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OF TURKU

ELITE ENGLISH GIRLHOOD IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Henna Karppinen-Kummunmäki



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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I analyze how eighteenth-century elite girls negotiated the norms and expectations of girlhood. I have selected a sample group of girls from the upper echelons of society. They are daughters of the aristocracy, gentry and urban professionals.

In the hierarchical society of the eighteenth-century world, girls were seen as subordinate beings. This was because of both their young age and being female. Moreover, the girls of this study were part of the elite, which also influenced the ways they were expected to lead their lives. Sometimes these expectations conflicted and the girls tried their best to strike a balance between these contradictions and their own feelings and desires.

In this study, I will combine several categories of historical analysis, namely gender, age and social class. All three categories apply to the lives of the girls I discuss and had a huge, impact on them. The key concepts of this study are girlhood and agency.

The source material includes personal writings such as letters, diaries and autobiographies, but also a vast collection of contemporary sources such as medical treatises, conduct books, dictionaries and magazines. I read these normative sources alongside the personal writings in order to show how the ideals of girlhood shaped but also created conflicts in the lives of these girls when they grew up.

This dissertation shows that being a girl in the eighteenth-century world was a process. A girl did not suddenly turn into a woman when she reached a certain age or when she married and became a wife, as previous research has repeatedly stated. Instead, she gradually turned into an adult as her age, behaviour and skills developed.

With this study, I hope to raise the profile of age as a concept of analysis in historical research. By applying concepts that have been used for studies of other periods but rarely for the period at hand, and taking nothing for granted or self-evident, we can acquire a much more vibrant and multidimensional image of the past.

KEYWORDS: gender history, girlhood, girlhood studies, eighteenth century, the elites, England

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tässä väitöskirjassani analysoin 1700-luvulla eläneiden englantilaisten eliitin tyttöjen tapoja tasapainotella erilaisten tyttöyteen liittyvien odotusten ja normien ristipaineessa. Tarkastelen joukkoa tyttöjä, jotka kuuluivat yhteiskunnan ylimpiin kerroksiin. He olivat aristokraattien, maalaisaatelin ja säätyläistön tyttäriä. 1700-luvun maailma oli vahvan hierarkkinen ja patriarkaalinen. Tytöt nähtiin monessa suhteessa alistaisina olentoina aikuisiin miehiin nähden. He olivat nuoria ja kaiken lisäksi naissukupuolen edustajia. Lisäksi näiden tyttöjen kokemuksiin vaikutti heidän kuulumisensa yhteiskunnan eliittiin. Ajoittain säädyn vaatima elämäntapa oli ristiriidassa ihanteellisen naiseuden ja tyttöyden kanssa, puhumattakaan heidän omista tunteistaan ja haluistaan.

Tämän tutkimuksen keskeiset analyttiset käsitteet ovat sukupuoli, ikä ja luokka. Nämä kategoriat vaikuttivat merkittävästi tässä tutkimuksessa esiintyvien tyttöjen elämään. Tutkimuksen keskeisinä tutkimuskohteina ovat siten tyttöys ja toimijuus. Väitöskirjani asettuu siten sukupuolihistorian, tyttöyden historian ja tyttötytöiden tutkimusalueille. Lähdemateriaalina on laaja kokoelma kirjeitä, päiväkirjoja, omaelämäkertoja sekä lääke-, laki- ja käytösoppaita sekä lehtiä. Lukemalla omakohtaisia tekstejä normatiivisten kanssa rinnakkain, tutkimus tuo esiin 1700-luvun tyttöyteen kuuluvat rajat, kokemukset ja ristiriidat.

Tutkimukseni osoittaa, että 1700-luvun tyttöys oli prosessi, johon kuului paitsi kronologinen ikä myös erilaisten tietojen ja taitojen karttumisen. Aikuinen tytöstä tuli vasta kun hän osasi toteuttaa aikuiselämänsä roolia vaimona, äitinä ja seurapiirileidinä. Tämä tutkimus on avaus laajemmalle vanhempia aikoja koskevalle nuoruuden historian tutkimukselle. Iän tuominen mukaan historialliseen tutkimuskäsitteistöön laajentaa merkittävästi kuvaa menneisyyden maailmasta.

ASIASANAT: eliitit, Englanti, sukupuoli, sukupuolentutkimus, tyttöys, tyttötytöiden tutkimus, 1700-luku

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Writing this doctoral dissertation has been a long journey and quite of a mental roller-coaster. (Additionally, the year 2020 has been something we have certainly not experienced before!) This doctoral dissertation has been a journey into a world long gone and into the intimate lives of people who lived in that world. But this has also been a journey to self-knowledge. During these years that I have done this research, I have found my own limits and strengths. It has been a rough path at times, but I have no regrets. I have grown into a cultural historian during this process. The dream of a little girl has finally come true.

Luckily, I have not been alone in this journey. A number of people have commented and supported me on my research project. Firstly, I want to thank my opponent Adjunct Professor Heli Valtonen, who shares my interest in gender history, history of childhood and youth and early modern cultural history. She challenged me to think what cultural history as a field of study is truly about. My other reviewers, Professor Elaine Chalus had insightful and even strict remarks concerning my thesis. She showed great integrity during the process and compelled me to rewrite my thesis at critical points before accepting it for public examination. This may have caused a delay, but it was a delay that resulted in an improved dissertation! Postdoctoral Researcher Soile Ylivuori who shares my interest in eighteenth-century elite women also gave very detailed comments on my text in the first review and helped me to improve the thesis. I am eternally grateful to both.

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Fellow doctoral candidates and closest colleagues were often the lifeline that helped me to carry on writing. They knew exactly what I was going through. When on occasion my own self-confidence failed and I was ready to give up, they encouraged me and pushed me to continue. They also showed me the importance of peer support and having fun. Nights spent at bars, or each others' homes, drinking, eating, laughing and crying have been the best time of my life! My gratitude for these nights go to, in no particular order, Niina Lehmušjärvi, Niina Siivikko, Susanna Lahtinen, Anne Närhi, Mari Tiihonen, Heta Aali, Reetta Sippola, Annastiina Mäkilä, Suvi-Sadetta Kaarakainen, Anna-Leena Perämäki, Otto Latva, Heta Lähdesmäki, Harri Kiiskinen, Maiju Kannisto and Panu Savolainen.

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In Turku 19 August 2020
Henna Karppinen-Kummunmäki

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1 INTRODUCTION: THE UNDERSTUDIED ELITE GIRLHOOD

When I saw her for the first time, I thought her the perfect image of a sophisticated aristocratic lady of the eighteenth century. She leans against a writing desk, her head against her left hand in a meditative pose. Her right arm rests on her lap. She gazes at the viewer with drowsy eyes and a hint of a smile. She is rather beautiful. Her dress is the height of fashion: a salmon pink taffeta dress with white ruffles, black fine lace on her shoulders, a necklace with a triple ring of pearls and pearl earrings to match. Her brown hair is curled at the top.

To my surprise, I learnt that she was only fifteen years old. The painting I just described was produced by Francis Cotes around the year 1760.¹ The sitter is Lady Sarah Lennox (1745–1832), the daughter of Charles Lennox, the 2nd Duke of Richmond and his wife Lady Sarah Cadogan. That same year young Sarah had arrived in London to start her life in the high society of the city. This painting reminds me how elusive and almost invisible a girl or a young woman was in the pages of history. We easily forget that there were also girls in the eighteenth century, not just grown women. The line between girls and women is often blurred. How, then, is it possible to study in a historical context something that seems to be between becoming and being and between a child and a woman?

Thousands of pages have been written about females in the past. Women have also written about their own lives. This is also true of eighteenth-century girls and women. However, almost all biographies focus on adulthood years. Childhood and youth, or what I term in this study girlhood years, are usually dealt with in the first ten pages or so. In certain ways even elite girls were on the margins. In a world where the adult male was the person with most authority and therefore most prominence, a young female, even an elite one, was doubly marginal. She was inferior in regard of her sex and inferior in regard of her age. Girls have certainly been in the margins of historical research, as well. This study explores the

¹ A reproduction of this painting can be found in Tillyard 1995 (1994). The location of the original painting is unclear.

experience and understanding of girlhood through autobiographical sources, correspondence, diaries and memoirs.

The main subjects of my study are elite English girls in the eighteenth century. They were not all noble or aristocratic, but they all lived in the world termed *polite society*. They include the following: the four Lennox sisters, that is Ladies Caroline (b.1723, married Fox, Lady Holland), Emily (b.1731, Fitzgerald, Lady Kildare, Duchess of Leinster), Louisa (b.1743, Conolly) and Sarah (b.1745, Bunbury and Napier), Lady Mary Pierrepont (b.1689, Wortley Montagu), Lady Louisa Stuart (b.1757), Lady Harriet Pitt (b.1758, Eliot), Lady Sarah Spencer (b.1787, Lyttelton), Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd (b.1771, Stanley), Miss Elizabeth Robinson (b.1720, Montagu) and her sister Sarah (b. 1721, Scott), Miss Frances (Fanny) Burney (b.1752, D'Arblay), Miss Mary Granville (b.1700, Pendarves and Delany), Miss Mary Berry (b.1763), Miss Maria Edgeworth (b.1767), Miss Eliza Dawson (b.1770, Fletcher), Miss Anne Tracy (b.1705, Travell) and the Wynne sisters Elizabeth (Betsey) (b.1778, Fremantle), Eugenia (b.1780, Campbell), Harriet (b.1784, Hamilton) and Justine (b 1786, Finlay).

The girls of this study were all members of the elite, although they represented different classes and faiths. They were daughters of aristocrats (Lennoxes, Pierrepont, Stuart, Holroyd, Pitt) and gentry (Robinsons, Granville, Tracy, Berry, Dawson, Edgeworth, Wynnes), but also urban professionals (Burney). Most of them were members of the Church of England, but some of them were Roman Catholics (Wynnes). Most, but not all, were born and raised on English soil. The three youngest of the Lennox sisters, Sarah, Louisa and Cecilia, were born in England, but moved to Ireland to live with their elder sister Emily, after their parents died. But Sarah and Louisa moved back to London, to live with their eldest sister Caroline, when they were in their teens. The Wynne family moved abroad in 1786 after Richard Wynne got into financial difficulties and had to sell his estate in Lincolnshire. Maria Edgeworth, in turn, was born in Oxfordshire: she moved to Ireland with her family at the age of five, but was later sent to boarding school back in England. Despite their differences, all these girls faced the similar expectations that belonged to being a female in the patriarchal eighteenth-century world. All of them represented the upper echelons of society, and therefore shared a similar lifestyle, albeit varying according to the family's financial means.

The list of names is extensive, but the girls left a varied written legacy. They commented on and emphasised different aspects of girlhood. Some were keener to express their opinion than others. Therefore, the Robinson sisters, the Wynne sisters, Fanny Burney, Lady Sarah Lennox and Lady Mary Pierrepont acquire more space in this study than the other girls.

Some, if not all, of the girls are better known for their adult lives, their connections to famous men or under their married names. However, because I focus on them as girls I use their maiden names throughout this study, contrary to usual

practice. However, when I refer to opinions they expressed on girlhood later in life, as adult women, I use the name they had at the time.²

1.1 Placing girls in history: Research question, previous research, concepts and methods

Research question

The aim of this study is to analyze how eighteenth-century elite girls negotiated the norms and expectations of girlhood. In the hierarchical society of the eighteenth-century world, girls were seen as subordinate beings. This was because of both their young age and being female. Moreover, the girls of this study were part of the elite, which also influenced the ways they were expected to lead their lives. Sometimes these expectations conflicted and the girls tried their best to strike a balance between these contradictions and their own feelings and desires. This is not biographical research, even though I draw on the experiences of individual girls. I use these as examples to aid in studying a bigger social phenomenon, in this case girlhood in eighteenth-century England.³

The time frame of this study encompasses over 100 years. One might ask whether it is possible to study such a long period as a coherent entity. Some historians like to call it the Long Eighteenth Century, a period that started in the end of the seventeenth century and lasted until the early decades of the nineteenth century. However as a cultural historian I find it unnecessary to make such labelling. Hardly any historical phenomenon is strictly limited into one century. It is true that there were significant changes during the eighteenth century. In Europe it was an era of the Enlightenment and finally a revolution which ended the ancient regime. In Britain it was an era of accelerated population growth, agricultural transformation and industrialisation. But the elite lifestyle, and the expectations that young females had to face, did not change significantly until the Victorian era. The changes were subtle over the course of this period and at times they are very not easy to detect. These changes include, for instance, attitudes towards girls' education or sexuality.

The research questions constitute three different themes, through which I construct my study. The themes are 1) girlhood as a life-stage, 2) socialization, i.e.

² All daughters of dukes, marquises' and earls were "the Right Honourable N. Lady N. and addressed as "Lady." The daughters of viscounts and barons were called "Madam" and their title was "the Honourable Mrs. N.N." In genteel families the eldest daughter was called Miss. See Anon.[Hannah More], 1745, 80; *The Accomplished Letter-Writer*, 1779, 27–28, 33.

³ On biographical research see Hakosalo et al. 2014; Leskelä-Kärki 2017. Also Caine 2010.

education, pastimes, entering society and 3) sexuality. Each theme is handled in one chapter: the first chapter looks into girlhood as part of the human lifecycle. I discuss eighteenth-century notions of gender, age and human constitution. How was age perceived? Although I am not writing a comprehensive review of gender and the eighteenth century, I am aware that I am participating in a discussion that has been extremely controversial among gender historians for the past two decades: was there a change in the notions of gender (from a one-sex to a two sex-model) during the eighteenth century? This work also contributes to the history of childhood and youth. In the eighteenth century, childhood and youth came more and more to the fore in pedagogical and political discussions. The increase in childhood literature and conduct books, aimed mainly at young ladies, is one sign of this. In this chapter, I will look into the chronological aspects of age. Were there certain points in life that were important? Girls were gendered subjects, so it is important to have an understanding of contemporary views of human constitution, gender and age. Another important aspect of girlhood that I handle in this chapter is girls as part of family dynamics, that is, as daughters, nieces and siblings.

The second chapter involves work and education, social and material environment. What was the education of eighteenth-century aristocratic girls like? I consider how the girls learnt to be ladies. Even though the elite was usually referred to as “the leisured class,” it did not mean that these young ladies spent or should have spent their time in idleness. Accordingly, one of the aims in this study is to find out what activities were appropriate for elite girls. This also involves the social life outside the family home. How and on what terms did girls appear in public? The material environment also has been taken into account when looking at girlhood experiences. Consuming and through that demonstrating one’s social standing was extremely important to the elite, especially in this era. Consumption increased in all social classes during the eighteenth century. Those who represented high society had to stand out from ordinary people.

The third chapter is about sexuality and the eventual maturation of the girls. Unmarried girls were sexually problematic according to the ideals of the time. They were no longer little children, completely under the influence of their parents, and especially their fathers, but before they were married they had no husband to control them either. Young ladies were in a somewhat liminal stage. As legally of age, they were potential sexual partners. But it was also necessary for an aristocratic girl to be virgin when she entered into marriage, in order to secure the paternity of family heirs. In this chapter I also look ask whether marriage signified adulthood to the girls or whether it happened later, for example, when they had their first child.

Previous research

Previous research on the eighteenth century, gender history, family history and childhood and youth history has been extensive.⁴ One might think that everything that could be written about the eighteenth-century female has been written already. Yet, for the most part, gender history has neglected age and dealt with women as a single coherent group. This study brings to the fore females of various ages, little girls, teenagers, and young ladies ready to be married. Even within the elite, the lives of these girls took individual turns, despite the ideal shared framework.⁵ After all, girlhood in the eighteenth-century was a phase in life when girls constructed their future womanhood.

Histories of childhood and youth, especially those published in the 1980s and 1990s, have tended to focus on boys as representatives of the young.⁶ Research into the gendered experience of age is thus still lacking to some extent, with some welcome exceptions from the 1990s and the past decade, which I use frequently in my study.⁷ Research into the family in this period has been far more extensive ever since Lawrence Stone published his pioneering study on the history of the English family. Nevertheless, historical studies focusing on families and family dynamics still tend to stress parent-child-relations. The viewpoint usually concerns parents' relations and feelings towards their children, not vice versa.⁸ There are few studies that have broken this pattern by turning their attention to sibling-relations. They show how minors, as well as grown adults, both boys and girls, interacted within gender-age-hierarchies.⁹ This study is all about girls and how they saw their world and interacted with it.

⁴ General views on early modern gender histories Jones 1990; Eales 1998; Wiesner 2000 (1993). Life-cycle studies: Abbott 1996; Vickery 1998; Mendelson & Crawford 1998. In Sweden and Finland see Vainio-Korhonen 2008.

⁵ Studies focusing on gender, as a cultural and social construction, provide useful space of discussion for my own research. See for instance Barker & Chalus (eds.) 1997. Also Tague 2002; Ylivuori 2015. Women and the construction of gender in France see Goodman 2008.

⁶ Such as Gillis 1981; Cunningham 1996.

⁷ For instance Müller (ed.) 2006. Also Fletcher 2010 (2008). There are some studies of gendered childhoods from earlier periods such as Kraussman Ben-Amos 1994; Miller & Yavneh (eds.) 2011. Also Hanawalt 1993. From other areas such as Scotland Nugent & Ewan (eds.) 2015.

⁸ For instance Foyster & Marten 2010. See also Bailey 2012 and on parents' feelings towards their children Kaartinen 2014.

⁹ Harris 2012. About siblings in the early modern period: Miller & Yavneh 2006. On sibling relations in early modern Sweden and Finland see Lahtinen 2001.

Girlhood studies for the most part, focus on modern times; from the nineteenth century onwards.¹⁰ Their time-frame is, therefore, very narrow, although their analytical approach, namely that girlhood can be studied as a cultural phenomenon, is naturally very useful in my research. Several cultural historians have treated the subject of girlhood in their studies, albeit in a later period than my own. Although their approach is historical and they treat girlhood as an age-specific cultural phenomenon, their studies still focus on modern times, the nineteenth century or afterwards.¹¹

Studies focusing on eighteenth-century girlhood history have their drawbacks. They have clearly focused on working class girlhood and usually focus on the late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century period.¹² In fact, interest in elite girlhood history among academic researchers has been rare. Alternatively, elite girlhood has been looked at through certain themes, such as education, in which gendered childhood and youth are more clearly visible.¹³ For the most part, these studies still tend to concentrate on the general views on girlhood produced by adults, rather than focusing on personal experiences of girlhood. Moreover, there is still a need for a study that gives a broad view of eighteenth-century elite girlhood and gives voice to the girls themselves. This is a void my thesis will fill.

Some of the girls studied here have raised much scholarly interest on their adulthood lives. The authors Fanny Burney¹⁴ and Maria Edgeworth¹⁵ have been studied through their well-known literary careers. However, despite this extensive previous work, I focus on them as girls and as subjects of the research question of girlhood, and I do not go beyond that theme in this study. This also applies to Lady Mary Pierrepont (Wortley Montagu), Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, Sarah Robinson Scott, Mary Granville Delany and Eliza Dawson Fletcher, who have been studied through their roles as social authors, bluestockings and Enlightenment thinkers.¹⁶ As regards the rest of the girls, namely Lady Louisa Stuart, Lady Harriet Pitt, Lady Sarah Spencer and the Wynne sisters, I am entering relatively new territory. Historian

¹⁰ For instance in Finland Ojanen, Mulari & Aaltonen (toim.) 2011. A global approach is provided by Helgren & Vasconcellos (eds.) 2010. There are also many studies on girlhood in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Britain and the US e.g. Moruzi 2012; Hunter 2002; Gomersell 1997. Recent early modern girlhood histories include Cohen & Reeves (eds.) 2018.

¹¹ Mulari 2015; Vehkalahti 2008.

¹² For working-class girlhood with a large timeframe Maynes, Søland & Benninghaus (eds.) 2005.

¹³ Girlhood history and education in Britain see, Simonton 1988; Vallone 1995; Simonton 2011; Hilton & Shefrin (eds.) 2009; O'Dowd 2018. On elite girlhood and education in eighteenth-century Sweden see Parland-von Essen 2005.

¹⁴ Darby 1997; Crump (ed.) 2002; Straub 1987; Johnson 1995.

¹⁵ Hollingworth 1997; Kowaleski-Wallace 1991; Nodelman 2008.

¹⁶ On the bluestockings and their correspondence: Sairio 2009; Eger 2010; Laird & Weisberg-Roberts 2009.

Elaine Chalus is currently studying the life of Elizabeth (Betsey) Wynne (Fremantle). I have included the Wynne sisters in my study with some reservations, for reasons that I explain fully on page 21. The rest of the girls have gained no scholarly interest, whatsoever. The information of the lives of the girls derives mostly from biographies and primary sources, the majority of biographies dating back to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and mostly compiled by their families. There are few recent scholarly biographies.¹⁷ I explain why I use printed sources below.

Girlhood

How can we look at elite girlhood in the eighteenth-century context? In this study, I will combine several categories of historical analysis, namely gender, age and social class. All three categories apply to the lives of the girls I discuss and had a huge, impact on them.¹⁸ The impacts of the various factors on each girl often differed. This combination allows me to present a much more vivid image of eighteenth-century girlhood than previously seen in girlhood histories. However, the line between girlhood and womanhood is often blurred, as O'Dowd and Purvis have correctly pointed out.¹⁹ As I will show in this study, girlhood did not automatically end, for instance, at the age of legal maturity (twenty-one) or in marriage.

In order to grasp the phenomenon of eighteenth-century girlhood, I have chosen not to look only at chronological age, but at age as historical process too. By 'age' I mean both the chronological age and stage of the human life-cycle, such as youth or adulthood. Chronological age and life-stage did not always correspond. Adulthood did not always occur at a specific age, for instance. Historians focusing on age agree that age-bound identities change throughout a person's life-cycle. This includes a constant physical and social transformation that is marked with certain rites of passages. Age is about power relations and cultural expectations. Certain things are expected at different stages in life. The expectations of life also vary according to gender. However, age is also a subjective experience.²⁰ Rudolf Dekker reminds us that youth and adulthood have been separated by various boundaries, legal, social and medical, which change over time and are therefore not universal. Childhood and

¹⁷ Regarding the Lennox sisters, I lean heavily on the celebrated biography of Stella Tillyard 1995 (1994). Edith Curtis also published a biography of Lady Sarah Lennox in 1946. Isobel Grundy has made a thorough study of Lady Mary Pierrepont (Wortley Montagu). See Grundy 2004 (1999). Biographies of Fanny Burney: Seeley 1900; Dobson 1903; Doody 1988 of Elizabeth Robinson Montagu: Dolan 1873; Climenson 1906 and of Maria Edgeworth: Lawless 1904; *The Life and letters of Maria Edgeworth* Augustus J.C. Hare (ed.) 1895.

¹⁸ I have used this same approach in my article Karppinen-Kummunmäki 2018.

¹⁹ O'Dowd & Purvis 2018, 2.

²⁰ Maynes et. al. 2005, 2–3; Paris 2008, 107; Mintz 2008, 91–93; Yallop 2016 (2013), 5.

youth can nevertheless be seen as distinct from adulthood. An adult is something that a child is not. It must be noted that it is often the adults that define youth and childhood, but not the reverse.²¹

Looking at girlhood through gender is another approach. Gender, like age, is regulated by norms and ideals and is influenced by social and institutional factors that are historically and culturally constructed as Joan Scott has argued. Moreover, gendered identity can be seen as a performance, in a Butlerian sense, something that people constantly act out through speech and gestures. Gender is produced through cultural discourses. The concept of performativity derives from Judith Butler, who contradicted the idea of male/female dichotomy as essentially biological in her famous and influential book *Gender Trouble* (1990). Gender is easily naturalized but it is not natural or given.²² Several historians agree that eighteenth-century notions of gender were fluid and not constricted by dichotomies, as they were in the centuries to follow. The Lacqueurian “two-sexed model” was still on the process of development, and no approach was universally embraced.²³ (To this discussion I will return in Section 2.1.) In the eighteenth-century gender difference was, for the most part, manifested in the body. Politeness²⁴ and the regulation of the body were essential aspects of being a female in eighteenth-century England. The rules of politeness dictated the appropriate behaviour for a female. Soile Ylivuori concludes that the way girls and women behaved and controlled their bodies constructed the gender difference. Moreover, the body was the locus on which eighteenth-century women and girls could negotiate agency and subjectivity. By utilizing their bodies the girls could both construct the gender difference and practice their own freedom.²⁵

When did girlhood start and when did it end? As it is impossible to trace any personal girlhood experiences before the girls acquired the skill to write, I assume that girlhood started whenever a child acquired a gendered identity. She became called a girl, not just a baby, infant or child. There is no agreement in the field as to when girlhood starts and when it ends. Other historians, like O’Dowd and Purvis, have stated that in early modern English society a girl is a young female anywhere

²¹ Dekker 2000, 6.

²² Scott 1986, 1056, 1067–1068; Butler 2008 (1990), 229, 235–236. See also Liljeström 1996, 134; Raddeker 2007, 175–177.

²³ Wharman 2004, 7–8; Harvey 2002, 910–913; Ylivuori 2015, 30.

²⁴ Politeness was the essence of eighteenth-century English society. It meant not only good manners, but also refinement, sociability, hospitality and self-edification. Ideal social interaction was easy and informal. This also meant natural interaction in mix-sexed company. In fact, women were thought to excel men in this regard. Their edifying good influence on men was seen as an important part of politeness. Klein 1989, 583, 603, Glover 2011, 3–4; Ylivuori 2015, 37–42; Karppinen-Kummunmäki 2015, 203–204; Ylivuori 2019, 14–15, 20. On politeness and self-fashioning see Kekäläinen 2012.

²⁵ Ylivuori 2015, 35; Ylivuori 2019, 15–17.

from infancy to her mid- or late twenties.²⁶ Within this categorization adolescent years have been divided into three stages: preadolescence (age nine or ten to thirteen), middle teenage years (from fourteen to seventeen or eighteen) and late teens to the early twenties.²⁷ Instead relying on the categorizations of other researchers, in section 2.1 I will look at the ways in which human life cycle was seen in the eighteenth-century context and how girls fit into it. These categorizations, however, functioned as loose frameworks only, and importantly, they were usually applied to males, not females. Although earlier studies have generally seen marriage as the rite of passage between youth and adulthood, this was not necessarily the case, as O’Dowd and Purvis remind us when they point out that child marriages and contemporary definitions of minors cloud the issue.²⁸ Moreover, marriage wasn’t the lot of every female in the eighteenth century. Amy Froide has suggested that prior to 1700 perhaps one third of the adult population never married.²⁹ And when they did, the estimated average age of marriage between 1600 and 1750 was twenty-six years. Towards the end of the eighteenth century this age decreased somewhat. Elite females tended to marry slightly younger than their social inferiors, most often in their late teens and early twenties.³⁰

Instead of looking at girlhood as a strictly chronological phenomenon, I want to stress that girlhood was a process in the eighteenth century. Even though young females lived under male authority, the social restrictions were relaxed when a girl grew older.³¹ She had much more freedom to be an active agent in her life when she was almost a young woman rather than a little girl just out of her baby clothes. Girlhood was seen as a slow and gradual progression through youthful years towards adulthood. As they got older, girls learnt different things and experienced life accordingly. Different events and features marked this passage. It is my suggestion that marriage was not the point when girlhood ended in all cases. Adulthood was reached when skills necessary to fulfil one’s role as a mature adult in society were acquired.

²⁶ O’Dowd & Purvis 2018, 2–3. Also O’Dowd 2018, 54.

²⁷ In comparison, in her study Kim M. Phillips defines the term “maiden,” the closest equivalent in medieval times, as referring to a young unmarried woman past childhood but not yet fully adult and age between her teens and early twenties. Phillips 2003, 3, 4.

²⁸ O’Dowd & Purvis 2018, 2–3. See also Maynes et. al. 2005; 3; Simonton 2011, 21.

²⁹ Froide 2005, 3–4.

³⁰ Mendelson & Crawford 1998, 111, 128, 129; Froide 2005, 5; Simonton 2004, 364; Simonton 2011, 20. Anna-Christina Giovanopoulos has argued that the percentage of child marriages was less than 0.5%, although she does not state what she means by a child. Giovanopoulos 2006, 47.

³¹ See Cohen & Reeves 2018, 12.

Agency

The second important concept for this study is agency. How can we understand agency of girls in history? Mary Jo Maynes has stated that girls' agency has generally been seen as restricted by powerlessness, invisibility and marginal status. According to her, the main problem in defining girls' agency has been inadequate notions of historical agency. A historical actor is understood as autonomous, driven by rational choice, and being aware of the world and how it functions.³² In the eighteenth-century, when an adult male was the measure of human being, it might seem that girls and women had no autonomy at all. Society was hierarchically structured: the male dominated the female, masters their servants, and parents their children. Yet, this is not the whole picture. Even though this would suggest a lack of agency for girls and women, they found a multitude of ways to exert influence within society. As Anu Lahtinen points out in her studies of the agency of late medieval and early modern women, by changing the way we look at agency and power-relations, we can see that females were active agents and were able to influence their conditions in life within the limits of historical-cultural boundaries. They commented on the norms of their day by adapting to them, interpreting and even remoulding them.³³ I am following Lahtinen's example by looking at the ways the girls were able to adapt and remould the norms according to their individual choices. Eighteenth-century girlhood had, therefore, a great deal to do with power, or the lack of it, and both social and age-bound hierarchies that sometimes clashed and required some navigation from the girls. Following Deborah Simonton, I start with the assumption that eighteenth-century girls recognized the importance of girlhood years in their lives, and actively tried to influence the shape that those years would take.³⁴ Mary O'Dowd, too, has shown that eighteenth-century Irish girls showed a sense of self-identity, sexual awareness and rebelled against parental authority.³⁵ Instead of simply examining what was said about girls by others, that is, by parents, didactical authors and so on. In this study I will closely observe what these girls thought about themselves and the world around them. In this way, it is possible to reveal something about the eighteenth century that would otherwise remain hidden.

