also increased. A woman could not possibly hide an unwanted pregnancy to full term while

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[15] Ibid.
[16] Anne-Marie Kilday, *The History of Infanticide in Britain 1600 to Present.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), 81.
[17] Ibid.

escaping the notice of others. Thus abortion, once the pregnancy was identified, was preferable to the other primary option of infanticide.

Infanticide

Infanticide is defined by Jeffrey Richter as "the killing of the illegitimate child by the mother at or immediately after birth."[18] Infanticide was most common amongst unmarried women carrying illegitimate children. In contrast to abortion, infanticide cases were more heavily recorded in the low-growth or rural areas of the early modern world.[19] Again, as Richter says in his analysis of early modern reproductive studies, "infanticide was for many daughters of the countryside little more than a form of delayed abortion," particularly for those who did not properly understand abortion techniques.[20] Infanticide was considered the safer option for the pregnant mother, since abortions were often risky as they were outside the bounds of medical practice and caused potentially life-threatening harm to the mother. Rather, these women chose to carry their pregnancies to term, hiding them if at all possible, and deliver quickly and quietly. This is the common theme in the description of infanticide, particularly in the court cases. Author Ulinka Rublack records this phenomena in her book *The Crimes of Women in Early Modern Germany*: "Women who were suspected of infanticide generally reconstructed their memory of the birth in the following way: they said that the birth happened suddenly and that the baby had fallen onto the floor. The baby had either been born dead, or the umbilical cord had been broken through the fall…"[21] This practice of understating the nature of the birth is very telling. It is as though women who were suspected of infanticide attempted to make their

[18] Richter, "Infanticide, Child Abandonment, and Abortion in Imperial Germany," 511.
[19] Richter, "Infanticide, Child Abandonment, and Abortion in Imperial Germany," 534.
[20] Ibid
[21] Ulinka Rublack, *The Crimes of Women in Early Modern Germany*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 164.

pregnancy seem less real. While most women complained of long labor and a painful delivery, having a child almost by accident, without pain, or quickly made the pregnancy less of an event.

The denial of pain in childbirth can be seen as either a deflection or admission of guilt or a connection with witchcraft. Western Europe operated under the Judeo-Christian tradition at this time, regardless of the Protestant Reformation that had divided the continent. In this tradition, Eve, the first woman, had been cursed to bear pain in childbirth because of her indiscretion in the Garden of Eden. In both Catholicism and Protestantism, this pain was seen as a method of purification through which women could pay recompense for woman's first sin. As Luther says, "[God] gives the woman her torment [in childbirth], but proceeds soberly and spares her, absolves her of spiritual misery…[22] The pain of childbirth was a perpetual and sobering reminder of the Fall of Man. To deny this pain, a basic element of womanhood, could be equated to attempting to subvert the will of God and could potentially be inferred as pertaining to a relationship with the Devil. Sexual intercourse with the Devil was a common theme present in the witch trials of the early modern period, particularly in Germany. Because the offspring of such a union would not be of God or even mostly human, the covenant of pain that marked women as the descendants of God was not thought to be present. In an effort to minimalize the experience of carrying an unwanted child and being complicit in its death, women often played into contemporary script of the female witch. Although no direct instances of infanticide led to accusations of witchcraft, being suspected of infanticide or charged for it during a woman's youth could contribute to her potential accusation of witchcraft later in life.

Modern readers tend to think of infanticide as more prevalent than abortion in the early modern period. However, it is difficult to distinguish whether it was more prevalent or merely

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[22] Susan Karant-Nunn and Merry Weisner-Hanks, *Luther on Woman: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 23.

more visible. Often, infanticide and abortion cases were combined, as women who attempted abortion but were unsuccessful sometimes committed infanticide upon giving birth. Again, Rublack states, "About a quarter of all women suspected of infanticide tried to terminate the pregnancy. It was largely for this reason that babies were often stillborn; in most cases, however, they were born alive and then killed."[23] An attempted abortion, while unsuccessful, may have damaged the fetus to the extent that it could not survive outside the womb and thus appears stillborn or severely malformed. As such, many cases were recorded as infanticide when they might have contained a combination of crimes.

The charges and punishments for infanticide were more convoluted than those for abortion. As authors Jennifer Evans and Sara Read have written, a single woman who concealed a birth was automatically considered guilty of infanticide.[24] Because there was little way of telling whether a baby corpse was the victim of infanticide or merely a naturally occurring stillbirth, the act of hiding a birth in which the baby was either stillborn or died shortly thereafter was enough to ground a charge of infanticide. This placed a large amount of blame upon the mother for a failed pregnancy, if indeed the charge of infanticide were false. In 1657, Anna Marie Krauth of Neckerhausen was "imprisoned for ten days and fined after three of her babies were stillborn."[25] Given the state of medical practice at the time, there was no way to tell whether her failed pregnancies were due to her inability to carry a child to term, or whether she intentionally committed infanticide. This is an interesting case in which a woman was deemed at fault for her failed pregnancies. A person who had three stillborn children would be reluctant to

[23] Rublack, *The Crimes of Women in Early Modern Germany*, 164.
[24] Jennifer Evans and Sara Read, "Before Midnight She Had Miscarried: Women, Men, and Miscarriage in Early Modern England" *Journal of Family History* 40 (2015), 77.
[25] Ulinka Rublack. "Pregnancy, Childbirth, and the Female Body in Early Modern Germany," *Past and Present* 150 (1996), 91.

share that information with the community because the shame of not being a "real" woman by failing to bear children. However, when a woman concealed this information, they then risked the chance of being charged for infanticide. This is just one example of the systematic oppression that women were bound by in the early modern period.

Although most cases of infanticide did involve the prosecution of women, not all of them did. There were several cases of non-maternal infanticide, most of the subjects being illegitimate, married fathers. As Kilday writes in her work *A History of Infanticide in Britain*, "Many of [these fathers] desperately wanted to avoid the long-term financial burden of a child born out of wedlock or as a result of an adulterous liaison. Men committed infanticide in an attempt to conceal their illicit sexual activity from their wives and to preserve their reputation in the community…"[26] Non-maternal infanticide is a completely different situation to analyze than a woman potentially having agency in terminating a pregnancy that would be to her detriment. Rather than a potential life-saving action to prevent banishment or social castration, non-maternal infanticide appears to have been a selfish move on the part of a father who did not want to take ownership for his actions.

In addition, it is impossible to tell the amount of compliance a woman may have had in these situations or whether she complied at all. Kilday also states that most men charged with infanticide were also prosecuted for "assault with the intent to murder" pertaining to the mother of the child.[27] In the very unfortunate case of Susan Baldwin, George Dewing repeatedly sexually assaulted her for months until it was obvious that she was with child. Baldwin confronted Dewing saying, "You have done what you ought not to have done; I was committed here for Sin and you have sinned with me, and ruined me. What you have done must be

[26] Kilday, *The History of Infanticide in Britain*, 69.
[27] Ibid.

known."[28] Despite this accusation, Dewing did not admit to having intercourse with Baldwin. She was charged with sexual misconduct and sentenced to be whipped at the stake.[29] Due to the physical distress of the whipping, she soon miscarried. Dewing was present for the miscarriage and disposed of the infant's body.[30] Because he hid the body and attempted to disguise its birth, his crime was interpreted as infanticide. Although he actively contributed to Baldwin's miscarriage and the death of their child, he was pardoned after a seven month jail sentence.[31] Assuredly, this sentence would have been different if Baldwin had committed the infanticide herself as a female. The standard punishment for a female accused of infanticide in early modern Britain was hanging.[32] Non-maternal infanticide was not as harshly punished for two possible reasons. Men such as George Dewing had the opportunity to establish a good reputation among the townspeople and befriend people in the judicial system, unlike his female counterparts. In addition, men were not held to the same responsible status as women in the childrearing process. For a woman to commit infanticide egregiously defied her supposed natural maternal nature, whereas a man already was not considered to be maternal. Even so, men were often charged in infanticide cases as accomplices, primarily accused of helping to dispose of the body. When it came to prosecuting them as accomplices, however, the courts became confused. As Kilday points out, "the courts were unsure about how to deal with accomplices to the crime of infanticide. Instead they reserved their indignation for the mother of the victim alone."[33] Even if the evidence showed that the fathers had been complicit in the crime, they were often not charged because infanticide represented a break with the maternal norm, not necessarily the

[28] Kilday, *The History of Infanticide in Early Modern England,* 70.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Kilday, *The History of Infanticide in Early Modern England,* 71.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Kilday, *The History of Infanticide in Early Modern England,* 67.

male. The differences in sentencing reveal the highly gendered nature of the crime of infanticide; even in cases where the male was the primary suspect or the accomplice, a man would receive a lesser sentence.

Contraceptive Use

If infanticide and abortion trials were often contorted and confused, contraceptive use occupied another complicated territory. In truth there were very few contraceptives in the way one thinks of them today, as there was no daily dosage that would eliminate the chance of becoming pregnant nearly entirely. Rather, the contraceptives of the early modern period operated much more like the contemporary Plan B in that they were taken after sexual intercourse as a preventive measure. However, these are really more accurately defined as abortifacients since they attempted to halt a conception that had already occurred. Abortifacients are herbal supplements, typically taken orally, that induce a menstrual cycle and eliminate the chance of pregnancy. Interestingly enough, there is very little contemporary literature regarding contraceptive practices. It could be that most of the knowledge regarding herbal methods was passed from woman to woman, without ever being documented by physicians.[34] While the exact methods may not be noted, there are documents describing their use and effectiveness.