It is sometimes said that girlhood agency is difficult to study due to the lack of sources.³⁶ Sources describing girls' own experiences, such as letters and diaries, are

³² Maynes 2008, 116.

³³ Lahtinen 2007, 12, 14, 25–26. Anu Korhonen sums up that historical agency is the combination of individual choices and historical-cultural conditions and possibilities. Agency is a constant process of negotiating and interpretation. Kaartinen & Korhonen 2005, 145–146, 150.

³⁴ Simonton 2011, 20.

³⁵ O'Dowd 2018, 54.

³⁶ Maynes 2008, 116–117.

few. Most of the material is produced by adults. Thus, youths are defined by others, not by the youths themselves. Girls and young women lived in the margins of public life and were invisible in the public records. “Good girls” did not leave any traces in the sources.³⁷ But the argument about the lack of sources is not completely valid. In this study, I show that there are sources, produced by the girls themselves that enable me to study their personal experiences. These sources give me access to their own views of themselves and their lives. I also show that the girls were not passive, but instead active in shaping their own lives. These first-hand documents are complemented with memoirs written later in life, which also reveal aspects from their girlhood, albeit perhaps interpreted with the benefit of hindsight and experience of adulthood.

The eighteenth century, or the Georgian era in the case of England, is a fruitful period to study girlhood experiences. Although the concept of childhood had been recognized in previous centuries, Enlightenment thinking had a considerable impact on how childhood and youth were perceived. More and more, childhood started to be seen as a special time of life with specific needs.³⁸ Toys and literature intended specifically for children increased in number, indicating the importance of childhood years. The way family was perceived also changed during this period. Families became important in political thought: well-functioning families represented the economic and political strength of nations. Children became important for the nation’s future well-being.³⁹ Girls were, therefore, a crucial group that were at the intersection of being dependant minors and full-grown independent adults.⁴⁰

Besides gender and family, class, or to use more contemporary suitable term social status, was a significant factor in the experiences of eighteenth-century girls. The focus of this study is clearly on the upper echelons of English society, and it, therefore, does not represent the girlhood of the eighteenth-century as whole, but looks at a small and somewhat privileged group. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have demonstrated in their famous study of the English eighteenth-century middle-class *Family Fortunes*, gender and class always operate together and class consciousness always takes a gendered form.⁴¹

There were approximately 2000 noble families in eighteenth-century Britain. The highest stratum, the aristocracy, was its smallest group, which held the greatest political power in the kingdom. Only peers had access to the House of Lords. It is estimated that by the time of King George II, there were some 180 English peers, and

³⁷ Ojanen 2011, 9–44; Tuomaala 2011, 45; Ylivuori 2015, 210–211.

³⁸ Immel & Witmore (eds.) 2006; Hilton & Shefrin (eds.) 2009; Fletcher 2008 (2010); Cunningham 2014 (1995).

³⁹ Davidoff & Hall 2002 (1987), 321, 343; Foyster & Marten 2010, 1, 3, 6.

⁴⁰ About the importance of studying children and the young see Harris 2009, 334; Immel & Witmore 2006, 5.

⁴¹ Davidoff & Hall 2002 (1987), xxxii, 13.

some 200 at the end of century (as only the eldest son inherited the title). The English, Scottish and Irish peers constituted their own peerages. After the Act of Union in 1707, the English and Scottish peerages were united, forming the peerage of Great Britain. Younger sons of the aristocracy and members of the gentry attended the House of Commons.⁴² Below the aristocracy on the social ladder was the gentry: the non-hereditary lesser nobility (such as knights), non-titled landowners, clergy and other professionals. Historians have frequently debated who belonged to this group. Amanda Vickery calls them the gentility, lesser gentry, “the polite” and “the genteel”. She includes landowners with no title and urban professionals in the gentry.⁴³ In their historical research Ingrid Tague and Hannah Greig have focused on “the quality” and the beau monde. Tague includes in “the Quality” those, with or without a title, who participated in certain social events, shared social codes, and knew how to act in certain situations. Members of the quality represented taste and good behaviour.⁴⁴ Hannah Greig defines her beau monde as a group of privileged fashionable people who had a social impact within Georgian urban society, as manifested in the London season. Although inherited rank was not a necessary requirement, most prominent members of this group were peers.⁴⁵ According to Vickery, the lesser gentry did not pretend to be part of the “quality” and the elites, however.⁴⁶ “Polite society” is also a possible term to define elite status, as politeness was a major part of societal discourse in the early part of the eighteenth century. Politeness defined the moral codes for the members of the elites.

I decided to call this group the elite⁴⁷ because this word best describes it, as it includes the variety of social positions the girls studied here represented. The term gives me space to look at a sufficiently wide range of people to give a wide enough picture of girlhood in the upper layers of English society. It is true that the girls nevertheless belonged to families from an array of backgrounds that varied socially and often had widely divergent financial resources. The girls studied here were daughters of aristocrats, gentry and even urban professionals. Yet, in they shared

⁴² Foreman 2001 (1998), xvii; Kaartinen 2006, 31; Greig 2013, 266. The British peerage consisted of dukes, marquises, earls, viscounts and barons. In some cases a woman could carry the title on her own right, but usually she carried the courtesy title in accordance of her husband’s rank. The eldest son of a duke also carried a lower-ranking title of his own right. Greig 2013, 266.

⁴³ Vickery 1999 (1998), 13.

⁴⁴ Tague 2002, 13.

⁴⁵ Greig 2013, 15, 17–18.

⁴⁶ Vickery 2002, 13. Lucy Worsley also speaks of pseudo-gentry, who aspired to a genteel lifestyle but were not wealthy enough. Worsley 2017, 28

⁴⁷ Following the example of Chalus 2005, 8; Kaartinen 2006, 35; Glover 2011, 15–17. For instance, Soile Ylivuori, in her study on Fanny Burney, Elizabeth Robinson Montagu and Mary Grenville Delany, has dealt with their ambiguous relationship with “politeness.” See Ylivuori 2018, 27–33.

similar values of life-style and expectations of girlhood. They had a only limited number of choices to maintain themselves besides marriage to an appropriate husband or legacies from their fathers. They had to live in an age-gender hierarchy that valued innocent, modest behaviour of girls and submissiveness to male authority. Naturally, the ways these values were treated varied according to their personalities and circumstances in life. The contradictions between collective beliefs and individual thinking are keys to a certain historical society. These contradictions often provide the key to the mores of a society of a given historical period and region. Instead of looking at structures of society alone, cultural historians focus on meanings and the ways people of the past created and interacted with them.⁴⁸ Individuals can and should be studied as individuals with personal traits/characteristics. The experiences of the girls studied here varied, but they can tell us a great deal about their time in general. It is the breakage points and frictions that reveal the norm.

1.2 Tracing female youth in sources

Correspondence, diaries and autobiographies

Autobiographical texts constitute the primary sources for this study. These texts include letters, diaries and autobiographies. The reason for choosing the writings of this group of girls is that they include very self-reflective passages on girlhood. If something is deemed as self-evident it goes unmentioned in the sources. And that is very difficult place for a historian to build a study on. There certainly are more sources in the archives but in the scope of one research it would have been impossible to go through them all. Besides, it is doubtful whether a bigger body of texts would bring any more material benefit for this study as it is qualitative not quantitative. As I focus on girlhood experiences, I mainly look at those texts that have been written before the age of twenty-one and/or around the time of the writer's marriage. In some cases, it is possible to trace a change in personal views from girlhood to adulthood. In these cases, I have included texts written later in life. I have included adulthood texts that can bring more insight into girlhood, as well. As society and family played an important part in forming eighteenth-century girlhood, I also looked at texts written by the girls' older siblings, parents and friends that commented on girlhood.

Letters are by far the most common source type in this study. The correspondence appearing in this research is written by the Lennox sisters, Elizabeth and Sarah Robinson, Lady Mary Pierrepont, Lady Louisa Stuart, Lady Harriet Pitt, Lady Sarah Spencer, Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd and Maria Edgeworth. The Lennox sisters

⁴⁸ See for instance Kaartinen & Korhonen 2005, 31, 123–126, 135; Leskelä-Kärki 2006 22–24; Ollila 2010, 65, 66.

corresponded frequently with each other. The sets of correspondence are between the following pairs: Emily (b.1731) and Sarah (b.1745) between the years 1760–94, Emily and Caroline (b.1723) 1756–1774, Emily and Louisa (b. 1743) 1759–1805. These letters are published by Brian FitzGerald under the title *Correspondence of Emily, Duchess of Leinster* (1949–1953). The manuscripts of Lady Sarah’s and Lady Louisa’s correspondence (1759–1821) are held in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin. Sarah also had frequent correspondence with a relative and a friend Lady Susan Fox-Strangways (1761–1817). Their letters have been published under the title *Life and Letters of Lady Sarah Lennox 1745–1826* (in two volumes, 1901–1902).⁴⁹ Childhood letters from Caroline and Emily to their parents are included in *A Duke and His Friends. The Life and Letters of the second Duke of Richmond* (in two volumes, 1911). Sisters and other family members were the usual addressees with the other girls, as well. Sarah Robinson’s correspondence (from 1740 onwards) mainly with her sister Elizabeth, has recently been edited by Nicole Pohl (2014) as *The Letters of Sarah Scott*. Lady Mary Pierrepont’s extensive correspondence from 1708 onwards is edited by Robert Halsband in *The Complete letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (1965–1967). The rest are published editions from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, usually edited by family members or friends. Elizabeth Robinson’s vast correspondence with several of her friends and family (1732 onwards) was published as *The Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu* (1825)⁵⁰, Lady Louisa Stuart’s correspondence mainly with her sister (1778–1784) in *Gleanings from an Old Portfolio*. (1895), Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd’s girlhood letters (1776–1796) as *The Girlhood of Maria Josepha Holroyd* (1897), Lady Sarah Spencer’s letters from the age of 17 in 1804 as *Correspondence of Sarah Spencer Lady Lyttelton 1787–1870* (1912), Lady Harriet Pitt’s letters in *The Letters of Lady Harriot Eliot 1766–1786* (1914) and Maria Edgeworth’s letters in *A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth, with a selection from her letters* (1867).

⁴⁹ Lady Sarah also wrote to her sister Caroline, but those letters have not survived. The archives of the Fox family in the British Library, known as the Holland House papers, are constructed mainly to form some kind of political testament to Henry Fox, Lady Caroline’s husband, and their son Charles James. Therefore it was not thought necessary to preserve Caroline’s private papers. See Stella Tillyard’s comments about the Holland House papers: Tillyard 1995 (1994), 427–429.

⁵⁰ There is a research project going on for editing the staggering number of 8000 letters written by Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, *Elizabeth Montagu and the Bluestocking Circle* conducted at Swansea University. Unfortunately, the fruits of this work, apart from the published edition of Sarah Robinson Scott correspondence, are not yet available. The project webpage is <http://www.elizabethmontaguletters.co.uk/home>. Also Anni Sairio (University of Helsinki) has been engaged in a project of transforming Elizabeth’s letters into digitally readable form. The project website is <http://bluestocking.ling.helsinki.fi/index.php/correspondents/emontagu/>

The reason for selecting mainly published material is that high standard scholarly editions, at least for some collections, were available. These editions have frequently been used in academic studies. In some cases, as for instance, the letters of Emily, Duchess of Leinster, I went through the original manuscripts (located in the National Library of Ireland) and noticed that the differences between the collection and the actual manuscripts were so small that they have no impact on my research.⁵¹ The rest of the collections certainly have their drawbacks, namely, that they are usually compiled and edited by the subject's descendants, who have no academic purpose. But, as in all studies concerning the early modern or eighteenth-century periods, the unevenness of the sources is a fact. The survival of the material can be purely a matter of chance.⁵² In some cases, old editions have preserved passages of texts and letters that have not survived in the original manuscript form. Additionally, conducting a doctoral thesis with grants, as most Finnish doctoral candidates do, places some financial constraints on the researcher, who may not be able to access all the available archival material. But these hindrances should not prevent us from using the material that is available. I also want to point out that it is possible to look at these editions from a fresh perspective and make new interpretations, while, of course, acknowledging their limitations. So far, these specific sources have not been read for girlhood experiences or in an age-oriented manner. Although, as Amy Harris rightly points out,⁵³ published letter-collections tend to focus on adulthood correspondence and are often compiled by relatives who censored them, my study shows that it is still possible to use these letters to conduct research of this kind. The drawbacks of the source material have been, duly noted, but their extent and the combination of different kinds of sources has enabled me to conduct an analysis that avoid many of the potential pitfalls and minimize use of misleading source material in my analysis.

The eighteenth century can be termed the century of the letter. The period saw an immense rise in epistolary manuals and publication of literary letters as examples for good letter-writing. The letter was an essential part of everyday life, business and government. The girls kept in touch with their relatives and friends, and sent news about politics and social gossip to their parents while staying away from home. The improvement in postal services in England during this century meant that people were able to keep in contact with each other more easily and frequently than before. The

⁵¹ The only difference I was able to trace was in the order of the letters, which can be explained by the difficulties of dating them.

⁵² In case of correspondence the writer herself might have destroyed her letters or asked her family to do so. A descendant might have destroyed material to preserve her good name and memory. The family archives were more likely to preserve letters from kin rather than those of other people. See Vickery 1999 (1998), 30. For instance, Fanny Burney sorted out her papers in old age to make them ready for publishing. This work was continued by her niece Charlotte Barrett. See Delafield 2012, 26.

⁵³ Harris 2009, 335.

girls were aware of how long it took for a letter to reach the recipient. The variation in time would also allow them excuses for their negligence in their correspondence. From a modern perspective, the eighteenth-century letter was neither a public nor a private form of writing. Letters were shared, read aloud to others and passed on to third parties. They were an essential part of politeness, as only polite and well-bred people knew how to use correct epistolary style in different situations. Therefore, being part of the elite also meant proper instruction into letter-writing. In fact, letters can better be termed “personal” rather than private or public.⁵⁴

The relation between the letter and the surrounding environment is both representative and performative. Letters can tell something about the person who wrote them, but also they represent the self, a performance. Letters can tell something about the relationship of the writer and the recipient, but at the same time the correspondence is the environment, where the relationship is built and kept up. In addition, the letters do not tell us about the time when they were written as such, they are a literary performance bound by conventions.⁵⁵

The sources of this study include some diaries, which in the eighteenth-century context, are very similar to letters. These are the girlhood diaries of Fanny Burney (1768–1778), Anne Tracy (1723–5), and Elizabeth (Betsey) and Eugenia Wynne (1789–18). No diaries written by children or young people in England prior to 1750 survive⁵⁶, which means that all such sources studied here come from the latter part of the period. I use the following published editions: *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney* edited Lars E. Troide (1988, 1990) and *The Wynne Diaries 1789–1820* edited by Anne Fremantle (1953 [1952]). Anne Tracy’s diary is included in *Family Life in England and America, 1690–1820*, vol. 3 edited by Amy Harris (2015).⁵⁷

The Wynne sisters make a striking exception in this group. They were born in England, but their diaries were written mostly while they were living as émigrés in Switzerland and Italy. Can a historian say anything certain about the past based on the sources available to her? The problem of representativeness is always present in qualitative research. The Wynne sisters were different, that is true. In this study I use them mostly as a comparison to other girls. Their experiences and observations and the differences in the ways they were brought up provide a sounding board for what “normal” English girlhood was in the elite circles of the eighteenth century. The family belonged to the landed gentry but became impoverished and moved abroad. By that time, Betsey and Eugenia (aged eight and six respectively) had already started their primary education. Therefore, the “basis” of their girlhood was very much

⁵⁴ Pohl 2001, 137–138; Brant 2006, 1, 4–5; Vainio-Korhonen 2011, 141–142; Hannan 2016, 40.

⁵⁵ Lahtinen et al. 2011, 21–22. See also Stanley 2004.

⁵⁶ Harris 2009, 338.

⁵⁷ I am very grateful to Dr Harris for sending me copy of this publication.

English and gentry, although later the girls' education and the society they socialized in were more aristocratic.

Like letters, eighteenth-century diaries were not private in the sense that they were not written solely for the writer herself. Journals were occasionally read by members of the family and friends. However, this does not mean they were not self-reflective or intimate. In fact, young people were encouraged to keep a journal to exercise their self-scrutiny and reflection. Good and bad conduct was to be carefully recorded. For both boys and girls, diaries were supposed to help them search out their own identity. Diaries could also become a place for solace in distress.⁵⁸ Diaries were, like any other literary composition, always subject to selection, conscious or unconscious. Since diary entries may have been made weeks or even months after the event, which certainly allowed space for meditation before recording.⁵⁹

For eighteenth-century females, both letters and diaries were the locus for creating selfhood. The girls expressed their gendered subjectivity both as persons and as representatives of the female sex. Their writing shows that they struggled with the contradicting expectations and norms of creating their selfhood and ultimately womanhood. In the privacy of their diaries, for instance, they were able to be impolite, saucy and frustrated, and express their thoughts more freely than in the company of others. Their diaries provide access to the growing up process and struggles of self-formation, and reveal a longing for autonomy.⁶⁰ This, however, does not mean that we have access to the purely authenticated self. Rather, letters and diaries show, too, the varying identities that the girls adopted depending on the situations and the people they interacted with.⁶¹ Isobel Grundy has shown that Lady Mary Pierrepont (Wortley Montagu) used her correspondence as an arena for self-justifications and identity-statements. Her statements varied in tone according to her age and her role as an unmarried lady, a wife and a mother.⁶² Dan Doll and Jessica Munns note that, for instance, Fanny Burney's claim that she is artless in her diary pages is a carefully constructed strategy targeted both others who read her writings and her older self: she created a character that both concealed and revealed.⁶³

I also use some autobiographies as a source for this study. Even though these sources were produced later in life, they can still give us hints at the ways girlhood was perceived in the eighteenth-century. This group of sources include the

⁵⁸ Sjöbald 1998, 520–521; Dekker 2000, 16–17, 50; Fletcher 2002, 421; Fletcher 2010 (2008), 283–284; Ylivuori 2015, 226.

⁵⁹ Dekker 2000, 16; Doll & Munns 2006, 10–11.

⁶⁰ Brant 2006, 18; Goodman 2009, 251.

⁶¹ Lowenthal 2010 (1994), 4, 9; Ylivuori 2015, 211, 213–214; Chalus 2019a, 222.

⁶² Grundy 2012, 11; Grundy 2019, 140–143. According to Grundy, Lady Mary's early poetry, written at the age of 14, included statements such as "I am a Woman." Grundy 2012, 11.

⁶³ Doll & Munns 2006, 12.

published autobiographies (edited by their family members) of Mary Granville *The autobiography and correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany: with interesting reminiscences of King George the Third and Queen Charlotte* (1861)⁶⁴ and Eliza Dawson's *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher. With Letters and Other Family Memorials* (1876). At the age of 20, Mary Berry wrote a short scetch of her early life, which I also include among my sources. This was published under the title *Extracts from the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry from the year 1783 to 1852* (1866).

Autobiographies were carefully selected compositions, and were written with a certain audience in mind, usually the generations to come. The autobiographies used in this study have been edited by family members, who may have omitted passages that they felt would be damaging to the subject's reputation. In the case of Mary Granville (Pendarves/Delany), the published edition is the only extant version of her autobiography: the original manuscript has been lost.⁶⁵ In general, as Rudolf Dekker points out, autobiography was more a public medium than the diary. Manuscript versions were meant to circulate among the family, but usually autobiographies were intended for publishing. Childhood memories are not just personal, but collective. The impact of parents, siblings and friends is crucial. Shared memories are more easily remembered than wholly personal ones.⁶⁶ Mary Jo Maynes argues that personal life narratives are historical sources as they "unpack" individual agency, that is reveal the constructions of people's actions and their intersection with social and historical hierarchies. Even though they do not give us access to first-hand experience, they still tell us how an individual's actions were shaped by life experiences, memories and emotions. Moreover, they provide information about behavioural and emotional standards: in this case, how girls should have felt and behaved.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ This collection also includes 1500 letters, which I also use for selective purposes. As in all edited collections, Delany's great-niece made heavy alterations, omitting letters and passages and changing the language from the originals. The surviving letters have been scattered around libraries and archives in Great Britain and the United States. Some of them have disappeared, including the pages that contain the autobiography. Thomason 2014, 86–87.

⁶⁵ Laura Thomason has analyzed in detail Granville's autobiography and its problems as a source for historical analysis. Thomason 2014, 86–88.

⁶⁶ Dekker 2000, 18, 122–123. See Pol 2011, 70. Dekker claims that autobiographical writers were well aware of the intended audience. The image they presented was carefully selected and polished. Dekker 2000, 18. This argument is, rather hard to accept as it over-generalizes. However, Fanny Burney was very aware of her audience when she wrote her diaries as Soile Ylivuori has shown. See Ylivuori 2015, 226–232.

⁶⁷ Maynes 2008, 119. See also Ulbrich 2014, 63.

Normative sources

I also use an array of texts that enable me to construct the normative framework for girlhood i.e. how girls were seen in social, medical and legal terms. They provide me with the structure, but they are not objects of research as such. Typical for the field of cultural history, I use the so-called “close-reading method” in which the sources are interpreted in their historical and cultural context.⁶⁸ I read these normative sources alongside the autobiographical texts to show what the norms and expectations of girlhood were and how did the feelings and actions of these girls contradict them. For the most part, these texts have one thing in common; as Brigitte Glaser has pointed out, they treated girls as future women. Girls were not perceived as in their present state, as children and young females, but in terms of their future roles as wives, mothers and societal ladies. The expectations they reveal tell us a great deal about ideal womanhood in the period.⁶⁹

Medical and legal treatises give an idea of how age and gender were understood in this period: for example, how girls were positioned in society in terms of their minority or their female gender. I have selected publications from throughout the period to detect possible changes in ideas and definitions of girlhood. Dictionaries are useful to find out how different concepts of female youth were defined. As with other normative sources, I have selected dictionaries that were published in different decades of the century. I searched for words such as “girl” and alternatives such as “virgin” and “maid” and also adjectives such as “girlish.” For comparative purposes, I also looked at how the word “boy” has been defined. I have searched newspapers and magazines, to see how terms of female youth were used in everyday life. For this I have used the electronic database ECCO (*Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*), provided by the University of Turku. This database enabled me to search for single words, thus making it possible to look through large bodies of text.

The largest group of contemporary sources are conduct books and other didactic publications. They are useful both in defining the parameters of female youth and the social expectations around them. There has been some debate among eighteenth-century historians about whether conduct literature is an appropriate source to use in studies of elite girlhood or womanhood.⁷⁰ However, whether or not the girls actually read any of the books mentioned does not alter their value as evidence of the ways ideal womanhood was perceived in this period. By educating girls, their authors wished to create the ideal future woman.

⁶⁸ Karppinen-Kummumäki 2018, 215.

⁶⁹ Glaser 2006, 190.

⁷⁰ Vallone 1995, 27–28; Tague 2001, 82–84; Tague 2002, 22, 30; Capp 2004 (2003), 26; Bérenguer 2011, 1, 7; O’Dowd 2018, 53.

A few notes on the text: Citations referring to correspondence are marked in the footnotes with the name of the collection (abbreviated), the name of the sender and the recipient, and the date and page numbers of the whole letter. When I cite autobiographies or diaries, I only refer to the collection and individual page number as it is sometimes difficult to identify the exact date. It must be noted that the orthography of these texts varies and can be very different from current English. I have not made any changes to the spelling or punctuation used in the editions.

2 IS IT A GIRL OR A BOY? A GIRL IN THE ELITE FAMILY AND SOCIETY

In this chapter I look at the ways girlhood was defined in medical, legal and societal terms. How did these definitions manifest themselves in society and in the life of the girls as daughters and sisters? How did the girls appearing in this study negotiate with the limitations these definitions caused? Did they accept them at face value or did they criticize them, or even rebel against them? And if so, how did they do that? Mary O’Dowd rightly stresses that in order to study the lives of girls in the past we have to give close attention to their age, whether they were adolescent or closer to being young women.⁷¹ However, girlhood was not only connected to chronological age. It comprised a range of other attributes as well.

2.1 Girlhood as a life stage

Gender and submissiveness

The girls appearing in this study recognized the gendered norms of their time, but they did not always accept them at face value. Some girls commented on these things in direct terms. In 1710 Lady Mary Pierrepont, then aged 21, commented on the notions of gender of her time. Writing to Lord Bishop of Salisbury she had no

doubt God and Nature has thrown us into an Inferior Rank. We are a lower part of the Creation; we owe Obedience and Submission to the Superior Sex; and any Woman who suffers her Vanity and folly to deny this, Rebels against the Law of the Creator and indisputable Order of Nature.⁷²

Outwardly she accepted the inferior and submissive position of females, but as the whole purpose of the letter was to argue against the poor condition of female

⁷¹ O’Dowd 2018, 68.

⁷² MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Gilbert Burnet, the Lord Bishop of Salisbury, 20.7.1710, 43–46.

education, the reader suspects that Lady Mary did not share the notion of the inferiority of women, at least when regarding the capacity of the mind. According to Isobel Grundy, both the Bishop of Salisbury and his wife Elizabeth, a writer herself, had the traditional view of gender which might explain why Lady Mary toned down her own opinions.⁷³ This was not the only occasion when Lady Mary played with the typical notions of females. In her love letters to Edward Wortley Montagu, she stated “I have not the usual Pride of my Sex. I can bear being told I am in the wrong, but tell it me gently.” In this statement Lady Mary echoed the usual stereotype of all females being vain and easily offended. Lady Mary raised herself above this and assured her lover that she could be corrected when necessary, but reminded him that it should be done gently as females were the weaker sex. However, she assured him that if he should choose her as his wife, she would “have all the deference due to your superiority of good sense.”⁷⁴ Lady Mary belonged to a family with a long tradition of female scholars. Additionally, she received an extensive education and had (at least secret) access to the library of Thoresby Hall, the family seat of the Pierrepoints.⁷⁵ No wonder young Mary was interested in literary pursuits that were usually out of reach for girls of her age. Fifty years later, fifteen-year-old Fanny Burney also commented on gender difference. The family she grew up in did not have the female academic tradition of Lady Mary’s, but there was a strong interest in intellectual pursuits. Fanny’s father was a professional musician and a scholar. In her diary entry, Fanny was aggrieved that a great author like Homer would express the opinion in his *Iliad* that the female sex was prone to love beauty. She concluded that this general assumption among men was the reason why they thought so little of women, even if it wasn’t true.⁷⁶ In November that same year, Fanny noted in her diary a conversation she had with a male acquaintance, Mr. Seton. Mr. Seton claimed that women in England are sensible but also like devils; censorious, uncharitable and sarcastic. He was struck “to see how forward the girls are made. A child of ten years old will chat and keep you company, while her parents are busy, or out, etc., with the ease of a woman of twenty-six.” But that was all. He praised Fanny and her sister as exceptions, as in any other household a young lady would have yawned all the time with this kind of conversation and not understood a word he said. Fanny concluded that she “said a great deal in defence [sic] of” her “poor sex”, but it sounded so poor compared to her opponent in conversation, that she dared not write it down. Mr. Seaton criticized English ladies of quality, who, as a consequence of inadequate education, had very feeble

⁷³ Grundy 2004 (1999), 37.

⁷⁴ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepoint to Edward Wortley Montagu, 9.4.1711, 99; MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepoint to Edward Wortley Montagu, 25.4.1710, 29–31.

⁷⁵ Grundy 2004 (1999), 10–11, 15–16.

⁷⁶ FB1, 37.

intellectual abilities. This education was the result of the social expectations these women were supposed to live up to. The polite lifestyle was therefore the cause of the degeneration of English women.⁷⁷

There are also several more veiled remarks on the same subject. Nine-year-old Eugenia Wynne, then living in Italy, stated vehemently that she was not a coward or afraid of dead people, Lady Mary Josepha Holroyd, daughter of Lord Sheffield and a scholar, joked to her friend about her delicate nerves, and twenty-year-old Elizabeth Robinson, daughter of a wealthy landowner, wrote that according to the *Spectator* magazine, women only expressed their true sentiments in postscripts, which led her to fill her letter with a postscript. These opinions appeared in everyday scenes in 1789, 1793 and 1740 respectively.⁷⁸

The girls, despite their varying personal and familial backgrounds, outwardly recognized the ways gender was seen in medical thinking of their time. Moreover, they were in a position to acquire knowledge. Yet, I can get the sense from these comments that they did not fully accept these views on gender. Why else would they have commented on them in the first place? Something that is taken at face value needs no comment. Besides, they made jokes about the material they read and even bluntly denied some of the opinions, like Fanny Burney did. Without over-interpreting these remarks they would suggest that these girls did not find gender as something completely fixed and unchangeable. There was the natural order of things and yet girls like Lady Mary liked to make fun on the gender stereotypes. It tells us that they saw their gender as something else than merely given identity, it was also a performance full of social discursives.

The explanations as to why the gender-hierarchy was the way it was differed over time and these too were reflected in the ways the girls played with established gender roles. For instance, Lady Mary Pierrepont, at the beginning of the century, still referred to the divine order of things, as in her letter sent to Bishop of Salisbury quoted above. God created the world and its order and this was not to be broken. Because of the sin of Eve, women were destined for their domestic and submissive role. From a medical point of view, the difference between genders was explained by the influence of the four humours on physiology and psychology. The inner heat of the body was caused by them and formed the basis of the human constitution. Imbalance of these humours caused diseases. They also varied according to gender,

⁷⁷ FB1, 46–47.

⁷⁸ WD 18.9.1789, 8–9; MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 13.10.1793, 244–245; EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 27.12.1740, 44–46.

temperament and social standing.⁷⁹ Towards the end of the eighteenth century rival theories as to why genders were different appeared. For instance, Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd's remark on delicate nerves was connected to these theories. In general, the male sex was deemed stronger and their nervous system was less irritable than that of females. It was generally agreed that females were prone to diseases that men didn't suffer from. These diseases were usually linked to menstruation, childbirth and nursing. Yet the female body was created to fulfil its most important function, childbirth.⁸⁰ In fact, a 1772 treatise claims that because females were "less exposed to inclemency of seasons and fatigue, [they] are consequently more tender and irritable."⁸¹ Although the focus of this study is not questions of gender difference in the early modern period, it may be noted that many historians have exaggerated medical emphasis on female inferiority. They have stated that medical theories of the eighteenth century saw females as a somewhat pathological group and that their physical delicacy was the reason they were also mentally weaker.⁸² However, none of the medical treatises I have read for this study provide clear evidence for such a claim. It is true that, throughout the period at hand, treatises stress that certain diseases were typical for women and that, for instance, menstrual flow and pregnancy restricted their daily activities, but none of them claim that these would diminish women's mental capacities. Females were physically different and more delicate than males, but their mental capacities were not denied on those grounds. This is a question that should be investigated further, but it is not the subject of this thesis.

Another way to look at how gender was perceived in the eighteenth century is these girls' attitudes to cases of cross-dressing. However, there is insufficient evidence to draw any clear conclusions. In 1771, nineteen-year-old Fanny Burney had been visiting her step-sister Maria Allen, and the company present proposed that a play should be performed. Maria was to play a man's role and she asked to

⁷⁹ The four humours, blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile, corresponded with four qualities, dry, wet, hot or cold. Each fluid had its own quality: blood was hot and moist, phlegm cold and moist, black bile cold and dry and yellow bile hot and dry. The blood warmed and moistened the body, phlegm affected brains and kidneys, which were cold and moist, black bile regulated the appetite, and yellow bile regulated the expulsion of the excrements. The humours also corresponded to temperament: blood-sanguine, phlegm-phlegmatic, black bile-melancholic, yellow bile-choleric. See in detail Fletcher 1995, 33; Mendelson & Crawford 1998, 18–26, 31–33; Shoemaker 2013 (1998), 16–21; Kaartinen 2006, 147–148; McKeon 2007 (2005), 272; Fletcher 2010 (2008), 24, 23; Toulalan 2013, 282; Read 2013, 14–16.

⁸⁰ Culpepper 1701, 18; Maubray 1724, 37–49; *The Ladies Dispensatory* 1739, iii, iv, 1, 19; Makittrick 1772, 22, 82–83; Hume 1776, passim.; Freeman 1789, iv–v, 31.

⁸¹ Makittrick 1772, 83.

⁸² McMaster 2004, 22–23; Read 2013, 1–2, 39; Quinlan 2014, 20, 23, 35; McAlpin 2014, 45.

borrow suitable clothes from one of the male guests. While Maria chose her clothes, Fanny stayed out of the room, as she was not able to compose herself to join the others. She was constantly bursting out in laughter; the whole scene was so ridiculous.⁸³ A decade later, in August 1789, eleven-year-old Betsey Wynne described how “Mons. Benincasa dressed up as a woman, and my aunt as a man. I came downstairs without recognising them. But at last Mons. Benincasa made such an absurd curtsy that I knew him an [sic] my aunt also from her voice.”⁸⁴ The way he made his curtsy revealed to Betsey that “the woman” was actually a man. In the following September, Betsey wrote: “Then followed the loveliest and maddest of balls, mascarades [sic], changing of sex, tumbling of women and men on to the floor – in short, we stayed up, all of us, still dancing, until after midnight.”⁸⁵ In the Butlerian view gender is a performance. It is made by actions. Therefore, a female is made through, for instance, properly enacted curtsies. A man who imitates a woman badly can only be ridiculous, but it was also possible to make this change convincingly. It is essential to grasp that gender was seen as fluctuating and playful, but a person’s sex was something fundamentally stable. However, the very fact that this difference of thinking existed in the eighteenth-century world enabled gender performance. It was also impossible to think that a woman wore trousers and a man a gown.⁸⁶ It is said that the pre-Enlightenment notions saw the two genders different in degree, not in kind. Men and women were situated in opposite ends of a spectrum. Moreover, early modern gender was not fixed with biological sex. This versatility was said to extend to the eighteenth century. Females and males still could experiment with cultural attributes of masculinity and femininity, move away from their own sex, so to speak, without causing concern. According to some historians, a change in the attitudes occurred in the two last decades of the century, when gender categories became more rigid and gender play was met with disapproval. Other scholars believe that this change happened much earlier.⁸⁷ Based on these few examples, I would hesitate to conclude that any significant change in gender attitudes occurred in the eighteenth century. Instead, I would suggest that older beliefs lived side by side with new ones.

Being born as a girl into an eighteenth-century elite family was not easy. Where there was money and estates to inherit, the sex of the child mattered, even though children were generally loved by their parents.⁸⁸ The expectations of having a son and

⁸³ FB1, 160–162.

⁸⁴ WD 20.8.1789, 2.

⁸⁵ WD 8.9.1789, 4–5.

⁸⁶ I thank Marjo Kaartinen for pointing out this very interesting aspect.

⁸⁷ See for instance Fletcher 1995, chap. 14; McKeon 2007 (2005), 270–277; Wahrman 2008, 592; Shoemaker 2013 (1998), 18–20; Ylivuori 2018, 43.

⁸⁸ Martin 2004, 178, 183; Kaartinen 2006, 71–82; Fletcher 2010 (2008) *passim*; Bailey 2012, 22.

heir were understood even by younger members of the family. In 1783, twenty-year-old Miss Mary Berry wrote about her early life in her journal. About her birth in 1763, she wrote as follows:

On this allowance [given by her father's uncle] they [her parents] retired to live in Yorkshire, in the same house with her mother at Kirkbridge, where she gave birth in two succeeding years to two daughters, myself and Agnes. But however well pleased the old uncle might have been with his niece, his expectations were disappointed at her not producing a male heir, and were finally crushed by her death in childbirth.⁸⁹

Although written in retrospect, Mary clearly thought that because of their sex she and her sister were a disappointment to her great-uncle, if not to her parents. They were not boys, who would almost certainly have been considered more suitable heirs to the family fortune. Her father's uncle, Mr. Ferguson, was a wealthy merchant, who having no children of his own, provided his sister's sons with allowances. According to Mary, her father was the heir-apparent until he refused to remarry after his wife's death.⁹⁰ These kinds of direct reflections, or at least recording them, seem to have been rather rare. Mary Berry was the only girl in my sources that expressed in writing the fear that she was of the wrong sex. Nevertheless, less direct reveries do exist. In 1760, fifteen-year-old Lady Sarah Lennox congratulated her sister Emily, countess of Kildare on the occasion of having a daughter but added that "though it is of a little pipingtail girl." This little girl was baby number nine in the Fitzgerald family, to which would be added many more children.⁹¹ Although Lady Emily's husband belonged to one of the wealthiest families in Ireland, several daughters would entail a substantial financial cost in the future, something that young Lady Sarah already understood. In a similar vein, and forty years later, fourteen-year-old Elizabeth Wynne was sorry that her acquaintance had a girl, instead of a boy, as she already had four daughters.⁹² Three examples may appear insufficient to generalize from, but, given that adult women made similar statements throughout the period, we can assume that these same

⁸⁹ MB vol. I. 2.

⁹⁰ MB vol. I. 1–3.

⁹¹ See Family trees in Tillyard 1995 (1994).

⁹² CEL vol. II. Lady Sarah Lennox to Emily, countess of Kildare, 23.6.1760, 100–101; WD 28.2.1792, 90–91.

assumptions were adopted by their children.⁹³ In aristocratic families especially, the birth of a male heir was eagerly anticipated to ensure that the title would pass on to the next generation. The eldest son was favoured over girls and younger sons. He would inherit the lands and the title of his father. Therefore, a male heir, or even better several sons in case of deaths, was the preferable state of affairs for many landowners.⁹⁴ Girls were future women and it is reasonable to assume that on the whole they inherited these traditions and beliefs from earlier generations. They lived in the patriarchal world where the adult male dominated. As females, these girls recognized that they were always somewhat inferior creatures socially, politically and financially. However, in this study we shall see that there were considerable personal variations how strictly these girls were obliged or willing to submit.

The obvious disparity in financial possibilities was sometimes acutely felt by the girls. Twenty-one-year-old Elizabeth Robinson was riding with her father on the coast one day when she tried to persuade her father gently to give her a small piece of land for her up-keep in old age, but apparently with little success.⁹⁵ She and her sister Sarah could only expect a marriage portion of £1000 each.⁹⁶ Although historians have established that there was no significant disparity in children's up-keep, it was future financial possibilities that set sisters and brothers on a different footing. It was possible for females to inherit the estates if there was no living male heir or when there were only daughters. (It is estimated that 20 per cent of marriages produced only daughters in the early modern period.) Inheritances were also specially designated to females, and girls and women received inheritances from other females as well. It must also be noted that females often inherited personal property instead of land. To prevent the estates from dividing by female inheritance, some landowners might entail their lands to other male relatives, slighting daughters altogether. The daughters would of course be provided with

⁹³ For instance, the Lennox sisters' great-grandmother Louisa, duchess of Portsmouth complained to her grandson that he had promised her "a little son." DR vol. I. Louise de Kéroualle, duchess of Portsmouth to Charles, 2nd duke of Richmond, 25.12.1723, 77–78. In an opposite situation a girl would be much welcomed. A daughter born in 1768 was very good news for Lady Sarah Bunbury: "her eager wish for a girl rather than a boy." The parentage of little Louisa was questionable: there are indications that the little girl's father was someone other than her mother's husband. Should this prove to be that case, a girl would not threaten the inheritance of the baronetage of Bunbury. The scandal would have even greater if someone who later proved to be a son of another man would have inherited her husband's possessions and the title. CEL vol. I Caroline, Lady Holland to Emily, Duchess of Leinster, 27.2.1769, 563–565. See also Tillyard 1995 (1994), 264–268.

⁹⁴ Martin 2004, 6.

⁹⁵ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 1741, 148–150.

⁹⁶ Thomason 2014, 108.

portions.⁹⁷ In Elizabeth's case, she had six brothers, so it was very unlikely that she would receive anything more than her portion. She found it unfair. Although she had grown up in a family of wealth her only route to financial security was through marriage. Elizabeth's strategy was to do something to alter her situation, whereas eighteen-year-old Mary Berry resigned herself to her fate. When her father's uncle died, he left his fortune (£300 000) to Mary's uncle William. Although the eldest son, Mary's father received only £10 000 without any mention of his two daughters. Mary surmised that the reason was that the two girls "would marry, and be thus got rid of."⁹⁸ Clearly her views changed over time, or at least she let everyone believe so. At the age of sixty, Mary Berry proclaimed that "what regrets I had then at having been born a woman, and deprived of the life and position which, as a man, I might have had in this world! But I am calm and resigned now."⁹⁹ Girls had to be provided with proper dowries, even if the biggest bulk of the property was handed over to the eldest son. Several daughters meant that more money had to be reserved for dowries. The size of dowry had a substantial impact on a girl's possibilities of marrying well. It was usual that the couple decided the maximum amount reserved for dowries in the marriage settlement. The more girls the couple had, the smaller the portion available for each.¹⁰⁰ The fate of an unmarried daughter was usually to remain in her father's or brother's house, as few respectable occupations were available for elite ladies.¹⁰¹ However, some historians have pointed out that fathers did not take any pleasure in snubbing their daughters. Susan Amussen has shown in her study of early modern England that fathers were often torn between conflicting demands when it came to the distributing of their estates. Fathers wanted to provide for their children so that they could prosper, but it was also important that the landholding remained viable and therefore undivided. This problem was especially acute within families that had little fortune to start with. Even if a daughter was entitled to a financial settlement, this was sometimes difficult to actualize.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Spring 1993, 9–11, 17–18; Erickson 1995 (1993), 5, 61–68; Vickery 1999 (1998), 194; Harris 2012, 33. Records show that a similar amount of money was spent on each child regardless of their sex. See, for instance, Erickson 1995 (1993), 50–51. Although laws of inheritance were different in Scandinavia, the trend for noble families to invest significant amounts of money for the education and up-keeping of both sons and daughters can be seen as similar throughout Europe. For an example, see Johanna Ilmakunnas' study on the spending habits of the aristocratic Swedish Fersen family. Ilmakunnas, 2011, esp. chap. 2.

⁹⁸ MB vol.I, 9–10.

⁹⁹ MB vol.III, 332.

¹⁰⁰ Erickson 1995 (1993), 61–64, 68–78; Martin 2004, 6.

¹⁰¹ Martin 2004, 7.

¹⁰² Amussen 1993 (1988), 86.

Perhaps girls were better received when the family already had sons or there was a chance of getting some in the near future as Joanna Martin suggests.¹⁰³ Or perhaps it was just a common discourse of the time that had little connection with everyday life. Ingrid Tague suggests that favouring boys over girls in comments was a convention determined by the patriarchal family model. It did not necessarily reflect real emotions or feelings of parents toward their children. As elite women were required to produce a male heir, giving birth to girls had to be explained and apologized for. Women also assumed that their husbands preferred boys over girls and lacked interest in female babies. Tague proposes that by the 1760s, through the idealization and domestication of family life and motherhood, favouring girls became much easier.¹⁰⁴ All the same, eighteenth-century fathers did cherish both sons and daughters and were pleased with their offspring no matter what their gender was. Fathers were also held responsible if they failed to look after their children. In the eighteenth century attitudes towards parenting changed alongside views on childhood. However, several contrasting views on parenting co-existed during this period.¹⁰⁵ Fathers had different views on fatherhood. Their views even differed from their wives'. Not all parents cared sufficiently for their offspring, as I will show in the next section. This question cannot be explored deeply here, but it is a subject for a different investigation. The main point is that misogynistic discourse did exist at the time and it was accepted by the girls as part of their cultural environment, even though they did not always agree with it.

Under guidance: age and obedience

Girlhood in the eighteenth-century meant much more than just female gender. As noted earlier, it was also a matter of age. This age-related experience is most clearly visible within families. The eighteenth-century relationship between parents and children entailed a subordinate position for the latter. Eighteenth-century society was strictly hierarchical: everyone had their own place and everyone was supposed to act according to that station. Regulating personal life was for the public good. Society was not about individuals, but households and families, and the family was seen as a

¹⁰³ Martin 2004, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Tague 2007, 194–195, 197–198.

¹⁰⁵ Fletcher 2010 (2008), 57, 129, 133; Bailey 2007, 218. Joanne Bailey has shown in her studies of eighteenth-century separation cases that mothers often based their claim on their husbands' cruelty towards their children. For example, in 1765 Catherine Ettrick accused her husband William of lack of interest and affection for his children. Often he also failed to correct their daughter's bad behaviour, but was excessively severe on other occasions, causing her bruises. Furthermore, Catherine complained that her husband failed to protect their children, sending their son to school unattended or leaving their daughter outside alone. Bailey 2007, 214–2016.

society in miniature. A well-functioning family was one where its members fulfilled their social expectations, both economically and morally.¹⁰⁶ This is why, as several historians have already established, the goal of eighteenth-century parenting was to raise happy and well-behaving citizens. According to Enlightenment thinkers like Locke and Rousseau, this was to be achieved with gentleness and not with anger or severity. The responsibility for children's behaviour lay with their parents.¹⁰⁷

Children were dependent on their parents as their care-givers. That is why children had to show their parents love, respect and humility. The normative sources I have used in this study, list that the duties of children towards their parents were reverence, respect, humility, love and obedience. Children were to obey their parents even if they might sometimes neglect their own duties.¹⁰⁸ There are also some indications that obedience, especially towards the father, was demanded even more from girls than boys. One of the reasons why this was the case is connected to the general views that females, of whatever age or status should be submissive to the male sex of similar social status. It was the parents' duty to teach their daughters subjection and obedience from an early age.¹⁰⁹

The relationship between parents and children was never equal, although it required some reciprocity, as Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos has stressed. Parents provided for their children, but they also wanted something in return. The exchange of provision was not always purely material or short term in nature. It could include emotional investment and a variety of favours. But this exchange was not equal: parents gave more to their children than they expected in return. Ben-Amos concludes that the parents' investment in their children did not end with their childhood and youth, but lasted long into their married lives and their children's own parenthood.¹¹⁰ Parents also hoped that children would take care of them when they started to get old and feeble. A motherless daughter would act as housekeeper for her father. At the same time, she would gain responsibility, power and respect in a safe and familiar environment that would enhance her managing skills for a possible future role as a wife.¹¹¹

Against this background, it comes as no surprise that several expressions of fulfilling their filial duty, however reluctantly carried out, are to be found in these sources: girls hoped that their parents were satisfied with their conduct or expressed their happiness at receiving advice from them. On a concrete level, they might act as

¹⁰⁶ Mendelson & Crawford 1998, 36; Giovanopoulos 2006, 45; Kaartinen 2006, 26, 45.

¹⁰⁷ Porter 2000, 340–342; Mendelson & Crawford 1998, 36; Kaartinen 2006, 26, 45; Foyster & Marten 2010, 3–4; Bailey 2007, 217–218; Bailey 2012, 80; Karppinen-Kummunmäki & Kaartinen 2016, 10–11.

¹⁰⁸ *A Lady* [Richard Steele] 1751 (1714) vol. II. 1–4; Seymour 1754, 139; Burton 1793, 68.

¹⁰⁹ Moir 1784, 7–8; Burton 1793, 67.

¹¹⁰ Krausman Ben-Amos 2000, 291, 292. See also Bailey 2010, 27.

¹¹¹ Davidoff & Hall 2002 (1987), 346–347; Bailey 2012, 188.

their parent's secretaries or help them otherwise.¹¹² The father's power was also expressly accepted. The sixteen-year-old Elizabeth Robinson complained to her friend in 1736, that her father had decided not to go to Canterbury races and the ball that followed them, which meant that young Elizabeth could not go either. Despite being disappointed at this and expressing it, she noted: "my father passed a negative upon my good intentions, and so obedience and staying at home is the only thing for a dutiful daughter."¹¹³ Lady Mary Pierrepont expressed a similar sentiment in 1710, when she was 21: "my Father may do some things disagreeable to my Inclinations, but passive Obedience is a doctrine should allwaies[sic] be received among wives and daughters."¹¹⁴ As Soile Ylivuori has noted, eighteenth-century girls learned from a very early age to put other people's needs first. In a patriarchal society it was the females' lot to submit and they had only relative power over their own lives.¹¹⁵

But, before I get ahead of myself, I shall look into the reasons why girls were in such submissive position in the first place. Age had a significant role in all this. After all, girls were not only females, but young females. Their age made them incapable of taking care of themselves, which is why they needed the support and guidance of their elders.

As in the case of gender, the ageing process was explained by the difference in balance of humours, or, later in the century, by the nervous system and physiology. The medical books examined for this study stated that change of condition with age was caused by an increase and then gradual decrease of inner heat. The balance of humours that caused changes in inner heat varied according to life stages from hot and moist bodies in infancy and childhood to cold and dry in old age. This also caused the physical changes in puberty, such as growing of breasts or starting of menstruation. The bodies of adolescents were hot and moist and the body heat was predominant.¹¹⁶ Alternatively, when ageing was explained by changes in nervous system and tissues, it was believed that children had more tender tissues than adults and, therefore they were more easily injured and prone to diseases.¹¹⁷ As adults aged, they became more delicate again.

¹¹² HP Lady Harriet Pitt to Hester, Lady Chatham, 29.11.1777, 20–21; DR vol. II. Lady Emily Lennox to Sarah, second Duchess of Richmond, Feb. 1744, 690; DR vol. II. Lady Emily Lennox to Charles, the second Duke of Richmond, March 1745, 449–450; DR vol. II. Lady Emily Lennox to Charles the second Duke of Richmond, (14.2.1746), 606–607; MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Sarah Martha "Serena" Holroyd, 22.12.1784, 10–11;

¹¹³ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Mary Ansley, 15.7.(1736), 16–18.

¹¹⁴ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 20.8.1710, 53–54.

¹¹⁵ Ylivuori 2019, 55.

¹¹⁶ Groeneveld 1715, 19–20; Lynch 1744, 2–4, 10.

¹¹⁷ Makittrick 1772, 22 71, 73–74, 79. See also Hamilton 1793, 256.

The girls studied here rarely reflected on their puberty, but they did comment on it in other girls. In general, youthful years were described by comparison with later life, as either more or less troublesome. In 1738, when she was sixteen, Elizabeth Robinson compared young and old unmarried women by stating that “the young maid is all vanity and the old one all vexation.”¹¹⁸ She may refer to the assumption that youth in general was a time for indiscretion and self-absorbance. But if a woman never married, in her older age she usually had to face the hardships of financial dependence, not to mention the ailments that age brought. Fifteen-year-old Betsey Wynne concluded that her acquaintance, Mary Blair, a daughter of her parents’ friends, was not to be left to herself for one moment as she was only thirteen years old and behaved so badly.¹¹⁹ In contrast, as we will see in section 3.2., Betsey considered her own behaviour more suitable. In the comments of mothers the difficult age of youth becomes clearer. For instance, Lady Sarah Lennox did not find her daughter Louisa easy to handle. According to the mother, the girl was awkward and it was impossible to teach her how to be graceful. She also had “more tricks than any monkey” and was slow in learning anything.¹²⁰ These personal testimonies are supported by notions found in the normative sources. *A Polite Lady* (1789), for instance, stated that young people were easily impertinent because of “the natural heat of their temper and the vivacity of spirits.”¹²¹ Adolescence in the eighteenth century was seen, therefore, as the most difficult and even dangerous time of human life. For whatever reason, adolescents were wild and out of control, but thereafter gradually gained control of their emotions.¹²² This belief was one that had long been prevalent; Barbara Hanawalt stresses that in the Middle Ages it was customary to contrast “wild and wanton” youth with “sad and wise” adulthood.¹²³ Although ideally females were to submit, youth was still considered, and even expected to, be a time of self-absorbance, vanity and bad behaviour. And this applied to girls as well.

What was the contemporary medical opinion on what happened to the young during adolescence? John Maubray writes in his *The Female Physician* (1724) that at the time of puberty “the more delicate Constitution of Females, takes a quite different turn from That of the other Sex.”¹²⁴ According to contemporary authors, puberty usually started around the age of twelve with girls and fourteen with boys. It was also

¹¹⁸ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, Dec. 1738, 31–33.

¹¹⁹ WD 23.9.1793, 142.

¹²⁰ LSL vol. I. Lady Sarah Lennox to Lady Susan O’Brien, 9.8.1778, 271–273; CEL vol. II. Lady Sarah Lennox to Emily, Duchess of Leinster, 17.10.1776, 198–201; CEL vol. II. Lady Sarah Lennox to Emily, Duchess of Leinster, 1.4.1777, 216–221.

¹²¹ Allen 1789, 91.

¹²² McAlpin 2012, 24–25. Humoural theories explained adolescent behaviour with excess body heat. Toulalan 2013, 282. See also Fletcher 1995, 211, Phillips 2003, 24.

¹²³ Hanawalt 1993, 6.

¹²⁴ Maubray 1724, 37.

agreed to be a time of turmoil and great physical changes to the body. Some authors claimed that girls would mature faster than boys due to their more delicate bodies. Young females should be brought up with a care for their physical condition, so that their bodies would not be damaged during this growing process.¹²⁵ A treatise published in 1789 also warned that the symptoms of puberty could start too early if a boy or a girl got into bad company or read obscene books.¹²⁶

The menarche was one of the most significant moments in a girl's maturing process.¹²⁷ It enabled girls physically to become mothers and therefore become capable of someday fulfilling their most important role in society. As in all matters concerning the female body, it is very difficult to find evidence of personal experience. Nevertheless, there are some references to menstruation. According to the Lennox family biographer Stella Tillyard, the ladies of the family usually referred to their menses as the "French lady's visit."¹²⁸ Menstruation was not referred in direct terms. Terminology concerning menstruation varied: the flowers, the terms, the courses, the months, sickness, monthly disease, monthly infirmity.¹²⁹ It is possible, albeit not certain, that at least some of the comments about being sick and in bed in the diaries of the Wynne sisters indicate that they were having menstrual pains.¹³⁰ When Lady Louisa Lennox was married at the age of fifteen in 1758, her eldest sister Lady Caroline Fox enquired "was Louisa a woman before she married?", a probable reference to the same thing.¹³¹ Early modern medical writers agreed that the beginning of menstruation usually occurred around the fourteenth or fifteenth year. Menstrual blood was seen as normal and the proper timing of menarche was essential as it had consequences for the girl's physical health. The years prior to this could make the girl suffer from chlorosis or greensickness. The regularity of the menstrual

¹²⁵ Lynch 1744, 3; Makittrick 1772, 77–78; Hume 1776, 1; Lignac 1798, 22, 115, 116, 124, 127. Adolescence/ adolescentia" *A new and complete dictionary of arts and sciences* 1754. See also "adolescence/ adolescence" Bailey 1721. Other discussions about the medical views on puberty in the early modern period. Read 2013, 39; McAlpin 2012, 24–25.

¹²⁶ Lignac 1798, 118.

¹²⁷ *Every lady her own physician* 1788, 1–2; Leake 1792, 45, 48.

¹²⁸ Tillyard 1995 (1994), 230.

¹²⁹ Crawford 2008 (2004), 21. More medical terms were "menstris", "menses" or "catemenia", "monthly evacuations" or "natural purgations." Crawford 2008 (2004), 21.

¹³⁰ E.g. WD 10.11.1789, 13. As Kaartinen, among others, has observed in the case of the diary of Margaret Hoby, menstrual pain was often mentioned in a veiled form as "being unwell". Kaartinen 2020.

¹³¹ CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, Countess of Kildare. 16.1.1759, 190–191. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu also thought that the age of fifteen and starting to menstruate was a time when childish dreams had to stop. Grundy 2004 (1999), 16.

cycle was also vital.¹³² Menarche was clearly one of the milestones in the transformation of girls into adult women. Although gender is much more than just biology, the body cannot be ignored. Physical transformation was as essential part of the process from girlhood to womanhood as mental one.

Chronological age was also important for the girls and it earned comment. The girls noticed the time passing and regretted how fast they grew old.¹³³ This may have been partly because every year the prospect of marriage became more acute. Their adolescent years would soon be over. The change of life was inevitable. But not all of the girls worried about their age. In June 1760, fifteen-year-old Lady Sarah Lennox wrote to her sister:

But though I have a presentiment that I shall be the old maid of the family (for Cecilia can't – she is so handsome), yet I don't quite despair as seventeen is generally the age people are married in England: for they look upon fifteen as quite a child.¹³⁴

It is easy to imagine a fifteen-year-old complaining that she was seen as a child by her elders. However, it seems that Lady Sarah found it an excuse for not being married yet. She was young and still had time, although her status as a duke's daughter required that lived in some style, and she would, eventually, need a husband to support her. As we will see in chapter 3, Lady Sarah was no spendthrift and her portion would not last forever.

Being young also meant that girls were expected to have a good health and look for the part.¹³⁵ No wonder then that in February 1724 Anne Tracy complained in her diary that she thought herself an old maid because she had lost a tooth.¹³⁶ Anne was only nineteen years old. But in early modern thinking, were youth meant good health it also meant beauty. Old age brought with it a variety of aches and pains and the inevitable ugliness, as argued by Kaartinen and Korhonen. Many teeth would go and good posture too. Bad eyesight and glasses did not belong to the beauty ideal of the time.¹³⁷ Moreover, a girl's status among the elite meant that she was obliged to be

¹³² *Aristotle's Master-piece* 1702, 2, 3; Verduc 1704, 125; Groeneveld 1715, 47; *The Ladies Dispensatory* 1739, 20, 21; *The Ladies Physical Directory* 1739, 1; Astruc 1762, 11; Hume 1776, 2, 5; Freeman 1789, 40.

¹³³ FB1, 72; WD 19.4.1794, 149.

¹³⁴ CEL vol. II. Lady Sarah Lennox to Emily, Countess of Kildare, 23.6.1760, 100–101. Lady Cecilia Lennox (b. 1750) was the youngest of the sisters. She died in 1769 at the age of 19.

¹³⁵ Of course there were always sickly children in families, but only those that had good health participated in society.

¹³⁶ AT 7.2.1724, 91.

¹³⁷ Korhonen 2005, 75–77; Kaartinen 2006, 197–198, 201, 204.

beautiful, as Hannah Greig has suggested. Beauty was not necessarily accompanied by personal charms, but it was recognition of the young lady's social standing, behaviour and manners.¹³⁸ Possibly Anne was worried that she would gradually lose her chance to get married as physical problems multiplied. Age was, therefore, not just a number of years but it was also manifested on the body.

Ageing also meant changes in everyday life. When Lady Sarah Spencer's sister Gin (Georgiana) turned sixteen her elder sister wrote:

Gin being now so near sixteen, that the time draws near when the last remains of the nursery establishment is to be abolished, and poor old Mile. Müller is to leave us. It will be a great change, and I don't think any of us will like it at first, but as it must happen some time or other, this is perhaps the best possible. Gin will then dine and breakfast with the circle, and be upon a footing with me in the household.¹³⁹

Georgiana, at sixteen, was thought old enough to dine with the older members of the family and participate in household management. This also meant that the nursery of the Spencer household was left empty and the governess was obliged to find a new position. The time at which daughters were allowed to leave the nursery varied in different families. The ways in which growing up changed girls' space of living and social obligations is discussed at greater length in section 3.2. All in all, youthful years usually meant a busy social life. Sixteen-year-old Elizabeth Robinson stated to her friend in 1736 that retirement from social life was suitable for a woman over thirty "but the pleasures of youth are of a more lively [sic] sort."¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth clearly thought a thirty-year-old woman was old and should not take part in lively activities as young girls did. If a young girl adopted an inactive life of that kind it was thought odd. One day in 1768 the bored fifteen-year-old Fanny Burney wrote in her journal that she was to "pass my days in the dullest [sic] of dull things, insipid, calm, uninterrupted quiet. This Life is by many desired so be it but it surely was designed to give happiness after (and not one ounce before) twenty full years are past."¹⁴¹ For young Fanny and others youth was a time of having fun, meaning enjoying a busy social life, at least for elite girls like themselves. This meant carefree days without adult responsibilities, yet, girls were mature enough not to be treated like children any more.