Many of the herbal methods of "contraceptives" in the early modern period would today be considered methods of early term abortion. This can be explained by a drastically different explanation of the reproductive system and when "life" technically began. As stated above, the so-called quickening was considered the official beginning of life and instilling of a soul. Although miscarriages could still occur after this time, the risk was far less than that of the precarious first trimester. Because of the high chance of losing the fetus before this time, a

[34] John M Riddle, "Oral Contraceptives and Early-Term Abortifacients during Classical Antiquity and the Middle-Ages," *Past & Present* (London: Oxford University Press, 1991), 5.

woman was not truly defined as pregnant until the quickening. Indeed, the people of the early modern period believed there were many reasons for a halt in a woman's menstrual cycle, such as "blockages" and "growths."[35] In the same way that the four humors and bile theory controlled other aspects of bodily health, the menstrual cycle was seen as a natural process of "purging" the female body of vile humors. Thus a halt in the menstrual cycle sometimes required an herb or potion to purge the system and restart the cycle. Many of these growths and the resultant purges were actually induced early term abortions.[36]

There are almost no listed trials for contraceptive use in the early modern period, because there was nothing to report. However, if any of these herbal methods were used too late in the term and evidence of use was discovered, the woman risked a trial for aborting her pregnancy. Contraceptive use was the loophole for evading a socially, mentally, or financially detrimental pregnancy, but it required early detection and action on the part of the woman. Furthermore, because of the herbal nature of the contraceptives in question, such as fennel, pennyroyal, and Queen Anne's lace, contraceptive use was mostly confined to rural areas.[37] Although these contraceptives could be found in the cities, they were often costly, far beyond the financial means of a domestic servant.[38]

Monstrous Births

Knowledge of contraceptives was limited to primarily the female sphere, or perhaps a local healer. As such, they were not normally included in the publications of the day. Since contraceptives were passed through female lines of communication, they escaped the notice of

[35] Evans and Read, "Before Midnight She Had Miscarried…" 12.
[36] Riddle, "Oral Contraceptives and Early-Term Abortifacients." 5.
[37] Riddle, "Oral Contraceptives and Early-Term Abortifacients…" 3-32.
[38] Laura Gowing, "Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England," *Past and Present*, 156 (1997), 89.

male medical practitioners. Only their failed attempts might result in legal repercussions, which were often labeled as stillbirths or abortions rather than contraceptives. In a similar way, women were often blamed for monstrous births. A pamphlet printed in London in 1657 recorded "a monstrous birth of three strange and prodigious things like young cats, all speckled, which came from a woman..."[39] This was not a solitary incident, as many more broadsides and tracts recorded instances of women giving birth to frogs, small mammals, or simply scaled beings. While most of these were certainly fabricated into sensational stories, their roots could have stemmed from deformed births due to attempted contraceptive or abortion techniques. Furthermore, the pamphlet went on to explain "how the Devil kept her company."[40] As husband of the accused recorded, "she would tell me than in my absence that she had played at Cards with the Devil and had found him one of the fairest Gamesters that she met withal."[41] A stigma would definitely have existed around women playing cards, implying gambling. Furthermore, if the woman was gambling with the Devil, there is also the question of the content of her bet. The deformity of the fetus did not lead to an accusation of contraceptive use or attempted abortion. Rather, the "monstrous birth" this woman produced led to accusation of sexual relations with the Devil, scarring her reputation and making her ripe for witchcraft accusations either at the time or in her later years. These sensational tracts are the only potential evidence the historical archive shows for the use of contraceptives or some abortive attempts. The presence of monstrous births led to accusations of witchcraft and foul play, when in reality, there may have only been complications with the birth.

[39] Anonymous, "A monstrous birth: or, a true relation," Located in the British Library, (London: Crown in Popes-head Alley, 1657). Early English Books Online.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

Yet monstrous births occupied a large fear and preoccupation in early modern European society. As David Cressy has observed, "Monstrous births might mean many things, but they could not be allowed to mean nothing."[42] Potentially the most prominent examples of monstrous births and their interpretations are found in the wives of King Henry VIII. First there came the multiple stillbirths during his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, some of which were rumored to be disfigured, although that was not made common knowledge.[43] Henry took these stillbirths as proof during his divorce proceedings that his marriage to Catherine had violated divine law because he had married his brother's wife. Even more intriguing are the interpretations of Anne Boleyn's monstrous birth. It is said that in January of 1536 she gave birth to a stillborn male child, about fifteen weeks into the pregnancy.[44] Supposedly, it was born with rough, scaled skin. Later, as rumors of witchcraft and infidelity sped through the court, this stillbirth was "interpreted as a sign of demonic possession, the result being that Anne was declared responsible for the premature death of this heir to the king."[45] Because the stillbirth occurred early in the pregnancy, it is possible that the fetus did not look fully human and was thus interpreted as a monstrous birth. Due to Boleyn and Aragon's positions as queens of England and responsibility for bearing Henry's heirs, their stillbirths, monstrous or not, could not go unnoticed or without explanation. The rumors and results of those monstrous births reveal an intense interest in female sexuality. Thus monstrous births and the interpretations of them represent the necessity of men in the early modern period to regain control over the female body.

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[42] Stephanie Chamberlain, "Fantasizing Infanticide: Lady Macbeth and the Murdering Mother in Early Modern England," *College Literature* 32 (2005), 78.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Chamberlain, "Fantasizing Infanticide," 77.
[45] Chamberlain, "Fantasizing Infanticide," 78.

In the basest sense, monstrous births represented a lack of control and an admission of the unknown to the early modern person. Because medicine and gynecology were still only in the very beginnings of their craft, it was impossible to determine what caused these stillbirths from a medical standpoint. Every stillbirth, then, had to be interpreted as either the fault of the mother or a judgement from God. No matter if they were caused by attempted use of contraception or through no cause of the mother, monstrous births placed the female body under deep suspicion, revealing the extent to which early modern society wished to harness control of it.

Miscarriage

Because it was a common part of life in the early modern period, the specter of miscarriage lurks behind any discussion of abortion, infanticide, and contraceptive use. As Kilday writes, "For the early modern period it is estimated that one in every two conceptions did not go to term. Miscarriages were common and, as a result, it remained exceedingly difficult for medical professionals, even as late as the nineteenth century, to distinguish between a natural and an induced abortion."[46] Miscarriages were more common in the first months of pregnancy, but could occur at any point in the gestation period. In a time where famine and sickness frequently occurred, a miscarriage was a sign that the body was not able to carry a baby to term or provide for it thereafter.

The relative frequency of miscarriage did not prevent it from being a source of shame. Miscarriage was often perceived as the ultimate sign of a woman's weakness, indicating that external forces such as shock, weather, and emotions ultimately held sway over the female body so that it could not even protect the growing life within it. Christopher Völter, who wrote a manual for midwives in Wurttemberg in 1679, confirmed these theories over a century later

[46] Kilday, *The History of Infanticide in Britain,* 78.

when he recommended that "pregnant women should abstain from extremes, since dancing, violent laughing, or voluptuous eating might damage the fetus."[47] Ulinka Rublack connects the permeability of the female body with monstrous births by citing a case in which a Stuttgart woman "bore a child with one foot and without genitals. She said that this could only be explained by the shock she had received from seeing a lame beggar on her way to market."[48] Any little shock was thought to be able to affect the fetus because the female body was so permeable to outside threats. In this way women were seen to have very little control over their reproductive systems.

As seen above, miscarriage was often misinterpreted as abortion, and late term miscarriage as infanticide. Although it was not an agentic method of reproductive termination, miscarriage cannot be eliminated from a conversation of female reproduction because, in some ways, it represents to an even greater extent the ways in which female bodies simultaneously held all the power and none of it. While women had the power to control their bodies through means of reproductive termination, forces outside of themselves often dictated the success of the pregnancy or instance of miscarriage. In the case of women in Württemberg, Germany, miscarriage could lead to accusation of criminal behavior.[49] As Rublack says, "In 1597… a town clerk's wife in Sulz was reported for 'not having acted during labor as she should.'"[50] This woman was fortunate enough to escape with a live birth and a warning, but others were not so lucky. Half a century later, a woman by name of Anna Marie Krauth was "imprisoned for ten days and fined after three of her babies were stillborn."[51] No matter if a woman attempted to end

[47] Rublack. "Pregnancy, Childbirth, and the Female Body in Early Modern Germany," 95.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Rublack. "Pregnancy, Childbirth, and the Female Body in Early Modern Germany," 91.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

these pregnancies or just had a series of complicated pregnancies; the failure to produce healthy children was read as an active choice on the part of the mother, and women were punished accordingly.