¹³⁸ Greig 2013, chap.5

¹³⁹ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Hon. Robert Spencer, 19.5.1810, 105–106.

¹⁴⁰ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Mrs. Ansley 15.7.(1736), 16–18.

¹⁴¹ FB1, 35. The following year she noted down in her journal that "I am not frequently from Home, on the contrary, I seldom quit it, considering my Age & opportunities." FB1, 60.

In the contemporary sources used in this study, the human life-cycle was roughly divided into seven stages: infancy, childhood, puberty or adolescence, youth, manhood or womanhood and old age. Infancy ended around the age of seven, childhood at fourteen, puberty at twenty-five, youth around thirty-five or forty, manhood at fifty.¹⁴² Although the date of these medical treatises and dictionaries ranges from the 1720s to the 1790s, there is little change in the overall idea of how the human life-cycle functioned. It has been claimed that adolescence was “discovered” in the nineteenth century with the advent of industrial society.¹⁴³ This is clearly not the case, as even the word can be found in the sources used in this study, the earliest mention being in 1715.¹⁴⁴ Of course, for the most part, the word refers to males, rather than females.¹⁴⁵ But there are exceptions. For example, in 1730 “adolescence” was defined as “the State of young Persons from twelve Years of Age to twenty one in Women; and from fourteen to twenty five or thirty in Men.”¹⁴⁶ Even though male is the measure of a human being, contemporaries acknowledged that the time of adolescence applied to girls as well. Also, it seems that girls were thought to mature faster than boys. The youthful years of girls ended around the age of twenty-one whereas boys could still be boys at thirty. The word “puberty” appears throughout the period.¹⁴⁷ In this case, the word clearly indicates both sexes. For instance in 1765, “puberty” was defined as “the time of life when the two sexes ripen to their perfect state.”¹⁴⁸ However, the term “puberty” may have changed its meaning during the eighteenth century. Some, like Sara Read, point out that “puberty” was in use in early modern England, but originally it referred only to boys.¹⁴⁹ Adolescence and puberty are, of course, connected to maturity, or the lack of it. As Carol Dyhouse argues, maturity has meant different things for males and females. Whereas male maturity was about independence, females submitted to dependence. In that sense,

¹⁴² Groeneveld 1715, 20; Lynch 1744, 2, 3; Venette 1720, 105–106; “age” and “infancy” in Bailey 1730; “age” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1790–98; MaKittrick 1772, 71–77. The idea of the seven ages of man had long roots, beginning in antiquity, where the Hippocratic model divided human lifecycle into phases of seven years. This model was transmitted to medieval medical and philosophical thinking, albeit with adjustments, by Isidorus of Seville in his work *Etymologiae*. The model represented the stages of physical and emotional maturing in which a man (i.e. male) gradually increased his involvement in work and public affairs. See Katajala-Peltomaa & Vuolanto 2013, 40.

¹⁴³ About this discussion see Dyhouse 2016, 115.

¹⁴⁴ Groeneveld 1715, 20.

¹⁴⁵ Venette 1720, 105–106; Lynch 1744, 2, 3; “adolescence” Dyche 1744; Allen 1765; Barlow 1771–1772; Ash 1775, Johnson 1799.

¹⁴⁶ “Adolescence” Bailey 1730. Also Barclay 1782.

¹⁴⁷ “Age” and “infancy” “puberty” Bailey 1730; “age” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1790–98; “puberty” Defoe 1735; Dyche 1744; Ash 1775; Barlow 1771–1772; Barclay 1782, Johnson 1799.

¹⁴⁸ “Puberty” Allen 1765.

¹⁴⁹ Read 2013, 39.

females were always a little bit “immature” compared to males.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, it can be said that “the ages of woman” were less connected to chronological age than to sexual status and relationships to men.¹⁵¹

The question of chronological age is also evident in legal matters. Eighteenth-century English law typically understood minors as people, whether male or female, under the age of twenty-one. Girls acquired a legal status at a very early age. At the age of seven a girl could be betrothed, and at nine she was entitled to a dowry, at twelve she could consent to or refuse a marriage herself, and at fourteen choose her own guardian. Like boys, girls were legally free to choose a marriage partner themselves at twenty-one, if they were not married before that.¹⁵² Eighteenth-century English law did not have any specific restraints for minors as loving parents were supposed to prevent their offspring from committing indiscreet acts. Minors were considered incapable of rational acts and therefore needed guidance.¹⁵³

Being legally a minor had important consequences for how a girl would lead her life. This was yet another sign that girlhood, like boyhood, was a time of dependency and submissiveness in the eyes of her elders. The girl’s guardians would choose, for instance, where she would live. This happened to Lady Sarah Lennox, who after being completely orphaned at the age of five had her two brothers-in-law as her guardians. She and her two sisters had to move to Ireland to live with their elder sister Lady Emily, Countess of Kildare. Her brothers would remain in school (the third duke would eventually take his position as the head of the family, but at the time he was still a schoolboy of sixteen). Later on, Lady Sarah would have to make yet another move to the capital, to finish her education with her eldest sister Lady Caroline Fox. All this was determined beforehand in the wills of her parents.¹⁵⁴ Although it was legally possible for a minor to make some decisions about her own life, in practice this rarely occurred, especially in aristocratic circles. Family dynamics also played a significant role. It seems that the pleasure of her elder sisters, and more so of her eldest brother, mattered to fifteen-year-old Lady Sarah more than her own. She knew that Emily would have liked to keep Sarah and her sister Louisa to herself in Ireland and not hand them over to Lady Caroline. Once she wrote to Lady

¹⁵⁰ Dyhouse 2016, 117–118,

¹⁵¹ See also Wiesner 2000 (1993), 51–52; Simonton 2011, 20.

¹⁵² *The Laws respecting women 1777*, 424,425. See also *The Infants Lawyer 1726*, 45–46, 48–50.

¹⁵³ *The Infants Lawyer 1726*, 18; *The Laws respecting women 1777*, 426. The king was the only exception. It was impossible to think someone, who governs the whole kingdom to be a minor i.e. “incapable to governing himself and his own affairs.” See *The Laws respecting women 1777*, 424.

¹⁵⁴ Tillyard (1994) 1995, 102–103.

Emily in Ireland: “But after seventeen I intend to go to Ireland, and take Massie Hall, by Carton, and so settle myself for life; and when I die leave all I have to Charles.”¹⁵⁵

The minority issue also came to the fore at the time of marriage. The contemporary view was that before a certain age, young people had not gained enough mental abilities to contract a valid marriage. *Conjugal Love Revealed* explained the age boundaries as based on sexual maturity. It stated that people usually became sexually mature between the age of nine and eighteen. However, the author thought that even though young people were able to conceive, young females especially were not at that age capable of giving birth to healthy children: “her internal parts not being large enough to go her time out, and a Woman so young cannot suffice both for her own growth, and the nourishment of her Child.” This is why he proposed that 20 is a far better age for a woman to marry (and have children).¹⁵⁶ The author of *A Treatise of Feme Covert* (1732) argued that age was a less important consideration when contracting a marriage than “Maturity, Ripeness and Disposition of Body.”¹⁵⁷ In 1753, the so-called Marriage Act (26 Geo II c. 32) replaced all previous laws concerning legal marriages. Among others, it stated that anyone under twenty-one years old, that is all minors, had to have their father’s consent for their marriage. Otherwise the marriage was void. The marriage was valid when both parties were able to make a contract and by their free will.¹⁵⁸ Minors were thought to be incapable of judging for themselves. It was the older relatives’ duty to decide on their marriages. When Mary Granville resisted a marriage proposal at the age of seventeen her aunt called her “childish, ignorant, and silly, and that if I did not know what was for my own interest, my friends must judge for me.”¹⁵⁹ As an adult woman, she knew what Mary’s best interests were, and in her case, it would have been to accept the eligible marriage proposal. A young girl did not have such good judgment and therefore needed the guidance of her parents, relatives and friends.

¹⁵⁵ CEL vol. II. Lady Sarah Lennox to Emily, Countess of Kildare, 23.6.1760, 100–101. Carton was the family seat of Emily’s husband James Fitzgerald and Charles their third son.

¹⁵⁶ Venette 1720, 112–115. Sarah Toulalan has stated that according to the humoural model, young and old bodies lacked sufficient vital heat to procreate. A correct balance of humours was essential for conception. Toulalan 2013, 283.

¹⁵⁷ *A Treatise of Feme Coverts: or the Lady’s Law* 1732, 26.

¹⁵⁸ *The Laws respecting women* 1777, 24, 25, 26, 40, 393, 401–403; Blackstone 1876, vol. I. 422. Historians have widely disagreed as to how the Marriage Act really influenced people’s lives. It has become an accepted universal truth that the Act gave parents unlimited rights over their children’s lives. Rebecca Probert has pointed out that parental consent was required from minors (that is under 21) by the canon law prior to the 1753 Act, before the couple could call for banns. She also stresses that if an underage couple could find a clergyman to marry them despite parental opposition, the marriage was perfectly valid. Probert 2009, 418–419.

¹⁵⁹ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 24.

Moreover, children and youths were not capable of making their own decisions and ought to be prepared to sacrifice their own desires for the good of the family.

Being a girl implied other qualities than just being physically young. These other qualities also reflected the girl's position under guidance. This submissive position is visible in the everyday language, both the ways girls were described and how they described themselves. As Peter Burke has stated, language reflects the society and culture in which it is used, and it also reshapes that same society.¹⁶⁰ By looking at how the terminology of girls was used, we gain a strong indication of how girlhood was perceived in eighteenth-century English society.

In everyday usage girlhood was pictured as mix of youthful playfulness and sweetness, but also wildness, foolishness and impertinence. When the girls described girlhood, they used such adjectives as good, beautiful, amiable, little, dear, clever, fine, romantic, lively, impulsive, droll, young, poor, charming, foolish and extravagant, agreeable, saucy, sweet.¹⁶¹ The ages varied from eight to twenty-five years.¹⁶² However, most of the references indicate that girls were clearly under the age of twenty. There is only one mention of a girl aged twenty-five. Betsey Wynne, herself sixteen at the time, noted in her diary on May 13th 1793: "Our farmer married this morning a young girl of twenty-five years old we all were invited to the wedding."¹⁶³ In comparison, adults and married women defined a girl as little, young, whimsical, good, agreeable, charming, innocent, gay and pretty. The age variation of these comments was from five to seventeen years.¹⁶⁴ Both girls themselves and married women seem to be on similar tracks. Girls thought girlhood extended slightly further than married women. However, the difference is not significant and cannot be taken as a general indicator as this study uses evidence from a limited number of people.

¹⁶⁰ Burke 1993, 9.

¹⁶¹ ME Maria Edgeworth to Honora Sneyd Edgeworth, 30.3.1776, 2–3; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 4.6.1808, 15–16; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 28.12.1808, 55–57; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Georgiana, Dowager Countess Spencer, 16.4.1810, 100; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 8.11.1810, 114–116; FB1, 2, 5, 9, 14, 18, 52, 79, 189; SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Montagu, 27.10.1743, 35–38; WD 13.1.1794, 170; WD 7.4.1794, 174; WD 28.4.1794, 176; WD 2.6.1794, 177; MD vol. I. Autobiography, 6.

¹⁶² SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Georgiana, Dowager Countess Spencer, 8.6.1804, 1–2; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 3.3.1812, 128–130; FB1, 26, 101; FB2, 5; MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 27.6.1794, 289–290; WD 13.5.1793, 138. WD 13.5.1793, 138.

¹⁶⁴ CEL vol. I. Marchioness of Kildare to Marquis of Kildare, 22.8.1761, 105–106; CEL vol. I Lady Caroline Fox to Countess of Kildare, 6.3.1759, 204–205; CEL vol. I. Lady Holland to Marchioness of Kildare, 28.5.1763, 373–374; MD vol. I. Autobiography, 11; MD vol. I. Mary Pendarves to Ann Granville, 25.11.1731, 315–319; MD vol. I. Mary Pendarves to Ann Granville, 30.10.1732, 386–389; FB1, 213.

Searching through contemporary sources gave me similar results as those listed above. In dictionaries a “girl” was defined essentially as a young female or maid and unmarried.¹⁶⁵ In comparison, “boy” was most often simply a male child, although Samuel Johnson specified that a boy was “one in the state of adolescence; one older than an infant.”¹⁶⁶ Another aspect of girlhood is identifiable from the adjectives derived from the word girl. Girlish was “like a girl, or one who is not arrived to years of discretion; wanton, playful, or giddy” (1765) or “childish, [---] or after the manner of a girl” (1744).¹⁶⁷ In 1772, *The complete English dictionary* defined girl as “playful, giddy and thoughtless, not arrived to years of discretion, or not acting with a proper degree of reserve.”¹⁶⁸ Newspapers and magazines usually spoke of girls ranging from the ages of twenty months to twenty years. The attributes attached to them were fine, beautiful, young, promising, handsome, well made, forward, romping, or unsuspecting, helpless, ill-attended, little, accomplished, brisk, raw, innocent, dear, giddy, lovely, unfortunate, hard-hearted, fresh, honest, generous, unhappy, pretty.¹⁶⁹

These attributes are very much in line with the findings of Wallin-Ashcroft. According to her, in eighteenth-century English literature the word girl ceased to be used when a female turned seventeen.¹⁷⁰ She does agree that the terms related to girls and other females paralleled the word child and reflected the person’s vulnerability, immaturity and submissiveness. Females, especially the young, were like children.¹⁷¹ However, I find it odd that Wallin-Ashcroft considers “young” and “old” neutral terms.¹⁷² In cultural history nothing is self-evident or without some implied meaning.

As one would expect, there seems to have been some change in the cultural climate related to girls. Medieval authors, as stated by Kim M. Phillips, connected girlhood and maidenhood with such attributes as chastity, purity, delicacy and beauty of body, modesty, humility, openness of manner, freshness, incorruption, and lack of

¹⁶⁵ Girl” Kersey 1713; Bailey 1721; Defoe 1735, Scott 1764; “girle” Bailey 1730; “girl” Dyche 1745; Buchanan 1757; Rider 1759; Allen 1765; Barlow 1772–1773; Ash 1775; Sheridan 1797; Johnson 1799.

¹⁶⁶ “Boy” Bailey 1730; Sheridan 1797; Johnson 1799.

¹⁶⁷ “Girlish” Allen 1765; Dyche 1744.

¹⁶⁸ “Girl” in Barlow 1772–1773.

¹⁶⁹ *The Annual register* 1758, 299; *The Annual register* 1759, 72, 112, 123; *The Annual register* 1760, 21, 79, 107, 147, 151, 248; *The Annual register* 1762, 67, 102, 132; *The Annual register* 1765, 142, 150; *The Annual register* 1766, 51, 87; *The Annual register* 1768, 11, 70, 105, 119, 133; *The Annual register* 1791, 56, 246; *The Aberdeen Magazine* vol. I. 1788–1790, 22, 36, 112; *The Aberdeen Magazine* vol. II. 1788–1790, 468, 503, 525–526, 662, 738; *The Aberdeen Magazine* vol. III, 1789, 43, 87, 240, 242, 326; *Bristol and Bath* vol. I, 110, 116, 117, 138, 220; *Bristol and Bath* vol. II. 141, 189, 262; *The Court and City* vol. I. 29, 123, 124, 131, 160, 284, 447, 553, 554; *The Court and City* vol. II. 22, 200, 381, 396.

¹⁷⁰ Wallin-Ashcroft 2000 97.

¹⁷¹ Wallin-Ashcroft 2000, 65–66, 80–81, 89–90, 94–96, 99–100.

¹⁷² Wallin-Ashcroft 2000, 99.

feminine passions.¹⁷³ What happened and how did girls turn into silly and whimsical, immature creatures? The origin of the word “girl” can be traced back to the Middle Ages. According to Jennifer Higginbotham, in Middle English “girl” was used to refer to any child of either sex, but in the early sixteenth century it began to transform to its exclusive meaning of young females, the meaning that was well-established in the eighteenth century. Higginbotham observes that while looking at these words describing young females, it must be remembered that their meaning varied according to the context in which they were used. They can indicate social status, sexuality, family ties, dependence, sexual innocence and obedience, for example. The word “girl” could be used not only in relation to men but to other women as well. She explains the establishment of “girl” as meaning specifically female youth and childhood with two major changes in the notions of social relations. Firstly, childhood became seen as gendered. She notes that prior to the eighteenth century the sex of the child was less socially relevant and childhood was bound to femininity. What this actually meant was that the male child, boy, had to be separated from females. The second change was that the category of girl became part of the linear female lifecycle. It was seen as “free space” for young females before womanhood and its roles within the patriarchal marriage.¹⁷⁴ In turn, Margaret Reeves claims that the so-called proto-Romantic view on childhood and of girls especially, took place already in the seventeenth century alongside Puritan, more restrictive, notions. Instead of focusing on the innate corruption of children some authors promoted a concept of the natural innocence of children, something that has usually been attributed to the writings of Locke and Rousseau. Especially girls sacrificed their childhood innocence to the wisdom of womanhood at the moment of their marriage.¹⁷⁵ Yet Reeves too fails to notice that between the seventeenth century and early nineteenth century girlhood was described with much more vivid terms than just those implying innocence or trouble.

Other expressions related to girlhood, such as virgin, maid or young lady, are less often used among or about the girls of this study. Virginity and girlhood tended to go hand in hand. The word “young lady” did not seem to have had any specific meaning attached to it. When the girls referred to someone as a “young lady”, they usually meant someone with high social standing, for example “a young lady of fashion.”¹⁷⁶ When the word “maid” appears it is usually in the expression “old maid” or refers to a

¹⁷³ Phillips 2003, 7.

¹⁷⁴ Higginbotham 2011, 172, 175, 176, 184–187. The words used were numerous: girl, maid, wench, bird, lass, damsel, pucelle, daughter, trull, pigeon, tit, slut, miss, tendril, stammel, woman-child, kitty, prill, tib, Gillian, mop, frotion, winklot, gixy, whims(e)y, zitella, vriester, fraulen. Higginbotham 2011, 173. See also Ryan 2013, 57.

¹⁷⁵ Reeves 2018, 36, 39, 46, 53.

¹⁷⁶ FB1, 34.

servant.¹⁷⁷ The only exception is eighteen-year-old Elizabeth Robinson who referred to a “young maid” in 1738.¹⁷⁸ Fanny Burney also described a bride as a maiden.¹⁷⁹ The word “virgin” appears very rarely. Fanny Burney described an unmarried lady over sixty years as virgin and a bride’s maid who was “a Virgin who may count years with the bride herself.” (The bride was fifty.)¹⁸⁰ The eighteenth-century dictionaries stated that a maid or maiden was a virgin or young woman, and more specifically, an unmarried woman.¹⁸¹ “Maidenhood”, according to Samuel Johnson, was “virginity, virginal purity; freedom from contamination, newness, freshness, uncontaminated state.” “Maidenly” behaviour was “gentle, modest, timorous, decent.”¹⁸² A virgin was defined a chaste maid and “unacquainted with men,” “a woman not a mother” and “any thing[sic] untouched or unmigled, any thing[sic] pure.”¹⁸³ State of virginity was sometimes separated from childhood and infancy. State of virginity started when the child had arrived at the years of discretion “which may be properly reckoned about the Age of Sixteen and so onward.”¹⁸⁴

The connection between the words girl, maid and virgin has been debated among historians. In her study of English single women in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Amy Froide claims that in the official records, but also in family documents and diaries, a female reaching her mid-teens was no longer referred to as a girl and called a spinster instead.¹⁸⁵ My sources never mention the word spinster in this context. Froide focuses on the lower social orders and I would therefore suggest that social standing determined the terms used. A daughter of a duke would not have been called a spinster. Instead, Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford have argued the term “old maid” became into wider use after the Reformation and by the early eighteenth century the word “spinster” had become to designate the negative

¹⁷⁷ FB1, 66; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 24.10.1808, 41; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 27.6.1808, 74–76; EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Sarah Robinson, Oct. 1741, 183–186.

¹⁷⁸ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret Duchess of Portland, Dec. 1738, 31–33.

¹⁷⁹ FB1, 66.

¹⁸⁰ FB2, 35, FB1, 66.

¹⁸¹ “Maid” in Kersey, 1713; Bailey 1721; Bailey 1730; Martin 1749; Buchanan 1757; Sheridan 1797; Johnson 1799.

¹⁸² “Maid”, “maidenly” Johnson 1799.

¹⁸³ “Virgin” in Bailey 1721; Defoe 1735; Scot 1765; Sheridan 1797; Johnson 1799.

¹⁸⁴ *The Lady’s Companion* 1740, 69.

¹⁸⁵ Froide 2005, 10. Froide bases her assumption on the observations made by Amy Louise Erickson about the legal documents of early modern England. Erickson also focuses on the middle income and poor families. See Erickson 1995 (1993), 47–48. Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford have argued the term “old maid” became into wider use after the Reformation and by the early eighteenth century the word “spinster” had become to designate the negative stereotype of the single woman. Mendelson & Crawford 1995, 67.

stereotype of the single woman.¹⁸⁶ But, were all girls virgins, or, to put it the other way round, were all virgins girls? What of females bound to voluntary or involuntary virginity such as nuns (who were ‘married to Christ’) or unmarried older women? If girlhood meant virginity, and the loss of virginity usually occurred at the moment of marriage, did girls become women then or on some other occasion? These questions will be handled more fully in Chapter 4.

In everyday life, the concept of girl was also used as a mark of improper female behaviour. This did not necessarily mean that the person in question was actually young, but that she behaved like a girl. Emily, Countess of Kildare described her new sister-in-law, Mary Bruce, Duchess of Richmond as “quite girlish, unaffected and merry”, whereas Lady Louisa Conolly described her as giddy and thoughtless.¹⁸⁷ The date of birth of the Duchess is uncertain (probably 1740), but she was around the age of seventeen at the time. It is, therefore, possible that the Countess was referring both to her lack of years and her carefree behaviour. Lady Caroline Fox was more censorious towards her sister-in-law. She described “The Duchess’s love for my brother is as a child loves its play-fellow.”¹⁸⁸ In Lady Caroline’s view, her sister-in-law loved her husband like a child, which was clearly not a steady foundation for marriage, and certainly not something expected from a lady of her status. The Duchess’s education, and consequently current behaviour, was also deficient:

The more I see the Duchess the more I blame Lady Ailesbury every day. Poor thing, she has I’m sure had no advantages from her education, and was quite a wild untaught thing turn’d loose.¹⁸⁹

The older Lennox sisters did not spare their younger ones either. Lady Louisa Lennox married in 1758 and became Lady Louisa Conolly at the age of fifteen. A year later, her sister Lady Caroline Fox wrote that Lady Louisa was “very much commended by everybody” and a “sweet amiable girl indeed, and so very properly behaved at her age

¹⁸⁶ Mendelson & Crawford 1995, 67. Also Amy Erickson has pointed out that in the sixteenth century legal documents referred to girls or maids as “virgins”. By the seventeenth century the term had changed to “spinster”. “Wench” was an unmarried female of any age in the later Middle Ages. According to Erickson, these terms had taken on negative connotations by the eighteenth century. Spinster gained the meaning of old maid in the late seventeenth century and wench as a whore in the eighteenth century. Erickson 1995 (1993), 47, 48.

¹⁸⁷ CEL vol. I. Emily, Countess of Kildare to James, Earl of Kildare, 22.5.1757, 37–38; CEL vol.III, Lady Louisa Conolly to Emily, Countess of Kildare, 28.5.1759, 19–23. Lady Mary Bruce (c.1740–1796) married Charles Lennox, 3rd Duke of Richmond.

¹⁸⁸ CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, Countess of Kildare, 7.9.1758, 180–182.

¹⁸⁹ CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, Countess of Kildare, 1.3.1760, 275–277.

is surprising.”¹⁹⁰ Still, even when a married lady, Lady Louisa was a girl to her elder sister.

The term girl was not always applied in a negative tone. Being young was also an excuse to behave in a lively way. Fanny Burney, herself nineteen years at the time, commented that a certain “Miss Cooke, who I believe is 40 too; but has so much good Nature & love of mirth in her, that she still appears a Girl.”¹⁹¹ Girlhood, as indicated earlier, meant livelihood and gaiety, something that adult womanhood normally lacked. Also, when a girl managed to behave as if she was an adult, and thus show that she was making progress towards becoming one, she was applauded for it. Fifteen-year-old Betsey Wynne remarked that “I amused myself very much and had another occasion to day to admire the good conduct and modesty of the Young Ladies of this country especially Miss Hoffmann which really behaves as well as any aged Lady.”¹⁹² The underlying idea is that age and power relations were connected. As Anu Korhonen has stated, age was determined in the early modern period through hierarchy and in relation to others. Different stages in life were separated by functions, rights and obligations. Girls were still in the process of becoming women, in the liminal stage between childhood and adulthood, where their behaviour was not considered proper for adults.¹⁹³ Minors were socially often seen as immature, and they were expected to be under the control of their elders. As Simonton puts it girlhood was a time of semi-dependence. According to her, girls were not completely dependent on their parents, as little children were, but did not have the full independence of adults.¹⁹⁴ It must be noted, however, that the independence of married women was questionable. Legally they were under the guardianship of their husbands.¹⁹⁵ Their independence was negotiable according to circumstances, relationship of spouses etc.

Girls of the eighteenth century held a status of dependency, submissiveness and obedience for several reasons. Girls were expected to conform to societal models of femininity and, therefore, the gendered notions applied to them as well. In the eyes of the law, minors, children and the young needed the guidance of their elders because their still developing minds and judgement could not decide their best interest. In the next section, I will look more closely how these ideals were put into practice on an everyday level.

¹⁹⁰ CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, Countess of Kildare, 3.4.1759, 205–206.

¹⁹¹ FB1, 158.

¹⁹² WD 2.1.1793, 134.

¹⁹³ Korhonen 2005, 75–76. See also Hanawalt 1993; 6; Fletcher 1995, 1995, 211; Abbot 1996, 73, 74; Toulalan 2013, 282; Katajala-Peltomaa & Vuolanto 2013, 41.

¹⁹⁴ Simonton 2011, 21.

¹⁹⁵ Shoemaker 2013 (1998), 91.

2.2 Everyday family dynamics

Loving parents and disobedient daughters

Eighteenth-century families involved different relationships: between parents and minor children, parents and adult children, between siblings, and between children and other family members such as aunts, uncles and grandparents. Widowhood and re-marriages also had an impact on family dynamics. For elite families kin networks were vital. Networks offered financial, political and even more importantly social support. Moreover, the family had a crucial role in transmitting social and cultural values to children and forming their gendered identity.¹⁹⁶ All of these factors had their influence on the personal experience of the girls. In this section I look at family relationships in these families and how the girls of this study managed to negotiate between the different norms and expectations they had as daughters, granddaughters, nieces and sisters.

Girls became part of their family circle and society from day one. This connection was also reflected in the chosen Christian name for the little girl. When Lady Louisa Stuart was born in 1757 her grandmother Lady Mary Wortley Montagu commented that “I am fond of your little Louisa: to say truth, I was afraid of a Bess, a Peg, or a Suky, which all give me the ideas of washing-tubs and scowering of kettles.”¹⁹⁷ Such a name would have been proper to a servant, but not for a lord’s daughter. Most of the girls appearing in this study share their Christian name with their mother, as did Lady Sarah Lennox, Lady Mary Pierrepont and Elizabeth Robinson. Lady Sarah’s sister Louisa was probably named after their great-grandmother Louisa, Duchess of Portsmouth. There had also been a girl in the family under the same name. Lady Harriet Pitt was most likely also named after her paternal grandmother. Frances (Fanny) Burney was named after her godmother.¹⁹⁸ A shared name was thought to form a connection between its bearers, so it was usual to name the child after kings or queens, saints, parents, godparents, grandparents or deceased siblings.¹⁹⁹ From the start the girls were tied to the world where their gender and family social status determined the framework for their lives.

The most meaningful relationship was of course between the girls and their parents. As I have already indicated, the eighteenth century idealised tender and affectionate parenthood. Motherhood became a full-time occupation to women and an ideal to achieve. However, this ideal was far from the reality of most elite mothers,

¹⁹⁶ Bailey 2010, 15, 17–19; Harris 2012, 3.

¹⁹⁷ MWM vol. III. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Mary, countess of Bute, 1754, 101–103. The date in the edition is most likely incorrect.

¹⁹⁸ Dobson 1903, 5.

¹⁹⁹ Cressy 1997, 150, 157, 160–162, 165; Abbott 2010, 114–115.

who handed the day-to-day upbringing of their children to wet-nurses, governesses etc. Fatherhood, in turn, was a sign of full mature manhood. The father was not only the keeper of discipline, the centre of authority, who was in charge of training and disciplining his children over the age of seven, but also a friend and guide to his offspring. Domesticity and sensibility encouraged intimacy within families.²⁰⁰ These ideals were also adapted to the ways children addressed their parents. No matter how young or mature the child was, she usually referred to her parents as “Mama” or “Papa”. Most often the attribute “dear” was attached to it. Such was the case with eleven-year-old Lady Caroline Lennox in 1734, the eight-year-old Lady Harriet Pitt in 1766 or eleven-year-old Maria Holroyd in 1782.²⁰¹ However, Elizabeth Robinson (b.1720) addressed her parents as “Sir” and “Madam,” even though in her letters to others they were always “papa” and “mama.”²⁰² Addressing family members with terms of intimacy was of course conventional in eighteenth-century letter-writing, but these conventions changed. Letter-writing became more informal during the period, even though age, rank, gender and kinship still had an impact on how to address the recipient. Especially with close kin, terms like “dearest papa” replaced the more formal “My Honoured Lord” or “Sir.” The French-originated *mamma* and *papa* were, however, in use from the end of the seventeenth century onwards.²⁰³ At least on a formal level the girls showed respect towards their parents and demonstrated their submissive status as daughters.

Despite these cultural norms, there are clear differences between sources as to how the parent-child relationships were portrayed. These statements show that personal dynamics had a great influence on the ways girls interacted with their parents. Autobiographical reminiscences were usually positive in tone, especially, if the parent had died. Mothers were beautiful, charming and gentle. Fathers possessed cheerfulness, excellent temper and good humour and they were dearly loved and admired.²⁰⁴ Everyday accounts related in letters and diaries were more vivid. The relationships between the girls and their fathers are almost over-emphasised in these statements. Fanny Burney had a quite loving but playful relationship with her father Dr. Charles Burney. Dr. Burney appreciated his daughter’s literary talents but could not help teasing her when the opportunity occurred. He certainly was not the

²⁰⁰ About the discussion of eighteenth-century parenthood see Bailey 2007, 219, 221; Bailey 2010, 24–26; Bailey 2012, 26–34; Foyster & Marten 2010, 4.

²⁰¹ DR vol. II. Lady Caroline Lennox to Charles, 2nd Duke of Richmond, 28.6.(1734), 689; HP Lady Harriet Pitt to Hester, Lady Chatham, 2.8.(1766), 1–2; MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd, 7.7.1782, 2–3.

²⁰² EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 27.1.1734, 6–7.

²⁰³ Wallin-Ashcroft 2000, 18; Whyman 2009, 22–23; Fletcher 2010 (2008), 292.

²⁰⁴ MB, 2, 5; *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 2, 6; MD vol. I. *Autobiography*, 13.

stereotypical gloomy patriarch who demanded absolute reverence and respect.²⁰⁵ The affectionate relationship between father and daughter is also clear in the fact that he had a nickname for her: Fanny Bull.²⁰⁶ Despite the hierarchical family structure of eighteenth-century society the sources reveal that children craved their parents' attention, love and approval. Especially the attention of their fathers was crucial, as they usually spent much of their time away from the family in London for business or politics. The parliamentary sessions usually began in November and, apart from the Christmas season, lasted for the whole spring. Young children, those who did not take part in social life, were usually left at a family seat in the countryside.²⁰⁷ Eleven-year-old Lady Caroline Lennox wrote in 1734 that she was "in great hopes my dr Papa will soon favour me with a letter which Will be a great pleasure to me."²⁰⁸ Eliza Dawson painted, in her adulthood reminiscences, a vivid image of a young girl of eight waiting for her father to come home:

My father was at this time, 1778, much employed as a commissioner under various Acts of Parliament for enclosing and dividing common land attached to townships, while my uncle took the surveying department. This took them much from home; and I well remember the joy which my father's return, especially, diffused through all his little household. I used to be on the watch for him at our garden gate, listening for the tramp of his horse, hours before his arrival. I had been diligently employed weeding or watering his favorite flowers, or seeing his pointers fed, and doing everything I thought would give me a clam to his approbation.²⁰⁹

Little Eliza could not wait to see her father again. In the meantime she took care of the garden so that her father would be proud of her. As noted by Bailey and others, these attitudes reflected the different roles of parents. Fathers acted as companions and teachers for their older children, especially after the age of seven, whereas mothers took care of babies and the younger ones. A mother was expected to provide emotional support a father's role was more material. He might teach his children to play or take them on outings and holidays. He had the task of enforcing discipline but should also show appropriate affection and provide economic support. Besides the

²⁰⁵ FB1, 19. See also FB1, 78–79. Fanny's gratitude and affection for her father. See FB1, 61.

²⁰⁶ FB1, 185. The same can be said about Mr. George Austen, father of Jane Austen, who had nicknames for all his children. See Worsley 2017, 21.

²⁰⁷ Martin 2004, 97.

²⁰⁸ DR vol. II. Lady Caroline Lennox to Charles, 2nd Duke of Richmond, 28.6.(1734), 689. A similar hope was expressed by fifteen-year-old Lady Harriet Pitt HP Lady Harriet Pitt to William, Earl of Chatham, 15.6.1773, 2–3.

²⁰⁹ *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 13.

obvious formal power over his children a father could have much informal influence on his daughter's life as well. Occasionally he would chaperone his daughter on outings, although this task was usually left to mothers and other female relatives. In return, daughters, especially unmarried ones, acted as companions for their parents and attended them during illnesses. While the extent of a father's involvement was optional and a matter of his own choice, the mother's duty and involvement was thought natural.²¹⁰

Therefore, it is not surprising that everyday mother-daughter relationships went largely unrecorded. Grown-up daughters spent much of their time with their mothers, something that was taken as self-evident.²¹¹ Nevertheless, this might have varied according to families and depending on girls' ages. Younger children might have spent only few hours daily with their parents and the rest with a governess or nursery-maids.²¹² As seen in the case of Georgiana Spencer in the previous section, when girls grew up, they were able to participate in day-to-day life more actively. Unfortunately the sources of this study do not provide any conclusive evidence on this matter. Additionally, it must be observed that most of the girls studied here lost their mothers at an early age and thus could not have a relationship with their biological mothers.

The girls were not only expected to show obedience and submissiveness to their biological parents, but also to their stepfathers and stepmothers. In ideal cases, new fathers and mothers were as dearly loved as the biological ones. Maria Edgeworth (b. 1767) had two stepmothers. Her own mother, Anna Maria Elers, died while giving birth to a daughter in 1773. Only four months afterwards, her father Richard Edgeworth married Miss Honora Sneyd. Mrs. Honora Edgeworth, in turn, died in 1780, and eight months later, Mr. Edgeworth married his deceased wife's sister Miss Elizabeth Sneyd.²¹³ In her letters, Maria referred to both of her stepmothers as "dear mamma" and referred to herself as "daughter."²¹⁴ Fanny Burney's mother died when she was nine years old. Six years later, her father married again. In her juvenile journal, Fanny referred to her stepmother Elizabeth as "mama."²¹⁵ Joanne Bailey points out that having a happy family enhanced personal and familial merit, because it showed respected social and cultural values.²¹⁶ When looking at girlhood memories, it is useful to keep in mind, as Lotte van de Pol states, that the emotional impact of memories varies greatly. Van de Pol gives an example: unpleasant childhood memories may not have been remembered very well, and could even be spoken of

²¹⁰ Davidoff & Hall 2002 (1987), 331–332, 335; Sheffrin 2006, 182; Bailey 2007, 219, 223.

²¹¹ Kaartinen 2001, 168; Davidoff & Hall 2002 (1987), 341; Fletcher 2010 (2008), 292.

²¹² Martin 2004, 112. See also Vickery 1999 (1998), 110, 113.

²¹³ *The life and letters of Maria Edgeworth* 1895, 6, 8–10.

²¹⁴ ME Maria Edgeworth to Mrs. Honora Edgeworth, 30.3.1776, 2–3; ME Maria Edgeworth to Margaret Ruxton, 11.2.1790, 17–18.

²¹⁵ FB1, 4, 5.

²¹⁶ Bailey 2012, 134.

with ease, whereas some memories remained too painful even to write down years afterwards.²¹⁷ It is no wonder then that autobiographical writings most often pictured positive family lives.

The emotional ties between eighteenth-century girls and their parents can also be traced in the most tragic events. Death was a common visitor in all eighteenth-century families. Research has already established that parents lost their children frequently and that they were genuinely mourned.²¹⁸ But children's and young people's grief has been understudied. It is estimated that between 1600 and 1750 a quarter of youths under fifteen years and a third of those under twenty had lost at least one parent, sometimes even both. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, the mortality rate declined. Twenty per cent of those under fifteen and a quarter of those under twenty had lost their parent(s).²¹⁹ Even though the girls studied here had most likely to face a loss at some point in their lives, it didn't prevent them from grieving or fearing for the sake of their loved ones. This fear of loss is especially visible in the way the girls described their parents' illnesses. Eight-year-old Lady Harriet Pitt fretted over her father's gout and eleven-year-old Betsey Wynne reported on her mother's "terrible attack of convulsions accompanied by colics."²²⁰ It was customary to embrace death with solemnity: "we all must die" as eleven-year-old Betsey Wynne bluntly put it in 1789.²²¹ In contemporary thinking, excessive sorrow was seen as dangerous as it affected one's health. The grief for a dead loved one could, at worst, be lethal. Female bodies were especially vulnerable to uncontrolled feelings. Such feelings would cause them all kinds of illnesses, such as hysteria. But the eighteenth century also saw the emergency of the culture of sensibility. Sensibility enabled compassionate behaviour and indicated refinement. Women became seen as the emotional sex for which this kind of behaviour was "natural".²²² Therefore, showing controlled and right kind of emotions was part of constructing the elite female gender. It is clear that young girls already embraced these rules.

There is no doubt that the death of a parent was a significant event, whether or not the girl remembered it or not. Mary Berry (b.1763) lost her mother before the age of four. She seems to have had no recollection on the event.²²³ Either she was kept away,

²¹⁷ Pol 2011, 71.

²¹⁸ Kaartinen 2014, *passim*. See also Davidoff & Hall 2002 (1987), 330–331; Fletcher 2010 (2008), 81–83. About two per cent of children died in their first days, four per cent within the first weeks, nine per cent within the first months and thirteen per cent within the first year. If the child survived to its second birthday, its chances increased enormously. Martin 2004, 171–172; Kaartinen 2006, 74–75; Foyster & Marten 2010, 7.

²¹⁹ Cooper 2007, 57–58; Foyster & Marten 2010, 7.

²²⁰ HP Lady Harriet Pitt to Hester, Lady Chatham, 15.9.(1766), 2; WD 2.9.1789, 4.

²²¹ WD 18.11.1790, 44–45.

²²² Kaartinen 2014, 157–158; Ylivuori 2015, 125–131.

²²³ MB, 5.

as happened to Burney siblings when their mother died in 1762,²²⁴ or she was too young to remember. A death could also result in an idealized image of a parent. In young Eliza Dawson's mind her mother's character was surrounded with "mysterious sacredness."²²⁵ Although there certainly were real emotions behind these remarks, it must also be remembered that unusual emotional events are more easily remembered than relatively neutral everyday ones.²²⁶ It is no wonder that these kinds of incidents are most often recorded in letters, diaries and autobiographies. Previous study has established that eighteenth-century autobiographical writers pinpointed the death of a parent as having the most profound consequences for them.²²⁷

Death also had purely material consequences. Even landed aristocracy and gentry lived on a very slippery economic slope. Family fortunes were very vulnerable to political and economic disturbances, bad weather or an array of unmarried sisters and younger brothers. An unexpected death could also badly injure the prospects of the family. If the father died young or with little economic means his younger children would have to make their fortunes themselves unless the heir was willing or capable of providing for them. For unmarried girls, the death of a father meant that they had to throw themselves on the mercies of their eldest brother and heir or other relatives to provide for them.²²⁸ Once again the girls had to face fact that they were not able to control their own lives but had to submit to the will of others.

What all of these examples have in common is that they show how these girls acted out their role as daughters in eighteenth-century family hierarchy. Just like gender, the age-bound relations within families were performed through speech and gestures. Age was about power and girls, for the most part, lacked that power. They were to show love and obedience towards their parents in their words and deeds. But as I will show next the girls were still able to rebel against such hierarchies and demonstrate their own feelings and thoughts and in the most drastic cases take their lives into their own hands.

Eighteenth-century family life was not always easy. What happened when things were not so rosy? I have argued in the article I wrote with Marjo Kaartinen (2016) that the contradictions in eighteenth-century elite families occurred when expectations and reality collided. That is when parents did not fulfill their roles as caregivers or educators, or children did not stand up to their parents' expectations as obedient and dutiful daughters and sons or behaved in away unsuited to their social status. The demand of fulfilling the appropriate role in the family went both ways. Evidence of frictions can be found even though it is scarce. It was unusual to reveal unpleasant

²²⁴ Doody 1988, 22.

²²⁵ *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 6.

²²⁶ Bailey 2012, 138–141.

²²⁷ Bailey 2012, 138–141.

²²⁸ Cooper 2007, 62–63.

matters in correspondence or diaries, at least directly. However, when friction is detectable it reveals important realities concerning ideal family roles.²²⁹ Twenty-year-old Miss Mary Berry thought that her father's "easy inefficient character" had placed him and his children in a difficult financial situation. Her father was disinherited by his uncle because he had refused to marry again after Mary's mother died. Mary felt that she "had to lead those who ought to have led me." She was her father's "guide and monitor" instead her father being her "tutor and protector."²³⁰ The roles of parent and a child had been reversed. Mary Berry was not the only one who had to become the carer of her parents. As the only unmarried daughter, even though already legally an adult, twenty-one-year-old Lady Louisa Stuart was bound to keep her ageing parents company. Letters to her sister are filled with references to their parents' current health, the books they read, and the visitors they had had. Nevertheless, her relations with her parents seem to have been mostly comfortable. She stated that "my mother is exceedingly good to me, and treats me with great confidence." But on one occasion, Lady Louisa wrote: "I do try all I can to entertain my mother, but the worst is that from late events half the subjects we used to talk of are grown painful."²³¹ When personalities clashed, it was not so easy to get along with one's parents. It is also obvious that both Mary and Lady Louisa felt that they were their parents' caregivers and not the reverse. In these cases the power-relations induced by age had been turned upside down.

The ideal of perfect love and harmony in families with several step-parents and half- and step-siblings was also sometimes put to the test. When her stepmother Mrs. Honora Edgeworth died, Maria was only thirteen years old. Maria's father wrote to his daughter that when she grew older, she would understand that her stepmother "fulfilled the part of a mother towards you, and towards your sisters, without partiality for her own, or servile indulgence towards mine."²³² It is evident from this letter that Mrs. Edgeworth's behaviour towards her stepdaughter had caused some alarm. Maria's father apparently tried to convince his daughter that his choice to marry for the second time was the right one. Whatever had happened between Maria

²²⁹ Karppinen-Kummunmäki & Kaartinen 2016, 8–9. In contrast Rudolf Dekker has argued that as the purpose of personal texts was to pass on family traditions and values to the next generation any negative comments about one's parents were necessarily omitted. Dekker 2000, 111.

²³⁰ MB, 3–4, 12.

²³¹ LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson, 28.11.1778, 109–111; LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson, 28.10.1778, 99–100. Mary Granville's relationship with her mother was also somewhat strained. She wrote that "the dejectedness of my mother's spirits, occasioned by the disappointments my father had met with his fortune, and the not being able to give her children all the advantages in their education she wished to do, made her unable to support herself." MD vol. I. Autobiography, 13.

²³² ME Richard Edgeworth to Maria Edgeworth, 2.5.1780, 6–7.

and her stepmother it shows that both children and parents were supposed to fulfil their roles in appropriate way. Children were demanded obedience but parents should show good judgment and fairness. Frictions between stepmother and her stepchildren were also evident in the Burney family:

Charlotte who is to accompany my mother on to Wales, where she proposes spending near 2 months. That dear little Girl went so much à contre coeur, that I was quite sorry & concerned for her. I believe, she would willingly & literally have parted with a little finger, rather to have been left behind with me & no wonder! – for she is never spoke to, never noticed at all, except as an errand runner: in which capacity, I am apt to suspect, she now Travels, as she is by no means a favourite.²³³

Fifteen-year-old Charlotte was very reluctant to travel with her stepmother Elizabeth to Wales. Her elder sister Fanny suspected that the girl would have a difficult time as she was not her step-mother's favourite. She would merely be a servant and no companion. Apart from few obscure remarks, the strained relationship between the Burney children and their stepmother Elizabeth Allen Burney is almost completely invisible in the diaries of young Fanny Burney. Charles Burney married his second wife in October 1767, apparently without the knowledge of either of their children. Margaret Doody is convinced that all the Burney siblings hated their new stepmother. They disparagingly called her various names behind her back, such as "the Lady", "Precious" or "Madam".²³⁴ Although the remarks of rebellion were very subtle it is clear that Fanny and her siblings ignored the power-relations that they were supposed to have maintain within the family.

It goes without saying that children sometimes disappointed their parents and did not live up to their expectations, just as the parents did not always live up to theirs, even though the girls of my study were fully aware of the expectations laid at their door.²³⁵ Early in the century, fourteen-year-old Elizabeth Robinson constantly gave occasion for reproof because of her sharp tongue, talkativeness and impertinence.²³⁶ In the privacy of her diary Betsey Wynne also used her sharp tongue when judging the behaviour of her parents. In December 1795 she wrote that her father had caused a disagreeable scene at a ball when he had a jealous fit and argued with his wife.²³⁷ In the eighteenth century it was obviously not acceptable that a daughter reproach her parents, even though she was right that such behaviour was not appropriate in a public

²³³ FB2, 208.

²³⁴ Doody 1988, 25, 27, 29.

²³⁵ Karppinen-Kummunmäki & Kaartinen 2016, 10, 12.

²³⁶ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 11.2.1734, 6–7.

²³⁷ WD 19.12.1795, 183.

place. The speech of unmarried girls was seen as problematic in the eighteenth century, and in early modern period in general. By talking too much, females broke the patriarchal order by claiming agency. They were no longer under male authority. Although conversation was an essential part of eighteenth-century elite social life, impertinent speech or sexual allusions, were not acceptable for girls, as they indicated a corrupted character and mind.²³⁸ Both boys and girls were obligated to show obedience and behave well, but when it came to sexual matters, girls were under stricter control.²³⁹ In moments like these, when their roles as young females and the members of the elite intersect, the contradictions of expectations become most visible. Marital issues were often extremely acute moments of dispute between the generations in elite families. In the early part of the century, twenty-one-year-old Lady Mary Pierrepont came face to face with the harsh reality of being the disobedient daughter of an aristocrat who was careful to preserve his and his family's status. Lady Mary was technically an adult, but she still was under the command of her father. Her father had found out that she had intended to marry a man of her own liking, and not of his choice. In a letter to her future husband Edward Wortley Montagu, Lady Mary related the conversation she had with her father:

He told me he was very much surpriz'd that I did not depend on his Judgment for my future happynesse, that he knew nothing I had to complain of, etc., that he did not doubt I had some other fancy in my head, which encourag'd me to this disobedience, but he assur'd me if I refus'd a settlement he had provided for me, he gave me his word, whatever proposalls were made him, he would never so much as enter into a Treaty with any other; that, if I founded any hopes upon his death, I should find my selfe mistaken, he never intended to leave me any thing but an Annuity of £400; [---]²⁴⁰

Her father, the Duke of Kingston, clearly believed in patriarchal power, and exercised it in all his actions. It was inconceivable to him that his daughter did not trust him with the most important choice of her life. In his view, a penniless younger son of a country squire was not a proper husband for his daughter. She should have obeyed him and chosen the right candidate.²⁴¹ These instances, too, can be interpreted as moments of rebellion and claiming of agency by the girls. In theory, girls were bound to submit to the rule of their father and act in every way for the sake of family honour.

²³⁸ Karppinen-Kummunmäki 2015, 199–205; Karppinen-Kummunmäki & Kaartinen 2016, 10–11. See also Parland-von Essen 2005, 35–37, 94–97; Ylivuori 2015, 174–189.

²³⁹ Karppinen-Kummunmäki & Kaartinen 2016, 12.

²⁴⁰ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 26.7.1712, 133–136.

²⁴¹ It is possible, as Krausman Ben-Amos has stated, that the duke used the inheritance portion as a way to punish his misbehaving child. Disinheritance occurred very rarely but it did happen. Krausman Ben-Amos 2000, 300–301.

Yet, these little frictions that ruffled the familial harmony show that girls were brave enough to make individual choices at time to time.

Being part of the kin network: With other family members

Eighteenth-century elite girls were born into a wide kin network that included, besides their parents and siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and godparents. All these people had an impact on the lives of the girls in various ways, both mentally and materially. The girls appearing in this study made frequent references to their kin in letters and diaries. At some point they all learned of their ancestry, as every autobiography includes a report of the family tree. This knowledge of family history was not reserved only for the daughters of nobility but also for those of the genteel. As we will see in this section, in relation to their grandparents, aunts and uncles the girls acted according to their submissive position in the family hierarchy but could also form close and affectionate relations. In the roles of aunts these girls managed blurr even further the strict age-bound hierarchies.

Even in an age of high mortality, some of the girls of this study had living grandparents. The rules of politeness applied in these relationships as in any other. At the beginning of the century, the two daughters of the first Duke of Richmond, Anne and Louise, spoke of their grandmother, the Duchess of Portsmouth, with the title of Madam and about themselves as “humble and obedient servant and grandchild.”²⁴² In 1804, seventeen-year-old Lady Sarah Spencer called her grandmother Georgiana, Dowager Countess Spencer as “dear Grandmama.” Her other grandmother was called “Granny Lucan.”²⁴³ These varying ways of address may be explained with changes in letter-writing styles towards the end of the century, but they may also be a sign of personal relationships. The Lennox girls, for instance, might not have known their French grandmother so well and therefore applied a more formal style. At the end of the century, sixteen-year-old Elizabeth Wynne referred in her diary to her maternal grandparents as the mother and father of her Mama instead of more intimate grandmamma or grandpapa.²⁴⁴ The grandparents lived in France so it is very possible that young Elizabeth had never met them. Once again these girls acted out their role of dutiful granddaughter in words that reflected their position in the age-bound hierarchy. But on the every-day level, the relationship with grandparents and grandchildren was as variable as with parents and their children.

²⁴² DR vol. I. Lady Anne Lennox to Louise, Duchess of Portsmouth, s.a, 27–28; DR vol. I. Lady Louise Lennox to Louise, Duchess of Portsmouth, 12.4.1706, 28. Lady Anne Lennox (1703–1789) was the future second Countess of Albemarle and Lady Louise (1694–1716), Countess of Berkeley.

²⁴³ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Georgiana, Dowager Countess Spencer, 8.6.1804, 1–2; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Hon. Robert Spencer, 22.2.1811, 119–122.

²⁴⁴ WD 11.4.1794, 148–149.

The descriptions the girls wrote of their grandparents were respectful, if not always especially affectionate. Lady Sarah Spencer had very affectionate relationship with both her grandmothers. Her letters are full of funny anecdotes and proclamations of her worry for their health and wellbeing.²⁴⁵ Eliza Dawson recalls later in life that her maternal grandfather Mr. Hill was not a very affectionate man. He never took her in his arms or kissed her.²⁴⁶ Her paternal grandmother was the matriarch of the family. She “exacted obedience and habitual attention from all her family, and I was accustomed to see her treated with the greatest respect by her sons and daughter.”²⁴⁷ Although in general autobiographies depicted grandparents as figures of authority, Eliza’s comment that her maternal grandfather did not show any affection towards her is noteworthy. Mr. Hill did not represent the kind of affectionate indulgent grandfather that was the eighteenth-century ideal. According to Bailey, love of grandparents was as important and idealized as that of parents in the eighteenth-century world.²⁴⁸ Eliza’s reflections support this view. Mr. Hill’s lack of affection was clearly against the ideal image of a grandparent. However, the autobiography portrays Eliza’s feelings in adulthood. Whether or not she felt the same way when she was still a girl is only speculative. In turn, Lady Sarah’s letters show that despite the age-bound hierarchy, grandparents and grandchildren could form a close relationship in their daily lives.

The age-bound hierarchy within families did have its effects. Grandparents could get involved in the lives of their granddaughters very forcefully, sometimes even more so than their parents. According to Foyster this involvement indicates that the parent-child relationship did not end in marriage. The birth of grandchildren started a stage in the life cycle where family patterns were newly negotiated. Married couples were not completely isolated from their birth families even though they had separate households. In a time of higher adulthood mortality than today it was not unusual for grandparents and other relatives to step in as substitute parents for their orphaned grandchildren, nieces or nephews.²⁴⁹ But sometimes the grandparents could change the lives of their granddaughters for good. When Lady Mary Pierrepont’s mother died in 1692, the children, Mary, her sisters Frances and Evelyn and her brother William were passed into to care of their paternal grandmother Elizabeth Pierrepont (née Evelyn). They stayed there until the grandmother died in 1698. At her death the

²⁴⁵ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Mary Georgiana, Dowager Countess of Spencer, 8.6.1804, 1–2; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 7.11.1808, 44; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 11.11.1808, 44–45; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 9.12.1808, 51–52; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 20.3.1809, 62–64; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 22.2.1811, 119–122.

²⁴⁶ *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 11.

²⁴⁷ *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 2–3.

²⁴⁸ Bailey 2012, 199; 200, 202–203.

²⁴⁹ Foyster 2001, 317; Cooper 2007, 59.

grandmother bequeathed to her granddaughter, seven-year-old Evelyn £12,000 (as the heir of the Evelyn family), and handed her guardianship to her daughter Lady Chayne instead of the girl's father. Eight-year-old Frances received £1000, but nine-year-old Mary got nothing. The reasons for this remain unclear.²⁵⁰ It is also unclear, what Lady Mary thought about her situation. What is certain, however, is that their grandmother's decision caused estrangement of Lady Mary from her sister Evelyn, who no longer lived with her siblings. According to Isobel Grundy, this is clear in Lady Mary's adulthood letters. Lady Mary's letters to her sister Frances, are lively and full of entertaining details. To Evelyn Lady Mary wrote only what was necessary for the sake of politeness.²⁵¹ The dependency of girls on their elders generosity is demonstrated in this case. Adults decided for the most part how and where the children lived. The decision of her grandmother reshaped the life of young Lady Mary and later her relationship to her own sister, and there was nothing she could do about it. But the care and help of grandparents was also reciprocated by the concern their granddaughters had for their health and well-being and by the practical services they offered them.²⁵²

Because of the wide age differences between siblings in families, it was not unusual that girls found themselves in the roles of aunts at a very young age. However, the way they acted in these roles varied greatly. Lady Sarah Lennox was only two years old when her first nephew Stephen Fox was born in 1747, and she virtually grew up with her Fitzgerald nieces and nephews in Ireland after her parents died. Her sister Lady Emily's eldest son George was born when Lady Sarah was three years old.²⁵³ Unfortunately, there are virtually no traces of her role as an aunt in her letters. Fanny Burney became an aunt at the age of twenty and she followed the growing up of her nieces and nephews with delight.²⁵⁴ The role of aunt did not automatically require graveness. Eugenia Wynne became an aunt at the age of eighteen, when her sister Betsey gave birth to a son. When she was in the mature age of twenty-four, Eugenia explains how she and her sister Justina (aged eighteen) "ran all over the gardens, frightening children."²⁵⁵ Being aunts did not stop them having fun as young girls of their age would. Although aunts were theoretically above their nieces and nephews in family hierarchies, this could hardly be the case when there

²⁵⁰ Grundy 2004 (1999), 8, 10.

²⁵¹ Grundy 2004 (1999), 12.

²⁵² SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Hon. Robert Spencer, 22.2.1811, 119–122; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Hon. Robert Spencer, 27.3.1810, 96–97; FB2, 159; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Hon. Robert Spencer, 20.3.1809, 62–64.

²⁵³ See Family trees in Tillyard 1995 (1994).

²⁵⁴ About his one-year-old nephew Richard Allen Burney she wrote: "He is vastly well & Crawls upon the Carpet with amazing Dexterity – he Can lift himself half way up already – Indeed he thrives extremely." FB2, 42.

²⁵⁵ WD 11.3.1798; WD 9.7.1804, 368.

was such a small age gap between them. Young aunts were almost like cousins. In the case of Lady Sarah, she was clearly more of a companion and playmate, whereas Fanny Burney and Eugenia Wynne could claim much more authority and duties of upbringing over their nieces and nephews.

The support of the family network was usually very welcoming for the girls studied here, but these relationships could also be strained. Aunts and uncles most often provided material aid and services to their nieces. This could be anything from chaperoning them at social events from accommodating them for various lengths of time.²⁵⁶ It was considered one of the most important duties of siblings to take care of each other's orphaned children.²⁵⁷ Aunts could also act as their niece's friends and mentors. For instance, Maria Josepha Holroyd and Maria Edgeworth held close friendships with their father's sister. Keeping up family connections was not only vertical, but horizontal too, as Amy Harris has suggested. Through correspondence, aunts included their nieces within the sibling network.²⁵⁸ Therefore, girls were not only subordinate beings in the hierarchical family, but vital members in its upkeep. However, because of their subordinate position, girls had occasionally to accept less welcome "assistance" from their close kin. Eliza Dawson recalled that her maternal aunts Hill "gave me plenty of advice, but no sympathy; they were intelligent, just, and good, but they saw in me the faults of a spoiled child, and thought it their duty to point them out."²⁵⁹ Mary Granville had similar memories. Young Mary was brought up at her aunt's house in Whitehall from the age of eight until she was fifteen. Mary was not very fond of her aunt's Lady Stanley's educational methods, however, as she observed

an impetuosity [sic] in my temper, which made her judge it necessary to moderate it by mortifying my spirit, lest I should grow too lively and unruly for my reason. I own I often found it rebellious, and could ill bear the frequent checks I met with.²⁶⁰

As an older relative, it was her aunt's duty to check her niece's imprudent behaviour, even though the young girl was not very pleased about it and even rebelled against it. Mary even found her aunt's actions too harsh. Not only did Mary criticise the actions of her older relatives, but she also made negative comments about their characters. She called her aunt Mary Lady Lansdowne jealous, who never read anything except

²⁵⁶ FB1, 108; MD vol. I. Autobiography, 4.

²⁵⁷ Crawford 2008 (2004), 221.

²⁵⁸ Harris 2012, 67.

²⁵⁹ *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 11.

²⁶⁰ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 8.

“idle books that I was not allowed to read.”²⁶¹ These examples show that even if elite girls were brought up to respect their elders and be submissive, it did not prevent them from rebelling against unfairness. These remarks were their way, even if subtly made, to show agency and stand up for themselves.