Child Abandonment

Finally, child abandonment demands discussion in a study of reproduction in the early modern period. Although not strictly a form of reproductive termination, abandonment occupied a portion of the public and legal discussion of reproduction in the early modern period. Especially prevalent in urban areas, child abandonment was and remains the laying aside of a child, either with the intent that it will be recovered and cared for by another, or that it may eventually die. Particularly in Germany during this period, cases of child abandonment swelled to the extent that the foundling homes received thousands of children in a single year and were still unable to make a marked difference in the city's population of street children.[52] The London Foundling Home was established in 1739 by Thomas Coram and it overfilled its capacity.[53] In some rural areas, children were abandoned near churches or monasteries with the intent that they would be cared for by the clergy.

However, far more often the children did not survive. The German principality of Saxony declared laws against the practice in the seventeenth century, saying that "if the intention was to secure the child's death, then the crime was prosecuted as infanticide, murder, or manslaughter."[54] Understandably, these laws were difficult to prosecute. In large cities such as London, it was nearly impossible to track down the mother of a child who was abandoned in the

[52] Otto Ulbricht, "The Debate about Foundling Hospitals in Enlightenment Germany: Infanticide, Illegitimacy, and Infant Mortality Rates," *Central European History*, 18 (1985), 218.
[53] Katharine Hogg, "Handel and the Foundling Hospital: The Gerald Coke Handel Collection at the Foundling Museum," *Fontes Artis Musicae* 55 (2008), 437.
[54] Richter, "Infanticide, Child Abandonment, and Abortion in Imperial Germany," 511

market square or at the steps of a church.[55] In practice, child abandonment became a more passive method of infanticide. Rather than actively participating in the child's death, a mother would abandon her child with the hope of its survival, but knowing ultimately that child would likely die.

Even if they did not die in the streets, the foundling homes established for the care of street children were often sites of death and disease. Schlözer, a professor of politics at the University of Göttingen in 1781, condemned the foundling homes of Germany as "death-camps for infants and morals" and equated them to intentional depopulation.[56] The homes had so many children that it was difficult to provide adequate care for every child. In addition, a lack of knowledge of germ theory led to some very risky practices, such as using the same pacifier for dozens of children and thereby spreading fatal viruses.[57] Especially during times of famine, child abandonment was common throughout European cities, including both Britain and Germany.[58] Although not exactly the same as abortion, infanticide, or contraceptive use, child abandonment stems from the same negative culture of female sexuality, unwed sexual desire, and illegitimacy. The ultimate goal of any of these practices was to hide the existence of an unwanted pregnancy. Child abandonment, as mentioned above, was an alternative to infanticide in that the mother did not directly kill the child but also was relieved of its burden. Just like abortion, infanticide, and contraceptive use, a single woman had to maintain the guise of sexual purity, whether that meant disrupting a pregnancy or hiding its results. These requirements stemmed from a specific social construction of female sexuality in the early modern period that prevented unwed women from displaying their sexuality or the results of that sexual desire.

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[55] Ulbricht, "The Debate about Foundling Hospitals in Enlightenment Germany," 218.
[56]Ulbricht, "The Debate about Foundling Hospitals in Enlightenment Germany," 214.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ulbricht, "The Debate about Foundling Hospitals in Enlightenment Germany," 217.

Chapter 3: The Physical Presence of Honor

The legal, social, and religious institutions of the early modern period portrayed women as explicitly sexual beings. One of the primary indications of this perception is the concept of feminine honor. Honor was regarded as an almost physical entity or object to be guarded jealously. As Lyndal Roper states, "like a kind of material possession, honor was something with which women might barter with men. Indeed, the legal framework insisted that it had a price."[59] She goes on to describe the extent to which bride prices and rape restitution differed based on social status and sometimes beauty.[60] In rape restitution, if the woman was a virgin her price was doubled; if she was of noble birth the price would be inflated per her status.[61] A peasant girl was worth less than a townsperson; this was reflected in their bride prices. Although this may seem horribly hierarchical to the modern reader, early modern society had no concept of equity or the idea that all men or women should be or were created equal. Ian Mortimer phrases it this way: "No two men [were] born equal – some [were] born rich, others poor; the elder of two brothers [would] succeed to his father's estates, not the younger…"[62] In both Germany and England, status was primarily something a person was born with, not that which he or she earned. Honor was essentially equated to virginity, but it was also based on the social status of married women or widows.

Closely tied to honor was the concept of will, and in a way they formed a juxtaposition. Honor was something to be guarded against the will of the man. Men possessed will while women possessed honor. In this way, honor represented a lack of agency. The phrase "to do his

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[59] Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe*, (New York: Routledge Press, 1994), 64.
[60] Ibid
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ian Mortimer, *The Time Traveler's Guide to Elizabethan England*. (New York: Random House Company, 2014), 50.

will," for example, carried an explicitly masculine tone. This appeared in such items as marriage vows or legal accusations of rape. Again, Roper says, "a man could not submit to or do a woman's will. Thus it constructed sex as submission to a man's will, so that heterosexual sex seemed to reinforce men's social superiority and their supposed greater intellect and will."[63] Sex was the battleground on which honor and will staked their claims. However, it was obvious from the start that a woman's honor was unable to stand in the face of man's will. Will was active while honor was passive. Will was the act of raping or deflowering in a moment of human passion, while honor required the withdrawal of all human emotion and rather relied on self-denial. By enforcing a requirement of feminine honor, the patriarchal society in which it was situated controlled the inevitable failure of women and their ultimate secondary status in society. In a society in which females must restrict their sexuality to prove their self-worth but were constantly bombarded by the male will, the female would always eventually be discredited, or, if not, deemed inhuman or even satanic.

In fact, it was impossible for her to resist this temptation to sexual sin. As Martin Luther writes, "There is not one to whom God gives the grace to maintain pure chastity. A woman does not have the power to do this herself."[64] Women did not have the power to keep chaste as they should, but men did not exist to help them in this endeavor. They could only to lead them to sexual sin. Luther would not admit the latter – he saw women as the doomed guardians of sexual purity and social morality. Women were too weak, as seen with Eve in the Garden of Eden, to resist the temptation of the world and could possibly keep chaste as they should. Yet they were expected to and punished if they did not. Through an interpretation of Luther's writing, this was the bind women faced: It was humanly impossible for them to deny their sexual desire and

[63] Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*, 60.
[64] Evans and Read, *Luther on Women,* 141.

remain chaste, yet to give into this desire led to their degradation in the eyes of the community. Thus a societal foundation on the concept of feminine honor was essentially patriarchal and therefore problematic for women.

While this bind represented entrapment for all women, it affected women differently depending on social status. As pointed out above, women were not equal in value to men. The restitution fee for the rape of a virgin differed whether she was of high birth or a peasant.[65] Honor was simultaneously something to be cherished or reviled. It was cherished for the people who possessed enough honor to grant them respect and high stature, yet reviled by those it simultaneously restrained or degraded. An upper class woman could be bound by the expectation that came with her chastity. She might be required to receive courtiers in a very specific manner, taught to restrain her natural emotions or inclination for fear of disgracing herself and spoiling her chances of marriage. For instance, in early modern Germany, the wealthy family of a girl who had committed a sexual act outside of marriage would have their gate or front door marked with tar, a physical sign of the dishonor and symbolic filth she had brought upon herself.[66] Such an infraction would ruin the girl's chance for marriage, thus leaving her a constant burden on her father's house throughout her adult years. For a peasant woman, their honor and thus their person could be regarded as specifically of lesser value. Rapes by upper class men of servant girls were rarely punished with fines or jail time because the girl did not have great societal worth.[67] Although she was not worthy of rape restitution, her person was still dishonored. She often left her position in disgrace and was forced to commit abortion or infanticide in place of caring for a child on the streets. Social standing thus wrapped the

[65] Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*, 61.
[66] Judith Bennet and Amy Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past 1250-1800*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 129.
[67] Bennet and Froide, *Singlewomen*, 201.

concepts of honor and purity, binding both upper and lower segments of the female population in the process.

As mentioned above, the loss of female honor occurred through the sexual act, either consensual or not. These rape prosecutions indicate the worth assigned to female purity, and even the forcible crime of rape was often reworded to implicate feminine guilt. Roper reports that in Germany in 1537 the crime of rape was designated under the label of fornication and not as a crime of violence. As she states,

> Immediately following the rape clause is a paragraph concerning 'anyone who, by work or deed, persuades a virgin or widow to his will'… The effect of this modification was to align rape and seduction more closely to one another, so that a man's best defense against the charge of rape was to argue that a woman had in some sense been 'persuaded' to his will.[68]

Rape could, in this sense, be reduced to persuasion instead of a crime. By including seduction in a discussion of rape, the crime was partly blamed on the woman for allowing herself to be seduced, instead of focusing on the trespasses of the man. The woman in this case was also considered partly at fault to the loss of her honor because she was not a good enough gatekeeper and ultimately succumbed to her baser desires.

In many cases, judges attempted to back up their patriarchal claims to justice by using pseudo-scientific information that implicated women's desire as the reason for men's rape. One reoccurring theory in this time was that women also released seed during the sexual act that led to conception. Thus in some trials, "pregnancy disproved rape…pregnancy indicated the woman had enjoyed the intercourse and thus it wasn't rape."[69] The courts tried in many cases to disprove the guilt of the man in cases of rape and instead placed the blame on unbridled female sexuality.

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[68] Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*, 61.
[69] Merry Weisner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World*, (New York: Routledge Press, 2000), 101.

In 1680, a woman named Mary Knowles from outside North Yorkshire left her statement as such:

> I know neither the man nor his name, he being a traveler coming in to light a pipe of tobacco. And I being alone and a lame woman of one hand, [he] forced me on to a low bed where I lay and there got the use of my body and immediately after went away. And [I] never saw him since.[70]

Miranda Chaytor, author of the article "Husband(ry): Narratives of Rape in the Seventeenth Century," goes on to explain that this was not a part of an accusation of rape, but rather Knowles' confession in her trial for infanticide.[71] Knowles gave birth to a child from this sexual interaction, which she swears was stillborn, but attempted to hide the body and all evidence of the pregnancy because she was unwed.[72] However, this was unsuccessful and she was charged with infanticide, the verdict being unknown. The Knowles case offers an instance in which an accusation of rape was denied on the basis of pregnancy and the two-seed model of reproduction. To the court, Knowles' pregnancy discounted the validity of her rape report. Regardless, she found herself at the hands of the court for attempting to conceal the rape and ostensibly attempting to forget the pain and shame forced on her.

Women were simultaneously passive and active in the sexual act. Honor was a passive notion that was forcibly taken through a man's will. But men were also helpless in the face of female sexuality. They were unable to stop their baser desires when a woman played the seductress. When raped, a woman was automatically perceived as lesser due to the loss of her honor, but she was also blamed as the conspirator that had led the rapist into sin. Bernard Capp speaks to this double standard as he says, "female sexuality was regarded (by men) as a male

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[70] Miranda Chaytor. "Husband(ry): Narratives of Rape in the Seventeenth Century," *Gender & History* 7 (1995), 378.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

possession, so that sexual immorality in women was regarded as a heinous fault while male lapses might be regarded as relatively trivial."[73] Women were simultaneously the gate keepers and the reasons for men's sexual lapses. Even when it came to rape prosecutions in which women should be seen as the victims, they were relegated to secondary citizens by nature of their sexuality. Rape prosecutions show how the patriarchal constructions of honor and purity affected women at large during the early modern period.

A woman's worth was also judged by her marital status. There tended to be three categories for an acceptable woman in the early modern period: virgins, wives, or widows. These represented the three stages of a woman's life, and each was predicated on the status of a woman's involvement with men. Any young woman who was not married was required by societal standard to remain virginal until her wedding night. She then transitioned into the wifely role in which a certain level of acceptable sexuality was allowed, as long as it remained within the bounds of marriage. The marriage bed was the only socially acceptable place for a woman to be sexually active for the procreation of children and the pleasure of her husband.[74] So, while society may have perceived a young woman's body as explicitly sexual and tempting to a male audience, her attitude and therefore honor must resist this sexual nature until marriage. This resistance does not equate to women possessing a will of their own, however. Resistance was a form of defense, which could be construed as a passive method used only when forced, while will was the active measure that reached out and attacked rather than defend.

Of course, there were many women who did not fit into these rigid categories. As Judith Bennet and Amy Froide say, "Any woman who did not fit into one of the three categories [virgin, wife, or widow] risked being equated as a member of the only identifiable, demarcated

[73] Capp, "The Double Standard Revisited," 70.
[74] Ibid.

group that did not fit: prostitutes."[75] The social conception of the prostitute included not only women who actively traded in sex, but any woman who dared to openly display her sexuality and sexual desire. The early modern discourse did not allow for the perception of a single woman who was sexually active, but rather relays this information through the male gaze. By labeling a sexually active woman a prostitute, all unwed female desire became service to a man and not an active choice by the woman. A prostitute was not free in her sexuality, but bound by the requirements of the label to serve as a mere source of pleasure at the hands of a man. Her sexuality did not become her own, but rather she was a commodity open to public consumption. This public consumption often took the form of entertainment or sensational stories in pamphlets and broadsides.

These stories were outwardly meant to instruct against inappropriate sexual actions and reaffirm the place of women in society, yet the detail in which they describe the actions of the women involved often becomes quite descriptive, making them also a form of titillating entertainment. The title and front page of one such pamphlet from London in 1658 reads,

> The crafty whore or, the mystery and iniquity of bawdy houses laid open, in a dialogue between two subtle bawds, wherein, as in a mirror, our city courtesans may see their foul-destroying arts and craft devices, whereby they injure and beguile youth, portrayed to the life, the pencil of one of their late (but now penitent) captives, for the benefit of all, but especially the younger four. Whereunto is added dehortations from lust drawn from the sad and lamentable consequences it produced.[76]

This paragraph describes an instance in which young men had frequented a whore house and were eventually found out and forced to report on the "city courtesans." There is a familiarity to the trope by which older, sexually experienced women stepped outside their assigned roles and seduced younger men. Yet there is also an aspect of ownership of the women that eliminated

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[75] Bennet and Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past*, 127.
[76] Anonymous, "The Craft Whore" Located in the British Library, (London: Printed for the Princes Armies, 1658). Early English Books Online.

their agency. In the words of the pamphlet, they were "our" whores, the personal property of the community, not their own persons. Here the sexual woman, outside the role of marriage, was described as a public commodity. Her relations were taboo, breaking the typical age arrangements by seducing younger men. There is also an inference of witchcraft in the "foul-destroying arts and craft devices" that the whores use to seduce the men. These accusations stemmed from the women breaking the bounds of their required roles and using their sexuality to their advantage, as they seemed to be doing in the whore house. However, they were not able to fully break away from the discourses of their society, because it seems evident that these women were tried and charged for their actions that produced "sad and lamentable consequences."

There was one position a non-virginal woman could possess in the early modern community that provided some power. Men in this period had a significantly shorter lifespan than women, most likely because of the hard work and frequent military service they faced. As such, the widow occupied a significant social space, one in which a woman was permitted to be single and also sexually experienced without necessarily being labeled a prostitute. As Bennet and Froide explain, "Widows had a public and independent place within the patriarchal society; single women did not."[77] Widows were often able to inherit property and manage their own finances, while single women who never married normally remained in their father's homes. Although widows frequently remarried, often still in their childbearing years, they were able to live independently without undue public scrutiny.

This is not to say, however, that their sexuality was not continuously in the public eye. Widow-ship came with some independence, but female sexuality was continuously under watch. Sexual activity was still limited to the marriage bed, if the widow chose to remarry.

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[77] Bennet and Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past*, 237.

Furthermore, a widow's sexual experience bestowed on her a certain perception of wildness. For a woman to have experienced a sexual relationship and then be left alone almost gave her a type of power. She was not degraded as the improperly sexual woman, but there was a wariness of her. Widows were often the first to be accused of witchcraft in the early modern period, facing trials in which they were feared and persecuted.[78] Alison Rowland argues that this could also be because "older women were most likely to display the hostility and aggression allegedly characteristic of accused witches because their gender and age rendered them particularly subject to pressing and frustrating socio-economic problems and sociocultural restrictions."[79] Widows were more likely to be poor, sickly, and beggars. If they attempted begging and were repulsed, their understandably disgruntled reactions could be regarded as a motive for retaliation through *malificeum*, or harmful magic. This malificeum often grew to accusations of killings babies, having sexual affairs with the Devil, or feeding their familiars through extra sexual organs.[80] There was a perception that, having been given a taste of sexual experience within marriage, widows were overwhelmingly sexual and required close watch to restrain this awakened sexuality.

In the case of Tempel Anneke, a widow from a village outside Brunswick, Germany, her single status and isolated living situation made her suspect for any suspicious activities in the village.[81] Although originally accused of "using sorcery to obtain stolen goods," her status as a widow and independent woman led to further accusations of thievery, sorcery, and murder.[82] Soon enough the questioning progressed to interrogators accusing her of sexual intercourse with

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[78] Christine Larner, "Was Witch-Hunting Woman-Hunting," *The Witchcraft Reader, Second Edition* Edited by Darren Oldridge. (New York: Routledge Press, 2002) 254.
[79] Alison Rowland, "Witchcraft and Old Women in Early Modern Germany," *Past & Present* 173 (2001), 53.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Peter A. Morton, *The Trial of Tempel Anneke: Records of a Witchcraft Trial in Brunswick, Germany, 1663* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006) xiii.
[82] Ibid.

the Devil as a means to acquire his black magic. The judge asked, for example, "How did she know [how to heal], whether it wasn't her lover the Evil Enemy who revealed it to her."[83] What started as helpful favors for neighbors grew into a full-scale witch trial based on the insecurities of community towards an old single woman. Widows represented an anomaly in that the woman had not committed any sexual deviance, but her sexuality was still perceived to be uncontrolled. In this way, unbridled female sexuality posed a threat to the social order.

[83] Morton, *The Trial of Tempel Anneke*, 77.

Chapter 4: The Centrality of Reproduction and Therefore Marriage

A single sexual woman disturbed the social order of the early modern period by undermining the central concept of marriage, which existed primarily for the purpose of reproduction. As seen above, marriage was the only safely sexual position a woman could hold in early modern Europe. Within the marital bed, a woman's sexuality was under the control of her husband, the most direct patriarchal control imaginable. The husband controlled everything in the household, from what his wife could eat to her ability to travel beyond the home.[84] Although she had some forms of agency, in terms of social settings and house labor, she was required per biblical law to submit to her husband in all things. She must "put on a veil, just as pious wife is duty-bound to help bear her husband's accident, illness, and misfortune on account of the evil flesh."[85] In truth, marriage in the early modern period was the foundation of the patriarchal structure. The structure extended outside the bounds of marriage to place women perpetually under a male head. A young woman could expect to be passed directly from her father's house into her new husband's, without any period of freedom.[86] As such, a woman was not able to establish herself as an individual outside the control of a man at any point in her life, unless she lived as a widow after her husband's death.