However, occasionally the girl had to submit to the power of others, especially if her position in the family network was a complicated one. Mary Granville’s parents were financially dependent on her uncle Lord Lansdowne. The death of Queen Anne in 1714 destroyed her father’s political career and forced him to retire with his family to the countryside. Yet their position in society required that Mary would receive at least a decent sort of education proper for a genteel girl. This financial dependency reached its height when seventeen-year-old Mary was forced to accept the offer of marriage made by her uncle’s political ally, fifty-seven-year-old Alexander Pendarves.²⁶² Mary put her situation bluntly: “I was not entreated, but commanded.” Despite her reluctance, she finally gave away, as she was worried about how her refusal would affect her parents’ situation. She thought it was her duty to release her parents from the need to support her when an opportunity arose.²⁶³ What else could a girl from respectable family do in these circumstances but to marry?

Love, support and dispute between siblings

When a girl was born into an eighteenth-century family she rarely grew up on her own. She was surrounded by brothers and sisters and often with half- and stepsiblings as well. Between 1725 and 1800, women gave birth on average to 7.5 children during their lifetimes.²⁶⁴ The Lennox family included seven children who lived to adulthood, five girls and two boys, and at least three children, who died in infancy.²⁶⁵ Initially the Burney household had six children, two boys and four girls. Additionally, the Burney children had nine half-siblings, five boys and four girls and two step-sisters.²⁶⁶ In the Robinson family there were nine children, seven boys and two girls.²⁶⁷ The Tracy family had all in all 14 children, nine boys and five girls.²⁶⁸ The Spencers had nine children, six boys and three girls, whereas the Pitts had four children, two girls and

²⁶¹ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 22.

²⁶² MD vol. I. Autobiography, 7–8, 26.

²⁶³ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 26, 28–29.

²⁶⁴ Foyster & Marten 2010, 7.

²⁶⁵ Tillyard 1995 (1994), 12, 17.

²⁶⁶ FBI, The Burney Family, xlii–xlvi.

²⁶⁷ Apparently there were a total of twelve children but only nine survived childhood. Climenson 1906, 5.

²⁶⁸ Harris 2012, 179.

two boys. The Granville sisters Mary and Anne had two brothers. Mary Berry had only one sister.²⁶⁹

Siblinghood was likely to be the longest relationships in a person's life during the eighteenth century. This was due to the demographic conditions: late age of marriage and high mortality rate, population increase, climate warming, and better hygiene and healthcare. It is estimated that on average a thirty-year-old adult had two surviving siblings of each gender during the century. Siblings constituted 18 to 22 per cent of person's closest kin. Therefore, siblings had great influence in shaping each other's sense of self.²⁷⁰

Sibling relations were some of the few social interactions that allowed eighteenth-century girls to act more freely and on more equal terms. Amy Harris has pointed out that sibling relations were seen, contrary to other early modern relations, as equal. Moreover, eighteenth-century siblinghood was linguistically less rigid than other relationships. "Brother" or "sister" could mean one's biological siblings, but also half- and stepsiblings, in-laws or even illegitimate siblings.²⁷¹ Although in every day practices siblings were bound to hierarchical demands, gender roles and male privilege.

The girls manifested their love towards their siblings frequently in letters. The emotional ties were strengthened by remembering absent siblings. The hope of a sister that she was not forgotten by her siblings is constantly stated.²⁷² This wish to be remembered was especially acute with unmarried sisters who, like Lady Louisa Stuart, still lived in their childhood home with their parents. Frequent correspondence with her other siblings was an important consolation in loneliness and a method of keeping up the familial ties. Lady Louisa's disappointment was bitter when she didn't receive any letters from her favourite sister Lady Caroline Dawson. Her elder sisters were less frequent in their correspondence, and Lady Louisa once complained that her sister Jane had sent her two copies of letters for someone else, but only a short note for her.²⁷³

Love between siblings was considered natural, if parents were wise enough to foster it. Children were bound to obey and respect their elders, but expected to love their siblings. A common heritage formed the basis for their solidarity and unity.²⁷⁴

²⁶⁹ The information is derived from primary sources unless otherwise stated.

²⁷⁰ Harris 2012, 15; Crawford 2008(2004), 211, 223.

²⁷¹ Harris 2012, 5, 12–14. See also Crawford 2008 (2004), 211–212; Davidoff & Hall 2002 (1987), 348; Lahtinen 2007, 123.

²⁷² EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, duchess of Portland, 15.8.1739, 37–39; EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Sarah Robinson (c.1740/1), 80–81; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Hon. Robert Spencer, 9.12.1808, 51–52.

²⁷³ LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson 15.7.1778, 16–21.

²⁷⁴ Crawford 2008 (2004), 218; Davidoff & Hall 2002 (1987), 348–349; Harris 2012, 28–29, 57–58.

Amy Harris points out that the close relationship of siblings was only natural considering that they spent almost every day in the early part of their lives together. Until the age of seven, and often mid-teens, Georgian siblings shared their daily routines of eating and sleeping, playing and studying. At the same time, they learned the family and social responsibilities and their own places in the family unit. In short, they influenced each other's development as individuals. School holidays frequently brought the brothers back home to interact with their sisters. In the meantime, they kept in touch with letters. Exchanges of gifts, news and inside jokes kept the family ties tight. Sisters were particularly close to each other, as they received their education in each other's company. Sister-brother relations have also been described as close, whereas relations between brothers were usually competitive.²⁷⁵ Expressing love in their letters can be described as "kin work." Familial ties were strengthened, for example, through correspondence. This was especially the responsibility of female members of the family. Letter-writing manuals, which were published in large numbers during the eighteenth century offered models for affectionate, equal and supportive sibling correspondence. These letters usually comprised a kind of group conversation: one letter might contain news from other siblings, the content of their letters and instructions for other siblings, for example, to answer to their letters more often.²⁷⁶

The girls sought to find their place in the family unit. Younger sisters had to adapt their role to the demands of their elders, whereas older ones had much more room to act. This is evident in the ways the girls wrote about their siblings in letters. Older sisters gave admiring and tender descriptions of their younger ones,²⁷⁷ whereas as younger sisters compared their own situations with the older ones'. For instance, fourteen-year-old Lady Sarah Lennox had contrasting opinions of her elder siblings. She thought her brother George did not like her, whereas Charles, the Duke of Richmond, was very agreeable and resembled her in many things. She thought her sister Lady Caroline an odd woman, but pleasant to live with.²⁷⁸ Lady Sarah was significantly younger than Caroline or her brothers. They had already established their lives as adults, whereas Lady Sarah was just entering into society. She felt herself closer to her brother Charles, because he was so similar in character. At the age of seventeen, Fanny Burney wittily remarked that "Younger sisters are almost different beings from elder one's, but, thank God, it is quite and unaffectedly without repining or envy that I see my elder sister so continually gad about and visit, etc, when I rest at home."²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ Harris 2012, 28, 40–45, 56, 63. See also Crawford 2008 (2004), 223–224.

²⁷⁶ Harris 2012, 44, 64. See also Crawford 2008 (2004), 218.

²⁷⁷ ME Maria Edgeworth to Sophy Ruxton, 14.8.1792, 36–39.

²⁷⁸ CL vol. II. Lady Sarah Lennox to Emily, countess of Kildare, Dec. 1759, 80–83.

²⁷⁹ FB1, 68.

There were various factors that affected the girls' relationships with their siblings. Age difference was one. The age gap between the eldest and the youngest in most families was often wide. The eldest of the Lennox children, Lady Caroline, was almost thirty years older than the youngest Lady Cecilia. Elizabeth Robinson (b.1720) was the first born daughter. Her eldest brother Matthew was seven years older than her, and the youngest brother Charles thirteen years younger. Elizabeth's sister Sarah was a year younger than her. The Stuart household was also large. Lady Louisa Stuart (b.1757) was the youngest of thirteen children. Her eldest sister Mary was nineteen years her senior. Lady Sarah Spencer (b.1787) was the second eldest child. She was five years younger than her brother John Charles. The youngest brother George was twelve years younger than her.

Age difference certainly played a part in forming sibling relationships. It is obvious that the narrower the age gap between them, the closer relationships siblings had. One evidently close sister-brother duo was Lady Sarah Spencer and her brother Robert, who was only two years younger than she. Lady Sarah wrote to her brother on his seventeenth birthday: "How very well I remember as if it was but yesterday, your christening, your childhood, and all your history, and bound up as it has been with mine, what a continual source of blessings and happiness and comfort you have been to me." Lady Sarah acknowledged that although there was no favouritism in their large family, some members were more intimate with each other than other "either owing to age or character." She looked up to her eldest brother, whereas she looked down her three younger siblings.²⁸⁰ Younger siblings were sometimes a source of annoyance. Nine-year-old Eugenia Wynne was annoyed when her younger sisters, Harriet (aged five) and Justina (three), were making a noise in the room while she was trying to read a book.²⁸¹ Older siblings, of course, made fun of the little ones. Mary Granville's seven years younger sister Ann was for the butt of her and her friend Miss Kirkham's remarks. Little Ann was "often offended at our whispers and mysterious talk." When Ann grew up, her elder sister, by then already married, marked her maturing with approval:

My sister was now grown a very reasonable and entertaining companion though very young: she had a lively genius, improved beyond her years, loved reading, and had an excellent memory. I was surprized [sic] at her understanding, having never before attended to her but as to a child, and the goodness of her heart, and the delicacy of her sentiments delighted me still more. From that time I had perfect confidence in her, told her some of my distresses, and found great

²⁸⁰ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to the Hon. Robert Spencer, 24.10.1808, 41.

²⁸¹ WD 17.8.1789, 1.

consolation and relief to my mind by this opening of my heart, and from her great tenderness and friendship for me.²⁸²

The importance of a sister maturing also lay in the mutual companionship. In sibling relations, too, acquiring sufficient reason and proper behaviour were vital. Older siblings regarded younger ones as mere children, as Mary Pendarves had done, as long as they were not able to have equal relationship as properly behaving individuals.

Siblings learned from each other, and it was especially the role of the elders to guide the younger ones. Mary Pendarves provided her younger sister, seventeen-year-old Ann Granville with some material advice, as in a letter sent in March 1724, where she told Anne what to wear during the time of mourning.²⁸³ In 1723, eighteen-year-old Anne Tracy recorded in her diary that she taught her sisters to play whist.²⁸⁴ From their earliest childhood, siblings took part in and influenced each others' upbringing. Older sisters could show an example of proper female behaviour by helping their mother in daily domestic tasks and assisting with the nursing of younger ones and teaching them.²⁸⁵ By imitating their older sisters, the girls learnt how to construct their own gendered identity.

Gender, age and social hierarchies were significant factors of difference, and these were applied, at least to some extent, in modes of address among the siblings as well. In aristocratic families the eldest brother was referred to by his title, whereas the younger sisters and brothers were addressed by their forenames.²⁸⁶ Therefore, the Lennox sisters called their brother Charles brother Richmond, and Lady Sarah Spencer referred to her brother, John Charles, as Althorp. Lady Louisa Stuart spoke of her elder, already married, sisters with their full name and title, such as Lady Jane Macartney or Lady Lowther, but she referred to her brothers by their Christian names. In genteel families sisters referred to their brothers by their first names or nicknames, as seen below where I discuss siblings' hypocorisms. In their sibling-relations girls did conform to the patriarchal gender hierarchy in which males (i.e. brothers) were put first. Moreover, girls had to also to acknowledge their place in the sibling age-hierarchy and the status of their married sisters as above themselves, and therefore address them with their surnames.

However, hierarchies did not prevent the girls studied here from bending the rules. The nature of different sibling relations was evident in the use of various hypocorisms or nicknames family members gave to each other. Girls used

²⁸² MD vol. I. Autobiography, 16, 85.

²⁸³ MD vol. I. Mary Pendarves to Ann Granville, 28.3.1724, 96–97.

²⁸⁴ AT 19.11.1723, 83.

²⁸⁵ Harris 2012, 39–40.

²⁸⁶ Harris 2012, 14. See also Lahtinen 2007, 120.

hypocorisms or affectionate nicknames for both their brothers and sisters. Frances Burney was known to all as Fanny, whereas her sisters were Hetty (Esther) and Susey (Susan). Their eldest brother James was known as Jem. Lady Sarah Spencer called her brother Robert affectionately Bob and her younger sister Georgiana (b.1794) Gin or Nig. Elizabeth Robinson was Fidget and her sister Sarah Pea and their brothers simply Matt (occasionally though “brother Robinson”) and Tom.

The different lifestyles of males and females were evident in the sibling relationships. A typical complaint of sisters was the dullness of home life when brothers were at school or away for business and politics. Joy was eagerly expressed when they came back for holidays or returned home safe from a long sea voyage.²⁸⁷ Christmas was the season when male members of the family gathered at their country seats for hunting. Then sisters were more easily able to converse with their brothers. Lady Sarah Spencer welcomed her elder brother’s company, although his daily visits occurred after the hunting trip and he turned up covered with mud.²⁸⁸ However, not all brothers provided pleasant company for their sisters. Lady Louisa Stuart commented that she saw her two brothers Frederick and William only at meals. When she did see them, they were rather boring company. She complained to her sister Caroline that they “speak about six words a day, and instead of being any company or comfort, only serve to give me the vapours by walking up and down the room without ceasing.”²⁸⁹ The lot of girls was often to limit their lives to the vicinity of the home. They hunted in the woods more infrequently than men and rarely travelled the way they pleased, although they still did so. Their brothers spent their days outside their sisters’ radar, at school or performing political duties, areas that were mostly reserved for the male. Visits from their brothers brought the girls news from the outside world they yearned for. The stories they told brought something new and exciting to a monotonous life in the home.

But sisters did closely observe the life of their brothers and rejoiced, alongside the rest of the family, if they had a good fortune, such as advancing in their careers. For instance, the Robinson and Burney brothers made their life in the navy and commercial shipping.²⁹⁰ Fanny Burney’s brother James sailed with Captain Cook on his voyages. In 1769 Fanny was very worried that they had not heard anything from James for six months, as he was supposed have come home.²⁹¹ Less dangerous, but

²⁸⁷ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, duchess of Portland, 11.2.1734, 6–7; FB1, 33, 93, 152; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Hon. Robert Spencer, 9.1.1810, 91–92.

²⁸⁸ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Hon. Robert Spencer, 30.12.1809, 91. See also Martin 2004, 109.

²⁸⁹ LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson 15.7.1778, 16–21; LS Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson 21.7.1778, 22–25.

²⁹⁰ SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Robinson, 4.2.1740, 7–8; FB1, 115, 152, 220, 251; FB2, 42–43.

²⁹¹ FB1, 83.

nonetheless interesting, was a career in politics, in which many brothers engaged. This concerned only the girls of noble families, such as the Pitts, Spencers, and Lennoxes. Lady Sarah Spencer was proud to announce in March 1809 that her brother James, Lord Althorp had given his first speech in the House of Commons.²⁹² In this way the girls took part in the family network. The success of their brothers was to their advantage - or at least, so they hoped. Families were larger units in which the actions of one individual was likely to influence the rest. For girls, actions of their relatives could either enhance or diminish their chances in the marriage market or endanger their financial security if they remained unmarried and under the care of their brothers.

Siblings were expected to support each other – it was their Christian duty, but these expectations were highly gendered: whereas brothers usually provided material support, sisters helped in the form of services. Brothers acted as mentors, trustees and business advisors for their sisters. Sisters also sought a place of abode in their brothers' homes if necessary. In return, sisters helped with household duties (especially with unmarried brothers), nursed during illnesses, carried messages and acted as companions.²⁹³ Sisters also assisted with pregnancies and births and nursed the sick, even when they were minors.²⁹⁴ In the words of Fanny Burney, even though sisters weren't able to give medical help, just being present was a "mutual comfort."²⁹⁵ Mature, older siblings also took care of the younger ones when the mother was recovering from a birth or parents were away for some other reason. Both the nineteen-year-old Anne Tracy and the twenty-four-year-old Maria Edgeworth faced the huge responsibility of taking care of the brood of their younger siblings. In November 1724, Anne Tracy's mother gave birth to her thirteenth child, a baby boy. First Anne had to nurse her mother during her lying-in period, and then she had to take charge of caring for the baby. Several of Anne's diary entries include complaints about how tired she was.²⁹⁶ In 1791, Maria Edgeworth wrote "I cannot help feeling unusual timidity, when I look round me and think I am trusted with so valuable a charge." Even though Maria was technically an adult, the responsibility laid at her door felt heavy. She was not a wife or mother but a still unmarried young lady. Her burden was relieved a little by her sister Emmeline who took care of young Charlotte.²⁹⁷

²⁹² SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 27.3.1809, 64–66. See also SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer 16.4. 1809, 66–69.

²⁹³ Davidoff & Hall 2002 (1987), 349; Crawford 2008 (2004), 218.

²⁹⁴ FB1, 51–53.

²⁹⁵ FB2, 54.

²⁹⁶ AT 22.11.1724, 120; AT 25.11.1724, 121; AT 27.12.1724, 124; AT 30.12.1724, 124; AT 6.1.1725, 124.

²⁹⁷ ME Maria Edgeworth to Margaret Ruxton, 1791, 20–21.

Sisterly service could also take the form of informing absent relatives of family matters, as Lady Louisa Stuart was requested to do in 1780 by her brother William. He begged her “make not...that shabby excuse of having nothing to say, but send me word how you all go on.”²⁹⁸ But brothers could also provide their sisters with services usually in place of their father. For instance, they could chaperone their sisters at balls. Sisters could benefit from the help of their elder married ones.²⁹⁹ Siblings also asked for each other help with shopping. While a sister or a brother was visiting town, or even the capital, it was convenient to send a request for purchases.³⁰⁰ Just as with other members of the family, the relationship of siblings was constituted with reciprocity. The duties performed, however, seem to have changed as girls grew older.

Life-cycle events evidently changed the relationships of siblings, although, as for instance Amy Harris has pointed out, sibling-relations did not end in marriage.³⁰¹ That said, they did change the everyday routines dramatically. Especially marriage was a crucial life-changing moment both for the girl who became a wife and her daily companion, a sister. The heartbreaking account of seventeen-year-old Eugenia Wynne shows what a bittersweet moment the marriage of her elder sister Betsey was to her.

11th Tuesday [---]For my part I have never been so unhappy as I am now, I had never till now known what sorrow was, I know it too well at present. I can do nothing but weep till my aching eyes have no more tears to bestow. My poor Mother, my poor Father, are both deeply affected and I can give them no comfort, I am only fit to mingle my tears with theirs. The dear companion of all the moments of my life, the dear partaker of all my joys, of all my pains, her who made the principal charm of my existence, her to whom I have always unbosomed myself, is going to leave me, and God knows for how long! I shall never be happy without her. My only comfort is the persuasion I am in that she will be perfectly happy – a man like Fremantle must make her so; his amiable qualities, his affection to her cannot fail to assure her happiness.³⁰²

Her sister Betsey had been her companion, confidante and playmate all her life. Since their birth, the two girls had spent every single day together, learning, playing and laughing. And she was now to leave Eugenia for her new life as a wife. Eugenia complained that her sister showed indifference towards her and her mother by not

²⁹⁸ LS1 William, Lord Bute to Lady Louisa Stuart, 12.1.1780, 118–119.

²⁹⁹ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to the Hon. Robert Spencer, 3.3.1812, 128–130; WD 31.5.1798, 296.

³⁰⁰ SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Robinson, 4.2.1740, 7–8.

³⁰¹ Harris 2012, 26–27,

³⁰² WD 11.1.1797, 247–248.

shedding any tears on her departure. However, she added that “I know her too well to doubt her affection. But the sentiment which now occupies her heart leaves no room for any other feeling.”³⁰³ The little sister was distraught that she would be left alone with only younger sisters, who in her mind, were not fit companions. Additionally, she may have been envious that her sister’s mind was now occupied by love towards her newlywed husband and not her childhood family. Their daily lives would be separated, at least for six months, as Betsey was to sail with her husband to England, and Eugenia was left behind in Italy. Had they lived closer, Eugenia could have helped her sister with births and childcare as well as acted as a companion. In this case the separation from the childhood home was more complete due to the physical distance between the sisters than in many other marriages. Even if travelling in eighteenth-century England still took a long time and was at times difficult, sometimes even impossible, a married sister living in the same country was at least occasionally reachable.

A death of a sibling was yet another significant and devastating event. The loss was acutely felt even though death was something everyone had to face at some point in their lives. In February 1790, when Maria Edgeworth was twenty-three, her fifteen-year-old half-sister Honora, died. In a letter to her aunt, Maria expressed concern for her father and her second step-mother Elizabeth, instead of contemplating her own thoughts and feelings. However, she says that her father had promised not to compare his other daughters with Honora. This remark indicates that Maria felt that her father had favoured and loved her sister more. Perhaps this, alongside, the age difference, decreased the affection between the two and explains why Maria mentioned nothing of her own sorrow. However, she tells her aunt that she would prefer to relate the details of her sister’s last moments in person rather than writing. It is thus possible that the event was too painful for Maria to think about after all, and that she needed time to think it through before telling other of it.³⁰⁴ Death reordered the age-sequence of the remaining siblings which much of the family dynamic was based upon. As inheritance prospects changed, marital, financial and educational prospects changed too. All this would change the daily relations of children. So it is no wonder that siblings were worried about each others’ health, dreaded accidents and closely followed the well-being of those away from home, especially brothers who had gone to war.³⁰⁵ Losing a brother might mean the family losing an heir and sisters their financial support. Losing a sister might mean losing one’s best friend and companion.

³⁰³ WD 16.1.1797, 250.

³⁰⁴ ME, 16–17; ME Maria Edgeworth to Margaret Ruxton, 11.2.1790, 17–18.

³⁰⁵ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Sarah Robinson s.a. (c.1740), 80–81; EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Anne Donnellan, 10.4.1741, 90–93; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Hon. Robert Spencer, 5.12.1809, 90–91; LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson, 26.8.1778, 44–47; AT 2.3.1724, 94.

As noted, however, eighteenth-century children were more accustomed to death than we are. When they lost a sibling, they kept mementoes, such as locks of hair, or organized burials for their dolls. Death was constantly part of their lives and the practice of naming younger children after a dead sibling reminded children of it. In early modern England almost two-thirds of children were given the same Christian name as a previously deceased same-sex sibling.³⁰⁶

When death left siblings orphaned, older ones stepped in as substitute parents, sometimes even against their own will. The sibling ties and duties towards each other were binding. The eldest sisters became substitute mothers to the younger Lennox girls when the Duke of Richmond died in 1750 and the Duchess the year later. In his last will and testament, the Duke ordered that the custody of his younger children would go to his second oldest daughter Emily, then Countess of Kildare, and her husband. For the youngest Lennox siblings Emily was in practice their mother, and apparently she enjoyed her role. In fact, in 1767 Emily's brother-in-law Lord Holland commented: "Are you wise to let that great girl Cecilia call you Mama, still?"³⁰⁷ When Fanny Burney's stepmother gave birth to a son in 1768, she wrote to Fanny asking her to take care of her newly-born half-brother in case the mother should die.³⁰⁸ Unlike Emily, Mary Berry was very reluctant in her new role. She wrote that instead of being a "gay companion," she became "a protecting mother" to her motherless sister Agnes.³⁰⁹

The natural closeness of siblings was also seen as a potential source for trouble. Sibling relations could easily degenerate into rivalry, hatred and contempt. Amy Harris points out that the advice literature of the time demanded that parents treat their children fairly and teach them morals and class- and gender-specific behaviour. Having a favourite was dangerous to the child itself. A spoiled child would become a tyrant. Children expected equal affection, even though, finding their own place in their family was sometimes difficult, as they had unequal futures. Early modern law's privileging of the first born son could cause tension between siblings. Moreover, younger children were increasingly dependent on the goodwill of the family heir

³⁰⁶ Harris 2012, 33–37.

³⁰⁷ CEL vol. I. Postscript in Caroline Lady Holland to Emily, Duchess of Leinster, 10.5.1767, 499–502. This decision can be seen as the final sign of displeasure towards his eldest daughter. Caroline had eloped and married a politician Henry Fox in 1744. The outraged Duke and Duchess of Richmond stopped all communication with their disobedient daughter for years and refused to meet their two grand-sons. They eventually managed to reconcile to an extent, but this shows that even then family harmony was not fully restored. The Duchess died a year after her husband. See also Tillyard 1995 (1994), 76–82.

³⁰⁸ FB1, 50.

³⁰⁹ MB, 12.

when fathers disposed marriage portions and property settlements so as to keep family estate intact.³¹⁰

Such frictions are to be found in the sibling relations of the girls studied here. There are some instances when the girls disputed their loyalty to each other and about favouritism shown by their parents. Even the closest of siblings were not immune to rivalry. Especially the younger sisters found themselves caught between the age and gender hierarchy and personal relationships. When she was 16, Fanny Burney related a quarrel between her sisters and herself:

[---] We disputed a little time & Hetty suddenly cried “Hush, hush, Mama’s in the next Room, if she hears us, we two shall be whipt & Fanny will have a sugar plumb.[sic]” “Ay, cried A. [probably their stepsister Maria Allen] ’tis her defending Lynn which makes Mama & my Grandmama so fond of her. [---]”³¹¹

In this quarrel it seems that Esther (Hetty) and Maria felt Fanny was favoured by their grandmother and mother. If they heard the children arguing they would be whipped and Fanny treated to a sugar plum. The favouring of sons and the tension it caused among the siblings is implicit. Fanny was not the only favourite in the family. Margaret Doody claims that Dr. Burney’s favourite child was Susan, who was named after his own twin sister, and who died at the age of eight.³¹² If this is the case, Fanny did not reveal any jealousy in her diaries. The birth of an heir was also a source of sibling rivalry. When the male heir was born to the Lennox family in 1730, the grandmother the Duchess of Portsmouth expressed her concern about how the seven-year-old Caroline would react to her baby-brother: “Did she receive her brother graciously? for it seemed to me that when she was here she was none too anxious for one!”³¹³ Before baby-Charles, Caroline had been the eldest child, and therefore received all the possible attention from her parents. It is very likely that she was not thrilled by the appearance of a rival. Sometimes, there seems to have been some rivalry between the siblings about loyalty and trust. Lady Louisa Conolly wrote a letter in December 1760 to her 16-year-old sister Lady Sarah Lennox, which implied that she thought her younger sister did not trust her the way she trusted their elder sister and substitute-mother Lady Emily:

[---]I must tell You that I find by most of Your letters to my Sister Kildare that You will let her into many secrets You won’t tell me, now my Dr: Soul I know

³¹⁰ Harris 2012, 27, 83. See also Crawford 2008 (2004), 215.

³¹¹ FB1, 11.

³¹² Doody 1988, 11.

³¹³ DR vol. I. Louise de Kéroualle, duchess of Portsmouth to Charles, lord Mar, Oct. 1730, 195.

that You are affraid I should tell my Dear Tom Conolly and that he should blab it out again, in the first place my Dearest love You may be very sure that anything he knew that You did not chuse should be known be certainly would never mention it, but then if You told me anything & desir'd he might not see Your letter I give You my word he would never desire You to let him see them and I would not do it[---]³¹⁴

Louisa seemed to have been upset about the fact that Lady Sarah denied her some sisterly confidence, and she did not trust her husband. Lady Louisa's marriage to the wealthy Thomas Conolly was generally thought a good match, but, some of the letters between the other Lennox siblings imply that they thought both Louisa and Tom, though very lovely people, childish and sometimes even foolish.³¹⁵ So it is no wonder that Lady Sarah might have thought her brother-in-law was not to be trusted with secrets. What secrets they might have been remains unknown. Younger sisters were sometimes slighted by their elders. After all, they were at the bottom of the family hierarchy, its least important members. For instance, younger siblings were sometimes deliberately kept ignorant of sibling conflicts in order to avoid more trouble. This happened to fifteen-year-old Lady Louisa and thirteen-year-old Lady Sarah Lennox. The older sisters Caroline, Lady Holland, and Emily, Countess of Kildare, wanted to conceal their negative opinions about the new Duchess of Richmond, their brother's wife. Whatever their thoughts, they recognized the status of their brother as the head of the family and did not want to undermine his prestige in the eyes of their younger sisters by criticizing his choices.³¹⁶

But sometimes this kind of neglect caused, if not downright anger, at least bitter remarks. Lady Louisa Stuart commented on her elder sister Lady Mary Lowther: "God knows what she is doing, for she has not writ to either of us these three weeks." She also scolded her sister Caroline for not coming to her and their parents for Christmas. Louisa wrote that she was not angry, but had hoped that her sister would have told her at once. Now she heard the news from a mutual acquaintance.³¹⁷ Lady Louisa, as the only unmarried daughter in the family, might have struggled in keeping up with family ties with her siblings. She might have felt slighted as she was not able to travel and attend the same activities as her married sisters were. Although she was older than Caroline her married status placed her above Louisa. She had less power

³¹⁴ POS 9535, NLI. Lady Louisa Conolly to Lady Sarah Lennox, 15.12.(1760). Transcript by the author.

³¹⁵ CEL vol. I. Emily, countess of Kildare to James, earl of Kildare, 28.5.1759, 97–98.

³¹⁶ CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, countess of Kildare, 26.8.(1758), 178–179.

³¹⁷ LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson, 7.7.1778, 8–15; LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson, 20.11.1778, 105–106.

over her life than the others but she was not afraid to demand the reciprocal attention from her siblings that was her due.

Eighteenth-century elite girls played a multi-dimensional role in both society and their families. Their position in both was defined by their age and gender and the ways girlhood was understood. They were first of all young females, but they were also daughters, sisters and nieces. Girlhood and age played a role in all of these. Medical and legal authorities had their own categorizations and attributes for girls. For the most part, these attributes enhanced the assumption that females, young ones especially, were bound to submit to male authority. In theory their whole lives were dictated by the age-gender hierarchy of eighteenth-century society. This submissive position of girls was also reflected in the relationship with family members. As children they were expected to be obedient to their wiser elders, and as females they were expected to submit to patriarchal rule, a submissiveness that was also extended to their brothers. Older sisters ruled over the younger ones. I suggest here that the girls outwardly accepted their lot, but they did occasionally negotiate and bend the rules according their personalities and family dynamics.