In the case that she never married, women were denied the right to ever control even their nuclear household or have any sense of autonomy.[87] By extension, this passing from one male head to another effectively eliminated a true female sphere of social engagement. Since the house was controlled by the husband and was also the primary site of domestic work, any meetings of women took place on a man's terms. While men could operate in an exclusively

[84] Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past*, 239
[85] Karant-Nunn and Weisner-Hanks, *Luther on Women*, 31.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past*, 238.

male sphere, such as a courthouse, pub, or legislative building, no such space existed for women. In these ways and many others, the institution of marriage grounded the existence of an overwhelmingly patriarchal society in which women were unable to exist as single individuals.

The obsession with marriage in the early modern period stemmed from society's focus on reproduction. Marriage existed as a safe sexual space to foster reproduction and build a family. As seen in many contemporary Christian texts, sex did not exist for the pleasure of the individual, but rather for the sole purpose of reproduction. Other Christian theologians combated this, saying that since God created Sex and the pleasure that came with it, it is profitable within the context of marriage. Martin Luther relegated the existence of women to a single purpose when he said, "Women are not created for any other purpose than to serve man and to be his assistant in producing children."[88] Women were not even the active participant in Luther's concept of bearing children, but rather merely man's assistant. In a time when famine, disease, and hard work killed many in their youth and limited overall life expectancy, reproduction occupied a much larger social space than it does in the modern developed world. In England, one in every five children died before their first birthday and about one in two before they were ten years old.[89] These numbers are even higher in Scotland due to greater rural population.[9091] In the Wurttemberg area of Germany, the infant mortality rate was estimated between a quarter and a third of all births.[92] Even with these dire numbers, the European population grew enormously during the early modern period. Just in Elizabeth I's reign alone, for example, the English

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[88] Karant-Nunn and Weisner-Hanks, *Luther on Women*, 18.
[89] Mortimer, *The Time Traveler's Guide*, 27.
[90] Leah Leneman and Rosalind Mitchison, "Scottish Illegitimacy Ratios in the Early Modern Period," *The Economic History Review* 40 (1987), 48.
[91] Historian Rab Houston from the University of St. Andrews also discusses this phenomenon in his "Mortality in Early Modern Scotland: The Life Expectancy of Advocates" (*Continuity and Change*, 1992).
[92] Sheilagh Ogilvie, *A Bitter Living: Women's, Markets, and Social Capital in Early Modern Germany* (London: Oxford University Press, 2003), 198.

population expanded by thirty percent to break three million for the first in history.[93] This period of growth represented a final recovery from population deficit caused by the Black Death.[94] As such, it is important to understand the medical ideas surrounding reproduction, specifically how they affected those bearing the brunt of reproductive responsibility: the women.

There were two dominant theories surrounding reproduction in the early modern period, a two-seed model and a one-seed model. As Anne-Marie Kilday explains, "In the two-seed model, both parents contribute seeds for conception, yet the father remained the more important because his seed was warmer and more active. In the one-seed model, only males contributed seed, so women contributed matter and a location, not spirit, form, or intellect."[95] Women had no agency in either of these theories. The two-seed model in which the woman also provided a seed was the root for the above stated theories that pregnancy disproved rape. Even in a theory in which women supposedly held one seed and men the other, women were not given an equal half. It was the male seed that truly gave life, while the female seed passively waited for the warmer male seed.

Even more so in the one-seed model, the child was almost completely credited to the man and not the woman. It was as though the man created a fetus alone and the woman was merely the placeholder. Luther phrased it in this way: "Women's seed could not in truth be called the seed of a woman, but rather the seed of a man."[96] These theories took away the power that women would otherwise be granted as the origin of life, but if read closer reveal a far more patriarchal message. Women were a place in which life was incubated, but their essence was not truly a part of the child in question. If the seed came only from the man, then it was not truly of

[93] Mortimer, *The Time Traveler's Guide,* 25.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Kilday, *The History of Infanticide in Britain*, 14.
[96] Karant-Nunn and Weisner-Hanks, *Luther on Women*, 174.

women. In this way, there was a more firmly defined boundary between man and woman. The one-seed model served as a basis for the entire patriarchal structure and the delineation between women and man. If women were merely a place to grow a male life and not really a source thereof, then man did not truly come from woman. Admitting reliance on women would reveal a major fault in the patriarchal narrative. Thus the one-seed model solved this predicament. By firmly separating man and woman and reestablishing man as the source of life, the one-seed model made sure that women were relegated to a secondary status.

Many men in the early modern period revealed their distaste for the physical matter of reproduction. Völter said that he "found it humiliating to reflect that I had developed in what was almost a sewer, between many bad smells and filth."[97] Luther also spouted this male-centric reproductive theory when he wrote that "Just as Adam was made from a clod, so I was made from a droplet of my father's blood. How my mother conceived me, how I was formed in the womb, and how my growth took place – all this I leave to the glory of the Creator."[98] Luther's analysis of his conception completely removed any agency from a woman. The womb was a place of growth, but the woman did not add anything to the pregnancy specifically. The father was the real giver of life. So while reproduction was a fundamental, dangerous, and critical aspect of female life in the early modern period, their level of involvement was relegated to that of a placeholder rather than an active participant.

Regardless of their place within the reproductive model, childbearing was an integral part of a woman's social life, no matter her social status. Women were required to bear children to fit the prescribed model of acceptable female behavior. If they did not successfully bear children or even chose to not become pregnant or marry to begin with, they would be held under intense

[97] Rublack, "Pregnancy, Childbirth, and the Female Body in Early Modern Germany," 94.
[98] Evans and Read, *Luther on Women*, 174

public scrutiny. The best example of this in early modern England is, of course, Queen Elizabeth I. Known as the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth Tudor made the conscious decision during her career to never marry or have a child, therefore never producing an heir and securing the succession. Many people of the time questioned whether she was actually a virgin, suspecting her of affairs with her courtiers, most notably Robert Dudley.[99] Elizabeth herself professed that "I hope to have children, otherwise I would never marry."[100] Even though she never married and did not produce an heir, she seemed to have understood and played along with the required maternal female script. Although she successfully ruled and kept England at peace for the longest span of time in the early modern period, it was her sexuality, or lack thereof, that occupied, and continues to occupy, the majority of writing on her reign.[101] So strong was her stance against marriage that the people of England began to theorize that something was physically wrong with her that she did not desire a mate or children.[102] This reveals much about the contemporary views towards the expectancy of childbearing. No natural woman would inherently go against her innate desire to bear children. Childbearing was a societal expectation for a woman in the early modern period, and to violate these expectations was equivalent to being physically and emotionally deformed, not a natural woman.

While according to generative theory the female body may have only been a placeholder in terms of reproduction, the act of reproduction and state of pregnancy dominated a woman's life and even death. In the early modern period, a woman could expect to be pregnant eight to ten times during the course of her life.[103] If the average gestational period is nine months, that

[99] Mortimer, *The Time Traveler's Guide to Elizabethan England*, 43.
[100] Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 43.
[101] Mortimer, *The Time Traveler's Guide to Elizabethan England*, 45.
[102] Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, 64.
[103] Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies*, 33.

amounts to between six and seven years of pregnancy throughout a lifetime, not including the aftermath of recovery and breastfeeding. The average life expectancy at this time in Britain and Germany hovered around 35 years, making this a significant portion of a woman's life. In addition, as many as one in five women died in childbirth during this time, making it the number one cause of death for women over the age of eighteen.[104] These grim facts alone provide reason for the overwhelming obsession with reproduction in the early modern period; for women it was the single most defining aspect of their lives. However, through bringing new life into the world, women's own lives were often discredited; in essence, the child's life, always imagined as male in default, was regarded with more importance than the mother's. As the bearers of life, they also were more open to social scrutiny. In a way, their bodies become no longer their own. The next section of this paper will outline the ways in which reproduction under a patriarchal society left the female body open and vulnerable. The female body in the pregnant state became a type of public commodity, open to the influences of community, nature, and emotion.

[104] Ibid.

Chapter 5: The Female Body as a Public Commodity

Reproduction in the early modern period was a highly communal activity, at least for those legitimately pregnant within the bounds of marriage. The pregnant woman's body became not strictly her own, but the source of a new life for the community. Women often surrounded other pregnant women as support systems, but this female-sphere should not be over-estimated. Pregnancy could be a wonderfully supportive time for mothers, but it was also a time of intrusion in which over women were allowed into a personal space. This allowance of intrusion is seen most obviously in the practice of breast fondling. A woman who was pregnant or seeking to become so was subject to frequent breast checks by friends and neighbors. In a time before the modern pregnancy test, the breasts were used an indicator for pregnancy.[105] Acquaintances even were reported to have grabbed a woman's breast to see if it had swelled in preparation for milk production or even begun lactating. Some mistresses of households required her servants to have monthly checks in which their breasts were examined for potential signs of infidelity.[106] These breast checks were not considered rude or improper; rather, they were seen as way to uphold the sexual purity of the community.

These women were not acting within a solely feminine sphere, but also representing the community as a whole. As a part of the community, they represent the indoctrination of the male gaze. The condemnation of deviant sexuality, as discussed above, was rooted in the patriarchal structure that determines male dominance within marriage. Deviant sexuality was a disruption of this male power and therefore must be socially perverse. Midwives and female neighbors were the agents who reproduced this rhetoric of deviant sexuality and policed their fellow women. Ulinka Rublack explains this phenomenon when she write that, "Far from helping them, female

[105] Gowing, "Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England," 91-92.
[106] Ibid.

midwives had themselves become chief agents in the control of women who practiced 'deviant' sexuality and motherhood…"[107] Pregnancy and childbirth were communal and served as methods of enforcing social norms. In this way the community was allowed access to the intimate moments in a women's reproductive cycle.

If childbirth was intrusive for the legitimate mother, it was even more so for those bearing illegitimate children. Whenever possible, illegitimate women attempted to hide their pregnancy. As Laura Gowing says, "For legitimate mothers, labor was a period to be planned for and managed in the semi-public female world of neighborly support. For illegitimate mothers it was exactly the opposite: a time to hide and afterwards deny."[108] However, hiding was difficult. Women either resorted to the practices of reproduction intervention listed above, or they were forced to leave their home. More often than not, they claimed ignorance. When seeking advice from other women regarding contraceptives or ways to induce the menstrual cycle, very few women would ever admit to having sexual intercourse.[109] Fornication in Britain and Germany at this time was still a punishable crime. In particular, James VI gave the secular courts in Scotland the ability to prosecute fornication in 1567, and Parliament gained that power in 1649.[110] Brian Levack, one of the foremost authorities on early modern Scotland, defined the punishment fines as such: "a fine of £40 Scots was levied for the first offence and 100 marks for the second. In 1661 the penalties were raised to £400 Scots for a nobleman, £200 for a baron, £100 for a gentleman or burgess and £10 for a person of 'inferior quality.'"[111] Notice here that the punishments are not defined by gender, but by social rank. However, regardless of the non-

[107] Rublack, "The Public Body," 58.
[108] Gowing, "A History of Infanticide in Britain," 59.
[109] Rublack, "The Public Body," 61.
[110] Brian Levack, "The Prosecution of Sexual Crimes in Early-Eighteenth-Century Scotland," *The Scottish Historical Review* 89 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 173.
[111] Levack, "The Prosecution of Sexual Crimes in Early-Eighteenth-Century Scotland," 174.

gendered framing, the pregnant female body was incontrovertible proof of fornication and was therefore more likely to be fined. Again, women were not separate from the community as whole and were still feared as conspirators against unwed mothers.

In many cases, women reported other women for deviant sexuality and were not above revealing the secrets of childbirth to the male-dominated legal system. Rublack reports cases in which illegitimate mothers were interrogated for the name of the child's father during labor. It was thought that while in the pangs of childbirth it would be impossible for a woman to refrain from shouting the name of her lover.[112] Of course, this very often worked. Beyond being constrained by patriarchal pressure, the desire to maintain social control was also embedded in religious and legal compliance. For a woman to be illegitimately pregnant meant that she had broken both the laws of God and man. As stated above, James VI made this combination permanent by giving the secular courts the ability to try sexual crimes. To fail to report an illegitimate mother's crime was to be complicit in her crime. Furthermore, in Protestant theology, predestination held that the elect would trend towards doing good and good works were a sign of redemption.[113] As such, by helping to enforce the morality of the community through the punishment of unwed mothers, other women could be proving their status as the elect. In many ways, religion and law were combined to help assert patriarchal control. This reasserts the position of women as a part of the masculinized society. This type of aversion only strengthened the patriarchal binds in which unwed mothers found themselves.

Even the terminology surrounding pregnant women differed depending if one was referring to a legitimately or illegitimately pregnant woman. In Germany, married women would

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[112] Ibid.
[113] Dewey D. Wallace, Jr. "The Doctrine of Predestination in the Early English Reformation," *Church History* 43, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 203-204.

be termed “gross schwanger” or great with child when they were pregnant, but unmarried mothers were labeled as “big-bellied” or “in uneherene schwangeres Mensch” which means a dishonorably pregnant person.[114] These terms were used in a similar manner in Britain. One broadside was titled “As concerning the visiting of a big-bellied woman and the looking after what may be borne by her.”[115] Although this might not seem overwhelmingly negative, the word choice was specific. It did not refer to happiness in the pregnancy and rather alluded to the potential for a monstrous birth by using the term “what” when referring the child inside her. As has been discussed above, women who were illegitimately pregnant often attempted to refer to their situation in words that did not direct allude to a child. “Big-bellied” referred to a state of being, not necessarily assuming the presence of a child. Conversely, the term “great with child” was found in a tract detailing the murder of a pregnant woman by her husband. The front page reads that the man “most inhumanely and without any provocation, killed his wife in a most cruel manner, she being great with child.”[116] The woman was obviously pregnant within the confines of marriage, making her pregnancy legitimate and honorable, deserving the descriptor "great." In addition, she was cruelly murdered and thus relegated to an elevated status. These terms, whether used in English or German, defined the status of a woman’s pregnancy without even declaring her marital status. Even the language surrounding female sexuality was cloaked in a way that insinuated a proper patriarchal code of what was considered legitimate or not.

It is important to note the value of an infant life to the early modern community. In both British and German literature, the central focus of any discussion of reproduction was on the

[114] Rublack, “Pregnancy, Childbirth, and the Female Body in Early Modern England,” 89.
[115] Gilbert Burnet, “An Edict in the Roman Law, in the 25th book of the digests, title 4. Section 10.” 1688.
[116] Anonymous. “Bloody News from Clerkenwel, or, a full and true relation of a most horrid and barbarous cruelty, committed by a journey-man-cooper, who lived in Tumble-Down-Dick’s Court, over-against Wood’s-Close.” 1670. Early English Books Online.

fetus, not the life of the mother. Although childbirth was a perilous time for the mother, records often indicate a desire to save the unborn child in question over that of the mother.[117] This is specifically seen in the case of Caesarean sections. Pregnancy at this time was not a medicalized practice.[118] Rarely was there a doctor present for births and no sort of antiseptic was formally used. As such, Caesareans were extremely risky procedures that were only used during cases of extreme distress, often with prolonged labor. Even more disturbingly, Greenfield and Barash note that "Caesareans were normally performed only on women who had already died during labor."[119] In relation to the earlier discussion of generative theories, this is a prime example in which the female body is merely a container for life. Midwives or doctors performed the surgery mere minutes after the woman had passed, opening her body to release the life inside. The womb in this sense becomes not a source of nourishment and life, but a cage from which life must be released.

It must also be noted that the life within a mother's womb, in a world without ultrasounds or any way to know the sex before birth, the unborn child was always referred to as male.[120] Male children were desired, and the chance of another emerging male life was enough to supplant desire to save an existing female life. While reflecting on the one-seed model of generation, the C-section, often performed by a male surgeon, releases the active, male-driven life of the infant from the passive, restraining cage of the womb. The woman becomes a symbol of death, not one of growth. Yet there seems to be a denial of dignity for the life of the mother. These emergency C-sections did not often result in a live birth; rather the child was typically

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[117] Chamberlain, "Fantasizing Infanticide," 85.
[118] Greenfield and Barash, *Inventing Maternity: Politics, Science, and Literature, 1650-1865*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 114.
[119] Chamberlain, "Fantasizing Infanticide," 85.
[120] Ibid.

stillborn or died shortly after birth from other complications.[121] With these posthumous C-sections, reproduction remains the primary function of the female body even in death. Perhaps it is fitting, since female life revolved around reproduction that many of their lives ended in the sole task they existed to perform. Yet C-sections, posthumous or otherwise, provide a powerful image of life forcibly taken from the mother in a way that denied female agency even in the matter of birth. The will of community was greater than the will of the woman and as such the community, through the actions of midwives, doctors, and female neighbors, imposed their will in the birthing room.

Because the patriarchal structure required reasoning for the subjugation of women, the female body was often interpreted as weaker and more vulnerable to nature, particularly when pregnant or sexually active. This weakness is contrasted with male strength and vitality. Lyndal Roper placed this dichotomy in terms of active and passive participants, which closely align with the previous discussion of honor and will:

> Women's bodies, by contrast [to men's] were thought to have weak boundaries in a sexual sense. Sexually permeable, their wombs were constantly alive, and open to male invasion…We might say that male bodies were imagined as constantly breaking their boundaries, polluting the world around them with violence and vomit. Female bodies by contrast, could bring pollution on society with their sexual openness.[122]

In this the male body was seen as penetrative, which was read as violent, and the female body was perceived as open. It is interesting to note that both male and female in this interpretation harbored pollution, but they did so to different ends. Male bodies only polluted the world around them through their "violence and vomit," but female bodies directly contributed to the degradation of the society, with the implication that this is much worse. Female pollution contributed to society directly rather than indirectly because of their position as the bearers of

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[121] Ibid.
[122] Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*, 153.

life. This theory of pollution is firmly grounded in Eve's sin in the Fall of Man. God cursed Eve with pain in childbirth and said to the serpent, "I will establish enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. Her progeny will tread upon your head and you will bite them on the heel."[123] If the serpent is taken to be the embodiment of evil and sin in the world, then the very children that Eve and every other woman has produced were born innately sinful and doomed to a life of hardship. Women are labeled as the source of original sin, polluting the world with the output of their bodies. However, this stands in contrast to the position of women as the bearers of life and the future. Women are bound to produce life, yet hated because of the sinfulness they represent. Even though theories of generation might disagree on the level of contribution women gave to the life inside them, society viewed the female body as a temple for growing life and the future of the community. However, this view does not render the female body stronger or more honorable, but rather as weak and open to the influences of her surroundings.