3 GROWING UP AS A LADY

An elite girl was not only born to be a lady: she had to be educated as one. Education in the eighteenth century was not merely about schooling and acquiring literary skills. Its purpose was to teach and socialize the young for their future adult roles.³¹⁸ The gender of the child made a great difference to his or her education. Brigitte Glaser stresses that the didactical texts of the eighteenth century were not primarily concerned with girlhood, but considered girls as future women. No matter what kind of education a girl received, its goal should be to maintain a girl's acceptance of the social station she was born into.³¹⁹ Early modern education was highly gendered and class-specific. Education was a clear status marker. Boys and girls were taught differently, as different expectations and roles waited for them in adulthood. Education was to furnish girls in their future roles as mothers, wives and societal hostesses.³²⁰

Not all elite girls received a similar education. In this section, I argue that the education of elite girls was strongly dependent on family dynamics, family's finances and social aspects, as well as the girls' own character. Moreover, ideals as to how a properly educated young lady should behave often conflicted with the requirements of elite social life. The social skills taught to girls, and how they were put to practice, are looked at more closely in the next section, which focuses on social life in general.

3.1 Preparing to become a woman. The Education and work

At home or at school? Growing up in the proper environment

Every elite girl's education started at home. As I don't have access to any first-hand testimony on the first years of formal education for the girls studied here, I can only assume that they followed the usual path. Elementary education, such as reading, was usually conducted by the mother or other female relatives for both boys and girls. Even if

³¹⁸ Whitehead 1999, xi–xii. See also Glover 2011, 26.

³¹⁹ Glaser 2006, 190, 192.

³²⁰ Parland-von Essen 2005, *passim.*; Kaartinen 2006, 78; Tikoff 2010, 103; Fletcher 2010 (2008), xiv, 220; Simonton 2011, 20–22; Bailey 2012, 75, Karpinnen 2012, *passim.*

the mother did not do the actual teaching herself, she at least supervised it. When the children turned seven, education became more gender-specific. When boys were sent to school, usually at the age of ten, girls continued to receive instruction from different tutors at home. More importantly, the women of the family handed down the domestic skills that girls needed later in life. Especially mothers passed on their cultural values and codes. Only a female could teach a girl the vital skills of how to be a female. Elite children, especially girls, learned the rules by living in proper environment. Maternal guidance was essential for the maintenance of the existing social order. Mothers taught their daughters morality and proper female behaviour: although it may not have been stated at the time, the girls were being accommodated to the contemporary patriarchal society.³²¹ As most of the mothers of the girls studied here died early, the duty of supervision most likely passed to other female relatives, such as grandmothers, older siblings, stepmothers or governesses.

The next step was either to send the girl to boarding school or to continue training at home. However, whether or not the girls were privately tutored and sent to boarding schools was not entirely dependent on the family's social standing, but also on other factors. There is no obvious distinction between noble and genteel families as to whether they had governesses for their daughters or sent them to school. Additionally, development during the period at hand is not very straightforward. The expansion of institutional education during the eighteenth century was neither steady nor consistent throughout the British Isles, even though there was an overall rise of the number of educational institutions for girls, such as dame and boarding schools or religious establishments.³²² Lady Mary Pierrepont's education started as early as the 1690s. As a daughter of an earl, she was educated at home by a governess.³²³ Mary Granville (b. 1700), attended a private boarding school for some years. At the age of six, she went to attend a school and among the twenty pupils there were daughters of earls and dukes, but also brewers and actresses. The reason for this decision could have been financial. Although Mary's great-grandfather was an Earl, her father, Colonel Bernard Granville, as the younger son of a younger son, had no financial means to educate his children at home. When Mary turned eight, she moved to live with her aunt and uncle in London, Lord and

³²¹ Kaartinen 2006, 78, 81; Parland-von Essen 2007, 97, 102; Sheffrin 2006, 182, 185; Tikoff 2010, 90, 96, 107; Fletcher 2010 (2008), 221–222; Glover 2011, 27; Simonton 2011, 23; Karppinen 2012, 56.

³²² Cohen 2007 (2005), 227–228; Goodman 2009, 84. Historians such as Michele Cohén who have studied the eighteenth-century debate about whether there should be public education of girls have established that the reasons that contemporaries often opposed it varied from the pointlessness of the education to fear of unrestricted social mixing. Private tuition had its obvious benefits. Home education provided personal tuition in a safe domestic context. Cohen 2007 (2005), 227–228. See also Goodman 2009, 84; Fletcher 2010 (2008), 221–222.

³²³ Grundy 2004 (1999), 9–10.

Lady Stanley, to finish her education.³²⁴ Mary's close contemporary, Elizabeth Robinson, benefited from the tutorship of Dr Conyers Middleton, the second husband of her maternal grandmother, even before she was ten years old. She frequently spent time at their home in Cambridge where she had access to the conversations of theologians, scholars, philosophers and other men of the world visiting the Middleton residence. She was to follow carefully what was discussed and then face the questioning as to the contents of these conversations. The Robinson children also had masters and governesses who educated them while at home.³²⁵ The Robinsons did not have a title, but they were a relatively wealthy land-owning family, which can explain how they were able to acquire private tutorship for their girls.

The nobility seems to have continued to educate their daughters at home throughout the century. Although I have very few firsthand accounts from the Lennox sisters and their experiences during their school years, we do know that they had governesses and all of the sisters were educated either at their childhood home, or, in the case of Lady Sarah, Lady Louisa and Lady Cecilia, at the home of their sister Lady Emily, Countess of Kildare.³²⁶ Genteel families with relatively good finances still educated their daughters at home, as in the case of Mary Berry (b. 1763). Mary's father was a gentleman in Yorkshire, the eldest son of the family and presumable heir of his uncle. She had a governess who provided at least the elementary education for her and her sister.³²⁷ Even at the end of this period, the five Wynne sisters had several tutors.³²⁸ But, as I have stressed, their situation was exceptional in many ways. The émigré Wynne family lived in Switzerland and Italy. The girls' father Sir Richard Wynne, Esq. was born in Venice and his children were baptized into the Catholic faith.³²⁹ Elaine Chalus points out that the Wynne's operated as aristocrats and raised their daughters accordingly. This enhanced their eligibility on the marriage market, after all, the family socialized with *bon ton*, Venetian nobility, French, Spanish and Viennese diplomats, and other people of status.³³⁰

Towards the end of the century, there seems to develop a tendency that girls from a genteel background were sent to boarding schools, like Eliza Dawson, sent to York at the age of eleven, and Maria Edgeworth, sent to Derby at the age of eight (1776) and London at the age of twelve (1780).³³¹ Eliza Dawson's father was the eldest son of a humble yet well-to-do landowning family in Yorkshire. Her mother had also inherited a considerable

³²⁴ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 1–3.

³²⁵ Doran 1873, 4–5; Climenson 1906, 5–6.

³²⁶ Curtis 1945, 21, 27; Tillyard 1995 (1994), 13.

³²⁷ MB, 1–2; 6, 7.

³²⁸ WD xv–xvi; WD 13.1.1790, 22.

³²⁹ More details about the Wynne family genealogy see Chalus 2019a, 225–226.

³³⁰ Chalus 2019a, 228.

³³¹ *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 20; ME Maria Edgeworth to Honora Edgeworth, 30.3.1776, 2–3; Lawless 1904, 6–7.

estate in the same area.³³² Possibly the early death of Eliza's mother was one reason for sending her to school. Mr. Dawson did not remarry and his daughter lacked any female role model at home. In addition, both Eliza's mother and her father's sister had attended the same boarding school in York, so it was only natural for Eliza to follow in the family tradition.

The fact that parents' financial position and the interest on educational matters affected to the extent and quality of the education their girls received³³³ occasionally caused contradictions. Elizabeth Robinson's family circle was "accustomed to struggle for the mastery in wit, or in superiority in argument" in which the girls also learnt. Especially her father took keen an interest in sharpening his daughter's perception and expression. Elizabeth's mother was also well educated in the school run by the educationalist Batsua Makin.³³⁴ The Burney parents took great care in educating their offspring. Soile Ylivuori concludes that the Burney sisters had to compensate their relatively low social position by their excellent education.³³⁵ Charles Burney was the offspring of a musician and an actress. Throughout his life, he strove to enhance his position in the polite society as a music teacher and academic music historian.³³⁶ Not being born into the elite may have provided the impetus for him to ensure that his children belonged to it. The first Mrs Burney was described as an "excellent French scholar" and she was also said to have read Pope's writings and Virgil in English translation to her children. In 1765 Charles Burney sent his two daughters Hetty (aged sixteen) and Susan (aged ten) to school in Paris, leaving Fanny to stay at home although she was a year older than Susan. The youngest daughter Charlotte was sent to school in Norfolk in 1768. According to her biographers, Fanny had no private tutors either.³³⁷ This is odd considering how much parents usually invested in their children's education. Possibly there was no great investment in Fanny's education because she was thought to be slow learner and not one of the excellent and witty Burney brood.³³⁸ On the other hand, the reason for the lack of tuition could simply be financial. Private tutors were expensive³³⁹ and it is very possible that Dr. Burney did not have sufficient means to hire

³³² *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 1, 2.

³³³ Parland-von Essen 2005, 79; Tikoff 2010, 90.

³³⁴ Doran 1873, 5–6, 12; Climenson 1906, 7.

³³⁵ Ylivuori 2015, 230.

³³⁶ Doody 1988, 11–13, 18.

³³⁷ Seeley 1900, 16, 29; Dobson 1903, 8, 15–16.

³³⁸ Her father once remarked: "She was wholly unnoticed in the nursery for any talents, or quickness of study." Cited in Doody 1988, 21.

³³⁹ For example in the Fox-Strangways family the annual salary of a governess was £20. Visiting teachers, who came a couple of times a week, cost £5–7 per lesson. Martin 2004, 216–222. Boarding schools were not inexpensive either. For example, the school that Jane Austen and her sister Cassandra attended in 1785 cost roughly £60 per annum. Their father's yearly income was around £1000. Honan 1997 (1987), 32; Worsley 2017, 29.

private tutors for his daughter. The reason that Fanny did not attend school with her sisters must remain a mystery, unfortunately.

When older siblings acted as substitute parents, it might be assumed that their opinions would be reflected in their education of the younger ones, but it is not easy to find clear evidence of such influence. For instance, Lady Sarah Lennox's sisters had a great interest in the thinking of both Rousseau and Mme. de Beaumont. Although Lady Caroline and Lady Emily frequently expressed their opinion on women and their position, they did not feel that they belonged to the intellectual circle of bluestockings, the literary salonnieres of their time. Details of Caroline's and Emily's education cannot be found, but Stella Tillyard argues that they understood themselves as fashionably educated ladies rather than scholars. Both took a great interest in French educationalism and especially Madame de Sévigné. Neither is it clear whether Lady Sarah or Lady Louisa shared their elder sisters' views, as there are no references to these matters in their letters.³⁴⁰ The elder sisters also differed from each other in certain respects. Lady Caroline clearly thought that the best place to educate girls was at home, under the tuition of their mother and female relatives. In 1762 wrote to Lady Emily that

How can you give in to that vulgar error of imagining anything your girls could learn of their masters would be of half so much advantage to them as being with Louisa and you in the sort of quiet way you seem settled in at Castletown? I should think nothing so desirable for a girl.³⁴¹

It seems that Lady Emily found tuition of her daughters by professional masters fruitful for their education, something her sister thought useless or even dangerous error. Lady Caroline's fear might have been a financial one, as her sister was constantly pregnant and thus producing new children to educate. However, according to Tillyard, this tuition did not mean anything but basic classical education with the necessary accomplishments of French, drawing and dancing and various reading in their home library.³⁴² The sources used in this study do not give any support for this argument, but nor do they contradict it. There were exceptions, but we do not know how many; when Emily's first-born son died in 1765, she decided to educate the rest of her sons at home, along with their sisters under the guidance of a tutor. As the younger sisters Lady Sarah, Lady Louisa and Lady Cecilia lived with Lady Emily during the years when they had their primary education in the 1750s, it is also possible that her opinions on education influenced them.³⁴³

³⁴⁰ CEL vol. I. Caroline, Lady Holland to Emily, Marchioness of Kildare, 19.12.1762, 354–356. Emily subscribed to Mme. de Beaumont's anthology for children *Magasin des enfants*. Shefrin 2006, 205. Caroline's and Emily's education Tillyard 1995 (1994), 94–95, 100–102.

³⁴¹ CEL vol. I. Caroline, Lady Holland to Emily, Marchioness of Kildare, 7.12.1762, 352–354. Tillyard 1995 (1994), 239–240.

³⁴³ Tillyard 1995 (1994), 245–249.

The Ornaments of the Fair Sex: Accomplishments

What then constituted the proper education for an elite girl? Michèle Cohen points out that there was no agreement as to what counted as an accomplishment in the period, or whether these were acceptable for a female at all. She states that the overall consensus was that a lady could be accomplished as long as she did not display it in public.³⁴⁴ Thus we have another conflict situation. They had to learn at least something of value in order to fulfill their place in society as elite females, yet they were not supposed to show off their learning to excess. How did the girls negotiate this conflict?

At the age of eleven Caroline Lennox scribbled the following letter to her father to show him, how well she had already mastered the rules of polite correspondence.

GOODWOOD, July the 5.

I received my Dear Papa's kind letter and am very glad to hear that you and my dear mama are well. I hope it will not be long before I shall have the pleasure of seeing you. Lord March and Sister Emily are both extremely well, and Sister em[sic] gives her Duty to her dear Papa and mama. Miss Pultney desires her complements to you. Pray give my duty to mama and believe me dear Papa your Dutiful

& obedient

Daughter

CAROLINA LENOS.³⁴⁵

Writing was a skill taught to elite girls of various ages depending on personal circumstances, but certainly after they learned to read. In some cases, the girls were taught by professional writing masters. Especially letter-writing was important. As noted in the introduction, letters had many functions in elite life. Above all, the letter was a medium of information. Through letters people stayed in touch with relatives, spread and heard news and gossip, and received information about new products and fashions. Letters also had an important function in education. By sending letter to each other, parents and other relatives, young people learned the rules of polite interaction. Rules of correspondence were as strict as in any other aspect of sociability.³⁴⁶ Through correspondence, girls took their place in the family network and their social circle. They helped to fulfill the expectations of being part of the elite.

³⁴⁴ Cohen 1996, 64–66.

³⁴⁵ DR vol. II. Lady Caroline Lennox to Charles, second Duke of Richmond, 5.7.1734, 689.

³⁴⁶ Tague 2002, 172–173; Harris 2009, 334; Goodman 2009, 100; Glover 2011, 27–28, 74.

However, simply learning to write letters was not enough. Elite girls had to write elegantly, and this was not easy. As Susan Whyman describes it,³⁴⁷ we can imagine young Caroline learning first to form separate letters on paper, and then struggling to keep her lines straight and even. Her letters might have been full of crossed-out words and the margins filled with overlong sentences. The nine-year-old Eugenia Wynne noted in her diary that she “wrote a letter four times and was never successful, because I write like a pig.” Eliza Dawson recollected that her school teacher “thumped our fingers so often for bad writing” with a mahogany stick.³⁴⁸ We can imagine what kind of physical exercise writing a letter was for a young girl of that period. It cannot have been easy to write neatly with quill pen and ink, let alone maintaining elegant posture. Writing desks, especially designed for females, were small and delicate, whereas their dresses were large because of the hoops. It would have required some practice to learn how to seat oneself with ease, and then remain in the correct writing position. Learning to be a woman required control of the whole body.³⁴⁹

Moreover, historians have established that letter-writing skill was a mark of social status, and especially for girls, a decoration for their sex. Neatness of handwriting and elegance of expression and correct grammar, as long as the girl was not too pedantic, manifested the inner qualities of the writer. Poor spelling was a mark of inferior intellect; while ink spilled on paper represented untidy and unclean appearance and consequently the immorality of its writer. However, it must be remembered that English grammar was only standardized during the eighteenth century. This explains in part the variations in the girls’ spelling.³⁵⁰ But, as Clare Brant has argued, stylish female letter-writing was also to resemble speech. The tone should be lively and amusing, and apparently free from rehearsal. Letters were conversations with someone who was absent. Of course, letters written by men should also fulfill this ideal, but especially women were thought to excel

³⁴⁷ Whyman 2009, 31.

³⁴⁸ WD, 28.9.1789, 9–10; *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher*, 21.

³⁴⁹ Karppinen-Kummunmäki 2014, 28. *The Accomplished Housewife or the Gentlewoman’s Companion* (1745) gave detailed instructions on the right posture:

“Let the Room for your Knees and Legs to come under the Desk be one Foot.

Lay your Book or Paper, on which you write, strait before you.

Let the Elbow of your Right Arm be distant from your Side about four Inches.

Let your Body be (nearly) upright and right against your Book or Paper; and if you suffer any Part of it to touch the Edge of the Desk (which it is best to avoid if you can) let it be but slightly.

Let the Weight of your Body rest on your Seat and Left Arm; and hold your Paper, on which you write, fast down with the Thumb and four Fingers of your Left-Hand. “Anon. [Hannah More], 1745, 38–39.

³⁵⁰ Porter 2000, 214; Brant 2006, 40; Goodman 2009, 100–101, 116; Percy 2009; 81–83; Tikoff 2010, 105; Glover 2011, 29; Karppinen-Kummunmäki 2015, 213–214.

in this art.³⁵¹ Yet again, by mastering the skill of the elegant hand, the girls manifested their place in society as members of the elite and as properly behaving females.

Diaries had a similar pedagogical function to letters. Betsey Wynne received her diary book in 1789 from a former Jesuit Mons Benincasa, the lover of her aunt Giustiniana, a noted salonnière and author, when she was eleven.³⁵² Betsey was an English girl living abroad, so it might have been even more important for her to exercise her native tongue in writing. Girls were encouraged to record in their journals conversations they had listened to and other social events they had participated in. This enabled parents to observe what their offspring had learnt.³⁵³ The sixteen-year-old Fanny Burney exclaimed that

I cannot express the pleasure I have in writing down my thoughts, at the very moment – my opinion of people when I first see them, & how I alter, or how confirm myself in it.³⁵⁴

Fanny already anticipated reading her journals later in life.³⁵⁵ However, not everyone thought writing a suitable activity for girls. Her friend and an author herself, Miss Young warned Fanny that writing is “the most dangerous employment young persons can have – it makes them often record things which ought to not be recorded.” What would happen, Miss Young asked, if Fanny had fallen in love with someone, and that someone would see what she had written? However, Fanny was adamant that she would not give her writing up. Besides, her father approved of it and knew what she was writing about.³⁵⁶ For girls, diary-writing made it possible to observe life around them: to record events and develop their thoughts and identities in a safe and socially proper environment. After all, female authors were still seen as something of an anomaly in this period. For those with literary ambitions, like Fanny Burney, the diary was the first platform where she tried her skills as a writer.³⁵⁷ Many of these literary experiments have unfortunately been destroyed. For instance, Lady Mary Pierrepont was a lifelong diarist, but none of her journals have survived. According to Isobel Grundy, she burned some of them herself, and others were destroyed by her sisters and daughter after her death, apparently, to protect her reputation.³⁵⁸

The elite girls were also required to express themselves verbally in various languages. The Lennox sisters were bilingual because of their French ancestry and the Wynne sisters

³⁵¹ Brant 2006, 22. This was also the case in France. See Goodman 2009, 139–140.

³⁵² WD 18.8.1789, 1.

³⁵³ Cohen 2009, 103.

³⁵⁴ FB1, 14.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ FB1, 20–22.

³⁵⁷ Sjöbald 1998, 520–521; Dekker 2000, 16–17, 50; Fletcher 2002, 421; Fletcher 2010 (2008), 283–284; Ylivuori 2015, 226.

³⁵⁸ Grundy 2012, 9.

because their mother was French, but good knowledge of French was also necessary because it was the language of the European courts. Living in Italy, the Wynne sisters even had difficulties keeping up their English, Elizabeth even more so than Eugenia.³⁵⁹ Some girls, like Maria Edgeworth, learned the language in boarding schools. Typically, the stress of the school teaching was on correct pronunciation and accent. Others studied at home, either by themselves or with a master. Susan Burney taught French to her sister Fanny, as she had attended a *pension* in Paris. As far as we can tell, the Burney and Robinson sisters learned Italian by themselves, as there is no mention of a tutor. Lady Mary Pierrepont, however, had a master to instruct her in her studies.³⁶⁰ The Wynne sisters also knew Italian and had a reading knowledge of German, which is no surprise considering where they lived and the people they socialized with. In 1790 Eugenia, then only ten years old, translated a German comedy into English.³⁶¹ As the Wynne girls had a tutor, Mons. Jaegle, himself a German, it is very likely that they had studied the language under his instruction.

Knowledge of ancient languages was less common in girls. It is not possible to trace the extent of Lady Harriet Pitt's studies, but she was evidently acquainted with Latin to some extent, as she used it to cite Cicero in her letters.³⁶² Of course, it is possible that sometimes a girls' knowledge consisted only of well-known citations. Lady Mary Pierrepont cited Erasmus, but since she translated Epictetus to English from Latin, she must have acquired a good knowledge of Latin. Apparently she knew no Greek.³⁶³ These observations are still noteworthy, as female knowledge of ancient languages was not thought proper. This was an area that was thought best preserved for males so they could maintain their "superiority".

Given the ways the girls of this study described their language studies, I would suggest that they were forced to mask their linguistic abilities to appear as innocent and proper as possible. Although mastery of foreign languages was thought important for an elite lifestyle, exhibiting one's skills widely, let alone boasting of them, was prohibited, as contemporary writers frequently remarked.³⁶⁴ Fanny Burney excelled in this modest behaviour. In her diaries she portrayed herself as learning French or Italian simply for

³⁵⁹ WD 35.

³⁶⁰ ME Maria Edgeworth to Honora Edgeworth, 30.3.1776, 2–3; FB1, 139, 268; MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Frances Hewet, 13.2.1710, 20–22; EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Sarah Robinson, (1741), 202–203. See also Seeley 1900, 29; Tillyard 1995 (1994), 9, 78; Grundy 2004(1999), 15. The Wynne sisters' mother was Agathe Camille de Royer (d.1799) but we know little of her. WD, Family tree on page x. Also Chalus 2019a. On teaching French at schools see Glover 2011, 32.

³⁶¹ WD 14.10.1790, 42–43.

³⁶² MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, 20.7.1710, 43–46; HP, Lady Harriet Pitt to William, Earl of Chatham, 15.6.1773, 2–3.

³⁶³ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, 20.7.1710, 43–46.

³⁶⁴ Karppinen 2012, 23; Ylivuori 2015, 182–183.

fun: “for the sake of its bewitching authors.” She understood both perfectly well, but absolutely refused to speak either in company. She also claimed that she could not write in either French or Italian.³⁶⁵ Despite her reluctance to speak foreign languages, Fanny was occasionally forced to do so when entertaining guests: as her stepmother did “not speak a Word of French, I was obliged therefore to do all the Honours.”³⁶⁶ Regarding ancient languages she was equally adamant. In one entry in her diary, she wrote that “I am just beginning to read Smith's translation of Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War I mention the translator, lest I should be suspected of reading the original Greek. I think the precaution necessary!”³⁶⁷ Although Fanny was clearly fluent in many languages, she avoided demonstrating that she was a scholar, let alone a pedant. Lady Mary Pierrepont started to learn Latin in secret. She claimed to have studied five to eight hours every day for two years in the library of her father's family estate of Thoresby.³⁶⁸ In August 1709, when she was twenty, Lady Mary Pierrepont wrote to her friend Anne Wortley:

My study at present is nothing but dictionaries and grammars. I am trying whether it be possible to learn without a master; I am not certain (and dare hardly hope) I shall make any great progress; but I find the study so diverting, I am not only easy, but pleased with the solitude that indulges it.³⁶⁹

Lady Mary said she studied alone without a master. She claimed she did not expect great progress, describing her efforts as a diversion. However, young Lady Mary had greater ambitions than she led others to believe. Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury gave young Mary guidance into her language studies. It was to him that Mary sent her Epictetus translation in July 1710. In a very humble tone, Lady Mary wrote that she “hardly dare offer you this Triffle[sic] to look over.” She claimed the text was “the Work of one Week of my solitude – by the many faults in it your Lordship will easily believe I spent no more time upon it.” Then she went on by thanking him for his teaching and instructions.³⁷⁰ It is obvious that Lady Mary, like Fanny, did not want to portray herself as a serious scholar. Studying was supposed to be more of an amusing pastime for girls.

³⁶⁵ FB1, 139, 185, 268; FB2, 11, 15.

³⁶⁶ FB2, 39.

³⁶⁷ FB1, 95.

³⁶⁸ Grundy 2004 (1999), 15.

³⁶⁹ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Anne Wortley, 8.8.1709, 5–7.

³⁷⁰ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, 20.7.1710, 43–46. In later life Lady Mary recollected the bishop's kindness in a letter to her daughter Lady Bute (14.7.1758): “I knew him in my very early Youth, and his condescension[sic] in directing a Girl in her studies is an Obligation I can never forget.” MWM vol. I. footnote 4, 43.

If contemporary writers had conflicting ideas about learning languages, religion was seen as an important part of female life, despite the general anti-religious atmosphere of the Enlightenment.³⁷¹ Religious literature, sacred scriptures, church history and hagiographies were recommended reading for elite girls. As females were deemed the “softer sex,” girls’ more tender hearts were more adaptable to devotional reading and practices than boys. Private forms of devotion, such as contemplation and prayers, were good for one’s soul, but authors also recommended church attendance, charity and other more visible practices to demonstrate one’s piety.³⁷² For the girls studied here, religion seems to have been more a matter of routine than devout practice, but it was part of the everyday life of the girls all the same. There is no record whether or not they actually read any devotional literature. Eliza Dawson recollected her religious instruction at school by writing that “I do not remember to have received a single religious impression at this school, though creeds were repeated, and catechisms taught, and all the formalities of religious service regularly performed.”³⁷³ Educational authors also warned that young girls should pay close attention to the way they behaved in the church. They should not gaze around at other people during services according to “the fashionable Practice.”³⁷⁴ Girls should behave during the sermon with “Gravity and Attention, which is a Thing too much neglected by young Ladies of this Age, who generally come to Church merely to see and be seen.”³⁷⁵ The girls recorded regular attendances at church services, but most of them are just short remarks that give no evidence as to how they reacted to these instructions. The Catholic Wynne sisters also gave confessions to local monks.³⁷⁶ Only sixteen-year-old Eugenia Wynne gave away her thoughts about religion interfering with her more secular life. She was worried that she might miss a ball because of the church service. She was even more infuriated that the priest suggested they should give up the ball altogether “and God knows what stuff.”³⁷⁷ Their religious beliefs might have been secularized, but church-going was part of the elite life-style. Churches were places to be seen in, like any other place of social gathering. As Soile Ylivuori points out that in the eighteenth-century there was an aspiration towards “polite religion.” Religious values were needed to embellish polite behaviour especially in females. Sufficient piety and virtue were essential elements of being part of the polite society especially for females.³⁷⁸

³⁷¹ See Porter 2000, chap. 5.

³⁷² Wilkes 1740, 54, 56; Gregory 1794, 4; Bennet 1796 vol. I. 9, 11–12, 22–26, 42–43.

³⁷³ *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 21–22.

³⁷⁴ Wilkes 1740, 56–57; D’Ancourt 1743, 7.

³⁷⁵ D’Ancourt 1743, 7.

³⁷⁶ WD 28.8.1789, 9–10; WD 25.3.1790, 32; WD 1.1.1791, 47; AT 24.11.1723, 85; AT 8.12.1723, 86, AT 25.12.1723, 87; LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson, 7.7.1778, 8–15; EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 1741, 148–150.

³⁷⁷ WD 25.12.1796, 239.

³⁷⁸ Glover 2011, 28; Ylivuori 2015, 115–119.

Piety and devotion might have been recommended for girls, as long as it did not go into excesses. As a historian it is impossible for me to know how these girls actually felt about faith and religion as they did not record their thoughts. What is certain is that religion was part of their daily lives, yet, it was something that went mostly unrecorded.

Ornamental accomplishments were recommended for girls to give the final touch to their polite education. These accomplishments included drawing, dancing and music. Drawing was, according to the educational authors, a perfect skill to enhance the taste, imagination and delicacy of the female sex. Landscapes, flowers, pastoral and rural subjects were recommended, whereas portraits required greater judgment and learning that was not thought possible for delicate females. Music, in turn, was the perfect way to entertain one's friends and give them pleasure, and to increase one's own happiness and tranquility of mind. Playing an instrument was also a perfect way to spend lonely hours. Harpsichord, spinet, piano forte, guitar and lute were proper instruments for young ladies. The flute and violin were, in contrast, unbecoming and manly. Dancing was a tool to practice good posture and elegance of motion. It was also important for social and political reasons, as we will see later. In dancing lessons children and the young first learned, not only the correct steps, but also the rules of civility and good manners: how to enter the room courteously and how to address the hostess, when to sit and how to converse politely.³⁷⁹

The girls appearing in this study did have instruction in all these accomplishments, which they absorbed more or less willingly and with varying success. Some had music teachers and drawing masters and they studied regularly, if not always with delight.³⁸⁰ Lady Sarah Spencer summed up her studies by recording that:

Friday morning was all taken up with masters, and what with singing myself hoarse and drawing myself blind, and listening to Gin's twanging and strumming her passages on the harp and piano till I was near deaf, I got finely tired by four o'clock.³⁸¹

The only one who had a slightly more ambitious training in drawing was fourteen-year-old Elizabeth Robinson. Mr. Robinson mastered the art of drawing and painting to an almost professional level and he was anxious that his daughter would learn the same skill. But young Elizabeth struggled in her studies and complained that all her human figures were deformed. To her friend the Duchess of Portland, young Elizabeth jokingly

³⁷⁹ Essex 1722, 84, 87, 90; Bennet 1796 vol. I. 110; Allen 1798, 28; *The New Pleasing Instructor* 1799, 14–15.