Medical science in the early modern period had not yet accurately mapped the female reproductive system or fully understood its processes. In a period when medical contemporaries described health in terms of a balancing of the humors, reproductive activity was described in a similar way. Jessica Munns and Perry Richards explain that, "The fluids in the body were also fungible or interchangeable; breast milk was viewed as redirected and purified menstrual blood."[124] These same medical practitioners also viewed the female body as a sheaf, leaving the reproductive system completely open to the influences of an improper diet or strong external forces. Thus a popular way to determine pregnancy was the garlic test. A woman would place a

[123] Karant-Nunn and Weisner-Hanks, *Luther on Women*, 23.
[124] Jennifer Munns and Perry Richards, *Gender, Power, and Privilege in Early Modern Europe*, (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), 13.

clove of peeled garlic inside herself and "in the morning, if she breathed out the characteristic odor, she was assuredly not pregnant. An embryo, if present, would certainly get in the way of this diffusion: sweet break proved conception."[125] Although not accurate, the test reveals the extent to which the female body was perceived as open to outside stimuli.

The body was a vessel that contained the fetus, but did little to protect it from the elements. This supports the patriarchal view of the community that women were the weaker sex, open to external influence and unable to fulfill their natural duty to bear children without undo protection. They were helpless victims to the elements that could easily upset their weak bodies. In a way this places women in a classic double bind. They were bound by religious and social duty to produce children, yet if they failed in their duty they may be charged as improper women on attempts of abortion and infanticide. Viewing nature as an active participant in the reproductive process seems to have both given and removed agency from the woman. In theory, the woman should have been alleviated of some responsibility for a miscarriage since her womb could succumb to outside forces, but she was simultaneously viewed as inherently weaker than man and once again found herself in a subservient position. Overall, by depicting women as bound to nature, early modern texts reasserted the premise that men were the dominant source of life and woman just the carrier thereof.

Women were not only depicted as dependent on the will of nature and the community; they were also bound to their own emotions. During pregnancy, any type of shock was thought to be enough to disturb the delicate balance within the womb, causing a miscarriage or monstrous birth. For example, a woman from Stuttgart in 1659 credited the birth of a child with one foot and no genitals to the fact that she "had received a shock from seeing a lame beggar on

[125] Kilday, *A History of Infanticide in Britain*, 56.

her way to market."[126] As John Maubrey wrote his midwifery text *Female Physician* in 1724, "[a woman] ought discreetly to suppress all anger, passion, and other perturbations of the mind, and avoid entertaining too serious or meloncholik thoughts, since all such tend to impress depravity of Nature upon the infant's mind, and deformity on its body."[127] In the same way that nature could affect the fetus from inside the womb, any intense feelings could change the psyche of the unborn child. Ulinka Rublack analyzes this phenomenon in her work "Pregnancy, Childbirth, and the Female Body in Early Modern Germany" when she writes that "A woman before, during, and after childbirth occupied a liminal space in which outer experiences were readily transmuted into inner experience which affected both her and the child."[128] The female body once again became a sheath, in which all bodily functions – physical, mental, and emotional – were mixed together to form one person. However, this theory of permeability must be examined beyond its early modern explanation to see its place in the wider patriarchal order and definition of femininity.

Since these great shocks or sudden outbursts, particularly by the woman herself, could greatly affect the fetus, women were required to remain meek and mild throughout pregnancy. As stated above, women spent a great deal of life either in pregnancy or breastfeeding their children. If the perpetual state of the female was pregnant or somehow attached to her children, then her perpetual state should also be that of meekness, firmly entrenching this as a feminine ideal. Similar to the way that the CDC in the February of 2016 has asserted that no woman should drink alcohol who may potentially become pregnant, in the early modern period this could be reframed that no woman who may potentially be pregnant should be acting in a manner

[126] Rublack, "Pregnancy, Childbirth, and the Female Body in Early Modern Germany," 95.
[127] Greenfield and Barash, *Inventing Maternity*, 117.
[128] Rublack, "Pregnancy, Childbirth, and the Female Child in Early Modern Germany," 86.

which may disrupt the life inside her. Thus the perceived permeability of emotion and shock to the female body can be seen as a means to reassert the ideal quality of meekness that reinforces the patriarchal system.

Chapter 6: Publicity and Reproductive Intervention in the Patriarchal System

Openness as a Method of Patriarchal Oppression

As seen above, the fertile female body was read as open to the community, emotion, and nature in the early modern period. This openness did not highlight or bring agency to women, but rather confined the role of female in the patriarchal system. Through the discussion of this openness, the female body was depicted as weak in comparison to the male body. Pregnancy in this manner can be seen as a very passive state for a woman in social context of early modern Europe. As Rublack states, "Pregnancies *happened* to a woman; the mothers were mainly conscious of getting fat and of eventually feeling fetal movements. Now pregnancy is defined as something a woman does, like a project."[129] This is an important difference. Whereas in the modern day pregnancy can be tracked beginning a few weeks after conception, the early modern woman had no sense of control over her body. Increasing medical knowledge regarding pregnancy and conception has given modern women a certain amount of autonomy over their pregnant bodies – they know what to eat to support a healthy fetus, what to avoid to limit the chance of birth defects, and can even specify the date on which they would like to give birth. Early modern women had none of this security. The structure by which the woman was thought of as open to emotions and natural phenomena actually turned a woman's strength and ability to bear children against her by displaying the womb as open to threats. Rather than the harbor and bearer of life, the female body was almost seen as at odds with the unborn child.

On top of creating an unequal view towards male and female sexuality, the public nature of female sexuality in the early modern period created an environment in which women were punished for their sexuality, often through shameful procedures. Weisner-Hanks records that "in

[129] Rublack, "The Public Body," 61.

some Lutheran areas, churching was required of all married mothers and forbidden to those who gave birth out of wedlock, creating a mark of the distinction between honorable and dishonorable women."[130] This can be compared to the situation in England, where unmarried women could only be churched if they named the father and came forth in a white sheet to repent of their sin.[131] Churching was the event in which both the mother and child were accepted back into the congregation after giving birth. Essentially this amounts to a type of Protestant excommunication. A woman was not allowed to reenter the church after giving birth without a formal churching; if she was not allowed due to her unmarried status, this was essentially barring her for participating in the religious community.

Even apart from the churching ceremony, menstruation and the physical matter of a woman's sexuality separated the early modern woman from the male community. The community, both religious and secular, saw the menstruating woman as unclean. The primary source of this belief stems from two rules in Leviticus 15: "'If a woman have an issue of her blood… she shall be unclean.' And 'if any man lie with her at all, and her flowers be upon him, he shall be unclean.'"[132] From these two biblical passages stems a long tradition of viewing menstruation and specifically menstrual blood as unclean and taboo. Since these passages come from the Old Testament, they are representative of the combined Judeo-Christian culture. These served as the primary basis for excluding women from positions of authority, both secular and religious.[133] Both Protestant and Catholic early modern communities retained this exclusion from authority – women were not allowed to become ordained ministers or ever teach above men. The

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[130] Weisner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World*, 97.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Patricia Crawford, "Attitudes towards Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England," *Past & Present* 91 (London: Oxford University Press, 1981). 92.
[133] William E Phipps, "The Menstrual Taboo in the Judeo-Christian Tradition," *Journal of Religion and Health* 19 (1980), 298.

taboos built around menstruation can been see as a foundation for the patriarchal societies of the early modern period.

Menstruation taboos did not operate the same for every woman in the early modern period, much like childbirth and pregnancy did not. The loss of blood was quite often seen as negative, which, combined with other symptoms of menstruation such as cramping and nausea, was regarding as "woman's sickness."[134] However, the discourse of menstruation differed based on the social standing of the person to whom it was referring. Writings on lay people and unmarried, sexually active women typically use words such as "women's sickness" or "termes."[135] However, for noble women or young virgins, menstruation was often referred to as "thyr flowering."[136] These words were more delicate, to befit a member of a more delicate class. Flowering also implies beauty and fruitfulness, something that menstruation was supposed to facilitate. If it did not, though, the perception surround it changed entirely. Much like the four humors of the body, menstruation was required to stay in balance with the body and be of use. If a woman conceived a child and did not bleed, the blood was thought to nourish the child and provide its source of life. If "however, a female failed to conceive, this blood 'wanting his proper use doe degenerate into the nature of an excrement, than it offednth in qualitie as well as in excess."[137] Much like other aspects of female sexuality, if menstruation were not being put to good use, it could serve only evil. The negative perceptions towards menstruation in the early modern period marked menstruating women as unclean and unworthy of religious and secular authority, cementing them in their status as secondary citizens.

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[134] Crawford, "Attitudes towards Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England," 90.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Crawford, "Attitudes towards Menstruation and Menstrual Blood in Elizabethan England," 94.

As cases of illegitimacy and infanticide rose in the early modern period, certain German principalities, both Catholic and Protestant, required the unwed mother to announce their pregnancy in front of the congregation.[138] If they did not, "they could be charged with infanticide even if there was no evidence that they actually did anything to cause the death."[139] Statutes such as this eliminated any form of personal privacy in the realm of female sexuality. A woman's children were not her own, but rather for the future community, and they must therefore be declared to all members of the community. Weisner continues to explain the extent to which German principalities construed female sexuality as a public commodity. In an extreme case, a German physician "suggested that all unmarried women between the ages of fourteen and forty-eight should be viewed monthly at a public both to see if their bodies showed any signs of pregnancy."[140] In the modern view these actions would be termed as an intrusion into a woman's personal privacy, but it was not so in the early modern period. A woman's reproductive system was seen by the community as an insurance measure towards the future growth of the community and therefore must necessarily be policed.

Often these punishments were not limited to women who were illegitimately pregnant, but also those who were judged guilty of fornication. In the case of a servant from Westheim, Germany, she "had to wear a placard with the words 'shameful whore' around her neck while in the pillory before she was banished from the country to the sound of clanging on a metal basin."[141] Notice that no men were accused or included in this fornication charge, or at the very least, they were not run out of town. Only women warranted this extreme punishment of banishment for failing to retain their position as the gatekeeper of sexual purity. The perceived

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[138] Weisner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World*, 104.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Weisner-Hanks, *Christianity, Sexuality, and the Early Modern World*, 104.
[141] Rublack, *The Crimes of Women in Early Modern Germany*, 148.

open nature of female sexuality required social statutes that demanded their purity, but punished open sexuality. Because every moment of a woman's sexual life was on display for the community, any indiscretion that she committed was cause for extreme punishment, on the premise that it was a method of safeguarding the community.

Reproductive Intervention as Conforming to the Patriarchal System

At first glance, practices such as infanticide, abortion, contraceptive use, and child abandonment seem completely against the patriarchal system that prevailed in early modern Europe. However, a closer look at these practices reveals that they were not always or even typically performed in order to make a stand against patriarchal oppression. Rather, women who practiced these methods of reproductive intervention were attempting to alleviate their awful personal situation by any means necessary and were often acting for the benefit of the children they already had. As Laura Gowing notes, "Infanticide is, it is generally argued, a product of exceptional mental conditions. But it was also a product of unexceptional economic and social circumstances where unmarried women might very well see no way in which they could bear and keep a child."[142] This eliminates some of the judgment from infanticide cases and also rewrites them in a way that creates more room for discussion. If infanticide is construed as a criminal act, it can be brushed aside as a product of exceptional circumstances. By revealing that logical, sane women participated in these acts, a larger discussion of the factors behind these difficult decisions must occur. There must always be a background to the trial. In very few cases did mothers simply murder their children because they did not want a baby or abandon their child in the streets because they no longer felt like caring for it. Rather, women were often forced to make these decisions in the face of rising tides of famine and economic distress.

[142] Gowing, "Secret Births and Infanticide in Seventeenth-Century England," 88.

If women were not murdering their children in a vengeful backlash against the concept of motherhood, the practice cannot really be considered subversive or anti-patriarchal. Historian Peter Laslett says, "Breaches of social rules do not necessarily weaken those rules, and under certain circumstances can even serve to strengthen them."[143] So then infanticide and other methods of reproductive intervention must be examined not for their brutal results, but for what they reveal about the time in which they were committed. As Greenfield and Barash say in their book *Inventing Maternity*, "the injustices of this society are shown to drive people to the desperate measures of infanticide: a civilization based on reason does not exclude barbarians but creates them. Infanticide remains the sole humane act, an act of salvation in a corrupt world."[144] Greenfield and Barash hold that the peak of infanticides in the early modern period represented a shift in modes of thought between the late medieval period and the Enlightenment. In their minds, "infanticide provides an opportunity for the discussion of whether a capacity for sympathy or a capacity for reason is the true mark of a civilized society."[145] This is an important space to think through. On one hand, the killing of children brings to mind barbarian and unreasonable actions that no modern person could ever commit. On the other hand, logic and reason, as developed in the Enlightenment, demanded a thought process that required the sacrifice of some for the betterment of all.

Women who committed infanticide in most cases acted within a social script that demanded sacrifice for the good of the family and the community and chose their actions carefully in order to benefit the larger group. This does not mean that they were at any point separated from the patriarchal system that governed their actions or that they were consciously

[143] Bennet and Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past*, 130.
[144] Greenfield and Barash, *Inventing Maternity*, 216.
[145] Ibid.

trying to subvert this order, but rather that they acted with logic and restraint. As such, the reproductive intervention methods that they practiced cannot truly be seen as an attempt to privatize or close the body to the influences of the public. Even when a woman acted outside the normal script of the caring mother by denying her pregnancy, she operated within a patriarchal system that demanded the success of the whole.

Conclusion

Although this study focused in large part on the legal and social mores regarding infanticide, abortion, and contraceptive use in the early modern period, it is important to note that these practices still occurred on a fairly infrequent basis. Prosecution for abortion and infanticide was not common, and surely not many people were committing the murder of infants without the public notice. Rather, the large amounts of literature regarding reproductive intervention can be credited to widespread fears and fantasies regarding female sexual behavior.

These fears of the inversion of normative motherhood manifested themselves in not only the law and media, but the contemporary societal script regarding the practice of witchcraft. It is not a coincidence that at the same time records on infanticide increase, the persecution and execution of supposed witches also increased. Many reports of witchcraft, and particularly the practice of the witches' Sabbath, included the killing of infants and presumably using them to perform *malificeum*. As Heinrich Kramer reported in his infamous witch hunters' guide, *Malleus Maleficarum*, "the devil demands the following oath of homage to himself: that she give herself to him, body and soul, forever…she is to make certain unguents from the bones and limbs of infants, especially those who have been baptized…"[146] Witchcraft, including a pact with the devil and the eating of babies, represented the farthest from prescribed motherhood that a person could travel. As such, the witch trials of the early modern period represented not so much an actual increase occult practice, but rather an intensified preoccupation with female sexuality.

In all the fears regarding witchcraft, monstrous births, and infanticide, there is a core fear in protecting a woman's perceived pure sexual status. As seen above in the discussions of honor and will, female sexuality was defined as passive and outwardly serving the pleasures of man.

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[146] Heinrich Kramer, *Malleus Maleficarum*, 1486, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* Edited by Brian Levack (New York: Routledge Press, 2004), 66.

Abortion, infanticide, and contraceptive use potentially flipped this narrative, presumably allowing women to practice their sexuality without the burdens of motherhood. It was this fear of emancipated women that led to the proliferation of anxiety about murdering mothers in the early modern period. As said before, infanticide was not common. It was not something that women wanted or even happily chose to do. But the increased perception that women could and would choose to intervene in a pregnancy they did not want, altered the language regarding the unassuming woman. Whether or not the instances actually occurred, which some certainly did, the fear that the very idea of infanticide stimulated was enough to create the broadsides and legal codes found in the historical archive.

Something about this early modern narrative rings true to the modern day. Women in the latter half of the twentieth century experienced large gains in women's reproductive rights. Abortions were legalized and grew in their safety and simplicity. However, the recent CDC statement and infographic reveals the ways in which some things have not yet changed. By telling a woman, regardless of her level of sexual activity, that she should not consume alcohol because she is the potential bearer of life, women are reduced once more to a public commodity, a place for the future but not the present. Just as women were denied control over their reproductive status in the early modern period, this government statement suggests the seizure of control from modern women.

Statements such as the CDC's beg an examination of the past. If abortion, infanticide, and child abandonment rates did actually rise in response to increasing pressure placed on female sexuality, this might shed some light on the modern day. Recently, a study has shown that in states in which Planned Parenthood and other access to abortion has been decreased, the rates of

Google searches pertaining to self-induced abortions have increased.[147] Women in Mississippi have searched methods of self-induced abortions more than any other state in the US since a number of abortion clinics have been shut down.[148] This speaks to the same desire for control that early modern women also experienced. Regardless of the legality or social permissibility of reproductive intervention, a number of women will always find themselves in an unwanted pregnancy and will always attempt to terminate that pregnancy, regardless of the legality or safety of her actions. Whether this is in the American Southeast in 2016 or Yorkshire, England in 1625, there are similarities in the female situation. For the early modern woman, infanticide, abortion, or child abandonment represented a way in which she could attempt to close her body to the public nature of pregnancy and childbirth and instead claim some type of control within the patriarchal framework of her society.

[147] Seth Stephens-Davidowitz, "The Return of the D.I.Y. Abortion," *The New York Times*, March 5, 2016. Accessed March 25, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/06/opinion/sunday/the-return-of-the-diy-abortion.html?_r=0.
[148] Ibid.

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