³⁸⁰ AT 31.12.1723, 88; AT 4.3.1724, 94; MWM vol. III. Mary Wortley Montagu to the Countess of Bute, 28.1.1753, 42–48; See also Grundy 2004 (1999), 15.

³⁸¹ FB1, 58, 188–189; AT 31.12.1723, 88; AT 4.3.1724, 94; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 27.6.1809, 74–76.

remarked that she would have been much apt learner if her father had set her draw faces of handsome young men, like Adonis, rather than old bearded ones.³⁸² She was not destined to be an artist, but at least her father thought his daughter had enough judgment to study portrait drawing, something that was usually thought beyond females.

Besides spending one's lonely hours, the idea of musical training was to make the girls visible and appear pleasant. Girls could show off their skills and good taste to potential suitors without appearing in public too much.³⁸³ They could perform at private soirees and dinner parties under the watchful eyes of their parents. But such performances could be a nightmare for some. Fanny Burney felt she played so badly she did not "dare touch a note, when any living soul is present, but which notwithstanding I amuse myself with often when alone." Fanny absolutely refused to perform before an audience even if she was entreated to do so. On one occasion her knees trembled at the very idea of playing and she escaped to the other end of the room. Luckily, her sister Susan rescued the situation by agreeing to play herself.³⁸⁴

Dancing, too, was an arena for young elite girls to present themselves in a favourable light.³⁸⁵ But, as already stated, dancing was also a way to improve one's deportment. Fifteen-year-old Lady Sarah Lennox caused concern because she carried herself so badly. According to her sister Lady Caroline Fox, she did not have the same elegance as her other family members. "She has not the least air," Lady Caroline concluded. Apparently things progressed, and with a help of a dancing master, Lady Caroline reported that young Sarah had started to hold her head better.³⁸⁶ Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd also received comments about her bad carriage and way of walking from her aunt in 1787. The aunt informed that her good carriage, a straight posture, and a genteel person were important for a woman.³⁸⁷

Physical appearance was of vital importance in eighteenth-century elite education. A girl had to control her body well and with apparent ease to be graceful. Grace, posture and appearance were confirmation of a girl's social position; an elite girl could be

³⁸² EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 3.11.1734, 8–11; EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 21.6.1734, 11–13; Climenson 1906, 16.

³⁸³ Karppinen 2012, 30; Ylivuori 2015, 112–113.

³⁸⁴ FB1, 58, 188–189;

³⁸⁵ Glover 2011, 32; Ylivuori 2015, 100–102. More on social aspects of dancing see next section.

³⁸⁶ CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily countess of Kildare, 31.1.1760, 270–272; CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily countess of Kildare, 8.4.1760, 278–282. Problems of bad posture were thought to be "inherited" by the next generation. Lady Sarah's daughter Louisa was equally clumsy. The girl also took dancing lessons to improve her posture. LSL vol. I. Lady Sarah Lennox to Lady Susan O'Brien, 21.4.1779, 295–298. Lady Mary Pierrepont also had a dancing master. Grundy 2004 (1999), 15.

³⁸⁷ MH Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd to Maria Josepha Holroyd, 19.1.1784, 8–9; MH Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd to Maria Josepha Holroyd, 4.8.1787, 17–19.

recognized simply by her look. The control of the body and the mind were linked in early modern thinking. The inner self was manifested in the outer appearance. Therefore, it was important that even the youngest of children learned how to control their bodily movements, gestures and speech. An attractive, well-behaved and gracefully moving young girl was assumed to have good character as well.³⁸⁸ Appearance was one of the essential elements in constructing female gender in the eighteenth-century. Every aspect of female behavior – speech, dress, walking and gestures – had to express their polite education, elite status and ideal “natural femininity” with softness, modesty and grace. It was for this reason that one goal of eighteenth-century education was to mould and as far as possible perfect the female body.³⁸⁹

The accomplishments the girls acquired were meant furnish them with elegant skills that enabled them shine in social situations. However, neat hand-writing, looking pretty and knowing foreign languages (without boasting of it) was not enough. The girls had to spend their days in useful activities. These activities I will look at next.

Avoiding idleness: Work and pastimes

The girls studied here belonged to the “leisured class”, but leisure did not mean that they could spend their days doing nothing, if they were to pass as well-behaved elite girls. It was important to keep oneself busy. In April 1786, when she was fifteen, Maria Josepha Holroyd gave her aunt the following description of her daily routines:

I get up at 8, I walk from 9 to 10; we then breakfast; about 11, I play on the Harpsichord or I draw. 1, I translate, and, 2, walk out again, 3, I generally read, and, 4, we go to dine, after Dinner we play at Backgammon; we drink Tea at 7, and I work or play on the Piano till 10, when we have our little bit of Supper and, 11, we go to Bed.³⁹⁰

Maria’s day started early and her day was spent walking, playing music, drawing, reading and eating. Similar reports of daily activities were made by the other girls as well.³⁹¹ Most often they simply wrote that they had “worked” meaning that they did some embroidery or needlework.³⁹² Sixteen-year-old Betsey Wynne called her acquaintance “lazy little Toad” when she found her still in bed at three o’clock in the afternoon.³⁹³ Although the Wynne sisters lived a different sort of life than their peers on English soil, I would

³⁸⁸ Revel 2001, 27–30, 53, 74–85; Tague 2002, 169–170; Parland-von Essen, 2005, 52–53; Kaartinen 2006, 139; Glover 2011, 32.

³⁸⁹ Karppinen-Kummunmäki 2014, 27–28; Karppinen-Kummunmäki 2015, 199, 210; Ylivuori 2015, 97–99.

³⁹⁰ MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd, Apr. 1786, 13–14.

³⁹¹ FB1, 14, 60; SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Montagu, 5.6.1744, 63–66.

³⁹² FB1, 58, 60, 69. See also Ilmakunnas 2016, 33–37.

³⁹³ WD 7.2.1794, 148.

suggest that they felt themselves to be essentially English in this regard. For instance, ten-year-old Eugenia noted down in her diary that “We were exceedingly lazy creatures this morning for we breakfasted into bed in the Italian fashion.”³⁹⁴ Ideally an English young lady would rise early in the morning, whereas Italians would be lazy and stay in bed for breakfast. In general, these statements portray a life of activity and productiveness. Idleness was the road to sin, as one commentator put it.³⁹⁵ Educational authors stressed that idleness was bad for one’s mental and physical well-being, so every loving parent should make sure that this would not happen to their daughters.³⁹⁶ Marjo Kaartinen shows how people in the eighteenth century were thought to become plagued by *ennui* boredom, if they did not use their time properly. However, time could be used improperly, too: wrong kinds of measures to prevent *ennui* could lead to immorality.³⁹⁷

Reading was one way to keep the girls away from trouble. Children started to learn to read around the age of five, or even as early as three or four.³⁹⁸ As their mother had already died, Mary and Agnes Berry were taught by their governess Miss Porter. Mary recollected that her sister was slower learner than she was and had difficulties with spelling.³⁹⁹ Fanny Burney also had a bumpy start. At the age of eight, she still did not know the alphabet. Her eldest brother James teased her by giving her a book upside down, knowing that she would not notice.⁴⁰⁰ Female influence on a girl’s reading can also be looked at from another perspective. Thoresby Hall, the family seat of the Pierreponts, had a splendid decorated library with thousands of books and manuscripts. According to Isobel Grundy, they were reading copies, not rarities for show. The library provided great female examples for young Lady Mary, such as Madame de Scrudéry, queens, and other female worthies, like Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle.⁴⁰¹ When the art of reading had been acquired, the girls read extensively. The books they read varied from novels and plays to history and newspapers. Apart from the novels, their reading was in line with the educational authors’ recommendations for young girls.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁴ WD 17.1.1790, 24.

³⁹⁵ A Lady [Richard Steele] 1751 (1714) vol. I. 5, 11.

³⁹⁶ Moir 1784, 42.

³⁹⁷ Kaartinen 2017, 146.

³⁹⁸ Kaartinen 2006, 78; Glover 2011, 27. The British elite was completely literate by 1600 unlike elsewhere in Europe. Brewer 1997, 167.

³⁹⁹ MB, 6.

⁴⁰⁰ Dobson 1903, 11; Doody 1988, 21

⁴⁰¹ Grundy 2004 (1999), 17–18.

⁴⁰² La Fontaine’s Fables. WD 31.10.1789, 10–11; SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Montagu, 5.6.1744, 63–66. Oliver Goldsmith, Lawrence Sterne, Elizabeth Rowe, Elizabeth Griffith, Alexander Poper, Plutarch, Homer, David Hume. FB1, 7, 12, 23, 37, 40, 65, 134, 177. Jonathan Swift, Chatterton. LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson, 28.7. (1778), 28–30; LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson, 2.8.1778, 35–36. Madame Genlis. MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd, 12.9.1783, 7. Spectator, Milton, Pope, Dryden. *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 9. See also Wilkes 1740, 99–100; Bennet 1796, vol. I. 82, 84–86.

The girls did participate in discussing and commenting on their reading. Reading was part of everyday life in elite families. Being able to comment on what they read was an integral part of the experience even for children. Books were sometimes read aloud and then discussed at together. Reading was essentially a polite activity, as it provided ideas, and knowledge, exercised reason, and improved taste. Moreover, being able to read meant that girls were able to receive religious instruction from the Bible and the Catechism. Reading was important medium for girls to learn the society's moral codes, which would mould their characters, but they were also able to pass these codes to future generations.⁴⁰³ Eliza Dawson recollected that while attending boarding school “two chapters of the Bible were read every morning by two of the young ladies as a reading lesson.”⁴⁰⁴ Several conduct books instructed young ladies on how to read aloud correctly. Reading should go “on smoothly, and with a plain, natural, and uniform pronunciation.” Volume and speed should be adjusted according to the audience.⁴⁰⁵ When she was twenty-one Lady Louisa Stuart read Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise* with her sister. The book occasioned “a great deal of conversation” and Louisa remarked that she was

charmed, perhaps more than I should be, [---] I believe it might be very dangerous to people whose passions resemble those he describes. But I have nothing to do with love, so it is safe for me, and I do think it, notwithstanding several absurdities, the most interesting book I ever read in my life.⁴⁰⁶

Susan and Frances Burney read “some of the best French works [in French] together, not regularly, but only such parts as are adapted either to our capacity or inclination.” Fanny continued by observing that Voltaire had been too free with religion.⁴⁰⁷ Once again, it must be remembered that the girls studied here represented the elite. They had the opportunity to ignore the social conventions when they chose to do so, albeit within limits.

Reading was also recommended as a solitary amusement that provided aid and comfort for elite girls during lonely hours. The conduct books instructed young readers to reflect carefully on what they read. In addition reading was a medium for self-improvement.⁴⁰⁸ Fanny Burney clearly had this maxim in mind when she wrote in 1769

⁴⁰³ Glaser 2006, 191; Cohen 2009; Martin 2004, 242; Glover 2011, 28, 51.

⁴⁰⁴ *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 21.

⁴⁰⁵ A Lady [Richard Steele] 1751 (1714) vol. I. 11; Allen 1789, 17–18. See also Karppinen-Kummunmäki 2015, 209.

⁴⁰⁶ LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson, 8.9.1778, 49–51.

⁴⁰⁷ FB1, 268–269.

⁴⁰⁸ Boscq 1753 (1632), 1, 116; Moir 1784, 208; Burton 1793, 180.

that “we have a Library which is an ever lasting resource when attack’d by the spleen.”⁴⁰⁹ The girls make reference to reading alone in their writings. Elizabeth Robinson once complained that she spent so many lonely hours reading that it made her eyes bad.⁴¹⁰ Even though both boys and girls read alone, Katharine Glover points out that male reading was usually depicted as a solitary activity, whereas female reading was seen as social, although it may well have occurred in small, intimate groups.⁴¹¹

Not all books were thought proper reading for young girls. Having just reached the age of majority, twenty-one-year-old Elizabeth Robinson had the confidence to state, “I believe it is of great consequence to young people to read none but the very best of authors.” Caroline, Lady Holland recommended in 1766 that Madame Beaumont’s story-books were “quite proper to be read by the girls.”⁴¹² The seventeen-year-old Mary Granville prided herself that, in contrast to her two aunts, she was brought up to love reading. Her aunts hardly read at all, and when they did they read books (those Mary called “idle books”) that she herself was not allowed to read.⁴¹³ The dangers of the wrong kind of reading were echoed in the memoirs of Eliza Dawson. At the age of fifteen, young Eliza’s mind had been “cultivated by novel-reading” albeit on an immoderate scale. She took a fancy to an army officer, who paid his addresses to her. Luckily, Eliza condescended to her father’s wish and dropped the affair at once. As an elderly woman, Eliza laughed at “the simple credulity of a village girl of fifteen.”⁴¹⁴ Improper texts were thought to distract young ladies from domestic duties. Excess reading would also discourage potential suitors, as female wit and scholarly activity was still considered an anomaly in the eighteenth-century. Especially novels, associated with female readership, were considered potentially dangerous. Novels might fill girls’ heads with fanciful ideas and unrealistic expectations of romances that were impossible in real life.⁴¹⁵

Besides reading, embroidery and other handicrafts were recommended occupation for elite girls. By the age of five, girls were already learning how to make their stitching samplers and plain sewing. Usually embroidery lessons took place either at home or at school.⁴¹⁶ The Wynne sisters, however, received some lessons in embroidery from the

⁴⁰⁹ FB1, 60. The 21-year-old Lady Mary Pierrepont also thought reading as good pastime as it “helps to wear away manny[sic] melancholy hours.” MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Anne Justice, 5.7.1710, 42–43.

⁴¹⁰ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, duchess of Portland, 30.5.(1741), 128–131.

⁴¹¹ An example of girl reading alone see SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Montagu, 5.6.1744, 63–66. See also Glover 2011, 55, 57.

⁴¹² EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Mr. Freind, 29.12.(1741), 209–213; CEL vol. I. Caroline, Lady Holland to Emily, marchioness of Kildare, 26.2.1766, 435–436.

⁴¹³ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 22.

⁴¹⁴ *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 25.

⁴¹⁵ Porter 2000, 286–287; Glaser 2006, 192; Glover 2011, 56, 64.

⁴¹⁶ Glover 2011, 27; Ilmakunnas 2016, 126–128. 13-year-old Maria Edgeworth knitted a work-bag for her step-mother while she was at school. ME Richard Lovell Edgeworth to Maria Edgeworth, 6.4.1780, 5–6.

local nuns in Italy, where they were living at the time. On 25 September 1794, sixteen-year-old Betsey noted that they had spent the whole morning doing this in the convent.⁴¹⁷ The variety of items that girls produced extended from gowns to purses, petticoats and shoes.⁴¹⁸ Conduct books promoted embroidery and needlework as a perfect way to spend lonely and quiet periods. They were also good exercise for the mind and body, not to mention an excellent way to save money.⁴¹⁹ For instance, Lady Louisa Stuart recollected later in life that sewing and hemming calmed her nerves when she was a girl.⁴²⁰ Needlework was clearly an essential part of social femininity. At the age of fourteen, Betsey Wynne smartly observed the female habit of carrying a working bag everywhere: “No ladye [sic] goes to pay a visit without bringing with her a working bag of which she makes hardly no usage.”⁴²¹ The needle-bag was the thing to carry around even if one did not do anything with it. It at least gave the impression that one was not idle.

Amanda Vickery and Stacey Shimizu observe that appreciation of female handicrafts stemmed from the notion that they promoted the biblical ideal of a productive female who decorated her home and made it pleasant to live in. Focusing on embroidery and knitting also kept a girl busy so that she was not able to spend her time in idle gossip. Therefore, girls learnt from early on to avoid gossiping by busying themselves with needlework. In addition it was handy if there was boring company, as a lady who focused on her needlework instead of conversation was not thought impolite.⁴²²

The importance of needlework was clearly understood by young elite girls as well as older women. Thus girls were taught needlework skills with their future as women in mind. However, the line between useful and merely ornamental handicraft was hotly debated at the time. Female commentators, like Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More, condemned such accomplishments as they prevented girls from engaging in more intellectual activities. Vickery suggests that embroidery was targeted by proto-feminists precisely because it was such a markedly traditional female pursuit.⁴²³ Accomplishments, including needlework, were thus marks of both an elite life-style and ideal femininity.

As part of their training, girls undertook many domestic tasks. This was part of their training to becoming adults. The lady of the house was, after all, responsible for the servants and household management, even if she did not actually participate in it.

⁴¹⁷ WD 25.9.1794, 157.

⁴¹⁸ AT 21.11.1723, 85, AT 15.11.1724, 89; AT 20.4.1724, 99; AT 9.6.1724, 105; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 21.4.1808, 8–10; SL, Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 9.5.1808, 10–11.

⁴¹⁹ Allen 1789, 40–41; Burton 1793, 123–125; Bennet 1796 vol. I. 110; *The New Pleasing Instructor* 1799, 15–16, 33.

⁴²⁰ LS2 Lady Louisa Stuart to Miss Louisa Clinton, 21.10.1819, 23–28.

⁴²¹ WD 16.7.1792, 120.

⁴²² Shimizu 1999, 76–77, 79; Vickery 2009, 232, 238, 243–244.

⁴²³ Vickery 2009, 233–234. See also Hivet 2006.

She had to keep track of household expenses.⁴²⁴ This meant that girls had to learn at least some mathematics. The subject was certainly not eleven-year-old Betsey Wynne's favourite (although she became an immaculate housekeeper later in life): "To-day there was an arithmetic session with Mons. Benincasa, that was a trifle muddled." Their mother certainly wanted to show her girls the good example of a household mistress, as she demanded that they occasionally buy presents for the servants. When she was ten, Eugenia Wynne wrote that she bought a pin for the cook but "not very willingly".⁴²⁵ But this was only for one occasion. It is possible that their mother wanted to show an example of the ideal mistress of the house and how she treated the servants. This was something daughters had to learn before they became mistresses of their own homes. All the same girls did participate in domestic management in some form or other. Some of them assisted in making breakfast and producing jellies, butter and sweetmeats.⁴²⁶ Some girls had still heavier responsibilities. When Lord Sheffield was away, he sent instructions about the estate farming to his nineteen-year-old daughter Lady Maria Josepha. It seems that Lady Maria was mainly in charge of the house-keeping as well. In March 1793, when she was already twenty-one, Lady Maria wrote to her friend that they had not had any difficulties in housekeeping, apart from the butcher's bill (£4 a week), which was too high for her liking. This excess expenditure she explained by her youth and inexperience.⁴²⁷ Although legally Lady Maria was already an adult, she still felt that she was not sufficiently adept to run the whole household in her father's place.

Although the girls spent most of their daily life indoors, there were moments of freedom in the open air. Walking and other forms of physical exercise were, after all, recommended as important for girls. Only a healthy body and mind could benefit from the fruits of education. Walking was excellent and some favoured riding as it displayed young ladies' beauty by bringing a "charming bloom" to their cheeks. If their physical health did not permit riding or walking, gardening was a useful way to spend time outdoors. However, girls should be protected from the sun and cold air. Girls' complexions should be preserved as beauty for them was essential. No elite girl was deemed beautiful, if she was tanned like a milkmaid. Walking was perfectly sufficient. It

⁴²⁴ Fénelon 1708, 228–230, 232, Essex 1722, 88–89; Burton 1793, 111. See also Glover 2011, 28; Tikoff 2010, 93.

⁴²⁵ WD 1.9.1789, 3; WD 17.1.1790, 24.

⁴²⁶ AT 15.2.1724, 92; AT 12.6.1724, 105; AT 28.7.1724, 109; FB2, 95. The young Lady Mary Pierrepont was instructed to carve meat as soon as she had enough bodily strength for the task. The carving master came three times a week, when the girl practiced on wooden models. She was also skilled in making bread and butter. Grundy 2004 (1999), 15.

⁴²⁷ MH Lord Sheffield to Maria Josepha Holroyd, 26.5.1790, 26–27; MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 13.3.1793, 212–213.

was not wise to let them play with their brothers as running around was not only rude but too much heat could destroy their complexion all together.⁴²⁸

The girls certainly got the most out of these activities. Occasionally girls went on walks or “took a ramble” as Lady Louisa Stuart put it in 1778. These were not only necessarily turns around the park, but might be long distance expeditions around the neighbouring countryside. In 1790, twelve-year-old Betsey Wynne reported that she walked 2 miles from home.⁴²⁹ Walking long distances was not straightforward for girls, as their shoes were usually delicate and not well suited to outdoor rambling in the countryside, as Kaartinen has pointed out. If the weather was cold, wet or muddy, girls were confined indoors for long periods. In towns the air was not always good and constant rain meant the hazard of catching a severe cold.⁴³⁰ If the family had enough money, the daughters could have a horse at their disposal. Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd, Lady Sarah Spencer and the Wynne sisters, if not others, rode frequently.⁴³¹ Hunting was a rare activity among females. But, there still were a few young huntresses. Eighteen-year-old Anne Tracy reported several times that she went hunting with her father and brother. She described it as a good sport. Once, she came home “starved with cold and hunger.”⁴³² I would concur with Kaartinen in suggesting that in addition to being a healthy activity, walking and riding offered the girls, as it did adult women,⁴³³ rare moments of independence and privacy that were otherwise scarce in households where several people lived in close proximity to one another. For twenty-year-old Elizabeth Robinson walking was “a friend to contemplation.” She also rejoiced in walking and talking with her friends.⁴³⁴

The girls certainly fulfilled the ideal of an active elite young lady. At least in their letters and diaries, they dutifully showed how busy they had been during the day. They did not spend their days doing nothing. Needlework and reading seems to have been the most

⁴²⁸ Essex 1722, 81; Wicksteed 1747, 110–111; Seymour 1754, 53–54; 57–58, 78–80, 83. Walking was a common way for eighteenth-century females to maintain their health. See Kaartinen 2019, *passim*. Davidoff and Hall have remarked that physical restriction of girls extended to their toys as well. Boys played with hoops and balls whereas girls had dolls, dolls houses, needlebooks and miniature work baskets. Davidoff & Hall 2002 (1987), 344.

⁴²⁹ LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson, 4.7.(1778), 6–7; WD 25.3.1790, 32.

⁴³⁰ Worsley 2017, 97–98; Kaartinen 2019 (e-book, no page numbers).

⁴³¹ Maria Josepha’s horse was named Pearl. Thirteen-year-old Maria could not wait the summer when she could ride out to the farms and fields. Her mother was less enthusiastic. MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd, 1.3.1786, 12. Lady Sarah Spencer rode a donkey, lead by her father, when the family went to see countryside in August 1808. Lady Sarah exclaimed that she could not have walked that long. SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 22.8.1808, 22–24. See also WD 7.1.1790, 21; WD 25.11.1793, 131; WD 3.7.1795, 178.

⁴³² AT 13.12.1723, 87; AT 26.12.1723, 88; AT 4.1.1724, 88.

⁴³³ Kaartinen 2019 (e-book, no page numbers).

⁴³⁴ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Mr. Friend, 1741, 132–135; EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Sarah Robinson, s.a. 216–217.

common employment alongside walking and riding. They did also take part on domestic duties from an early age. This emphasizes the importance of learning their future role as household mistresses. I have thus far discussed the ideal elements of eighteenth-century education for girls. Next, I look at what happened when this ideal was not fulfilled.

Not meeting with expectations: bad education

Children and the young were aware of the expectations and demands of good education and upbringing. To be able to function in society, girls needed both social and literary skills. The girls I have researched knew what was required of them and had the courage to demand it. It was very rare that they directly accused their parents or other guardians of bad and inadequate education, however. Usually this kind of criticism was made in veiled form, but there are some examples from straightforward accusations.⁴³⁵ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (née Pierrepont) remembered her own education as “the worst in the world.” Her governess had tried to fill her head with “superstitious tales and false notions.”⁴³⁶ Others also commented on inadequate education and upbringing. The Wynne family shared a house with the family of the French ambassador to Venice, Marquis de Bombelles, for three years. According to Elaine Chalus the families had frequent problems and disputes due to the close living arrangements.⁴³⁷ In the privacy of their diaries, the Wynne sisters poured out their irritation at living with a bunch of ill-disciplined boys. Fifteen-year-old Betsey complained that parents “can find some thing[sic] to say to others children But cannot see the faults of their own.”⁴³⁸ According to Chalus, as the eldest child, Betsey was frequently in charge of her younger siblings, but also of the three de Bombelles boys. Comments such as those above reflected her disgust at the Rousseauian carefree upbringing.⁴³⁹ Similar sentiments were expressed by her twelve-year-old sister, Eugenia. She had a classic “if they were my children”-comment in her diary 15 March 1792:

It is impossible to do anything that demands attention when the children are so rowdy and it is of no use to bid them to be quiet for it is as if one spoke to the wind, they take no notice. One comes in with a chair as his carriage pulling it after him with a great noise, another escapes with cries from the blows of his brother, that really it is not to be born, it gives me the colic. If it was my children or my sisters I would certainly have shown them the door for it is unsupportable.”⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁵ Karppinen-Kummumäki & Kaartinen 2016, passim.

⁴³⁶ MWM, vol. III. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Mary, Countess of Bute, 6.3.1753, 25–26.

⁴³⁷ Chalus 2019a, 229.

⁴³⁸ WD 13.1.1793, 135.

⁴³⁹ Chalus 2019a, 229.

⁴⁴⁰ WD 15.3.1792, 93.

The noisy children gave her colic and physical pain, so much so, says Eugenia, that she would have thrown them out had they been hers. This criticism of boys behaving badly may have been partly provoked by another problem: it is possible that twelve-year-old Eugenia, aware of the double standards, was jealous that she, as a girl who had to be well-behaved, was not herself able to behave such a rowdy manner.⁴⁴¹ Girls restricted their physical activities in order to be feminine.

Recollections of childhood education were usually represented as grim, but the grimness took a varying forms. Some criticized concentration on polite behaviour. Eliza Dawson described the education she had received at boarding school as “a place in which nothing useful could be learned.” Grace in dancing was put ahead of reading and “everything was artificial, flat, and uninteresting.” To make matters worse, she had as “daily associates some girls of thoroughly depraved character.” She also criticized the methods of teaching: “Lessons were said by rote, without being understood.”⁴⁴² Eliza thought that public schooling was about just that: artificial education, useless skills and potential bad influence from other pupils. Age difference does not explain this contrast. It is very likely that what she required in her adult life, as wife and scholar, had an influence on how useful she found her girlhood education. Some girls, like Lady Mary Pierrepont, openly took part in criticizing the education of females that barred them from literary studies. At the age of twenty, Lady Mary wrote that girls and women were allowed to read only books that weakened their minds and strengthened their defects. Girls were taught only to focus on their appearance, and any girl who tried to develop her reason had to make excuses because she was labeled ridiculous. She especially criticized “Women of Quality, whose Birth and Leisure only serve to render them the most uselesse and most worthlesse part of the creation.”⁴⁴³

These comments were part of a wider phenomenon of the time known as the *querelle de femme*.⁴⁴⁴ Contemporary writers questioned the need for or lack of female education. After all, the purpose of education was to give girls skills that they later needed as wives and mothers. Edward Wicksteed commented in 1747 that with daughters “we take care of their persons, and neglect their minds.” He continued that girls are taken straight out of nursery and before their mental capacities are fully formed made to learn “a fantastic gravity of behavior, and forced to a particular way of holding her head, heaving her breast, and moving with her whole body.” Wicksteed thought that girls were brought up

⁴⁴¹ Karppinen-Kummunmäki & Kaartinen 2016, 12.

⁴⁴² *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 20–22. A similar kind of comment was made by Lady Louisa Stuart in 1778. She clearly criticized her sister-in-law’s wish to send her daughters to boarding school by writing that “I do not see that the want of music and dancing, which are the only parts of education, as she calls it, that they might not have at home, would ruin them.” LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson, 28.10.1778, 91–93.

⁴⁴³ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, 20.7.1710, 43–46.

⁴⁴⁴ Bock 2002, 1–4, 6–13.

as empty-headed decorated dolls: pretty and pleasing from the outside but lacking any intellectual capacities. The blame for this was put at the parents' door. John Bennet (1796) criticized the way boarding schools did not teach any domestic skills, let alone piety and virtue.⁴⁴⁵ Hannah More (1777) accepted that elite girls had to exercise their outer form and those skills that were necessary for social life, but she also recommended that parents did not forget their virtues and their minds. Life was not a constant holiday with balls and other amusements which was what the fashionable education prepared girls for.⁴⁴⁶ If girls were educated at home, the blame for bad education was usually placed on mothers who pampered and indulged their offspring. For instance, they might encourage their daughters' vanity and let them speak and do as they pleased. When a mother felt pleased at her daughter's accomplishments, she also gratified herself.⁴⁴⁷ These comments reflected the enlightened pedagogical thinking of Locke and Rousseau. A child was innately good, and if she behaved badly, it was due to her parents' failure to instruct her properly.⁴⁴⁸

The reasons for lack of education were various. Parents were not always willing, or financially able, to provide their children with the education proper for their gender and social status.⁴⁴⁹ When Mary Berry's father refused to remarry, the family faced financial difficulties. Mary wrote that "every expense of education in the acquirement of talents was denied us." Mary and Agnes then aged twelve and eleven respectively,

were thus left, almost children, to our own devices – to be as idle, and to read what books, and choose what other employments we pleased. [---] To neither of us had the least religious education been at all thought of. It was in the middle of the age of Voltaire, and his doctrines and his wit had been adopted by all the soi-disant Scotch wits.⁴⁵⁰

The Berry sisters were therefore left without supervised learning: their education was inconsistent and no-one took interest in whether the girls studied or not or what sort of things they studied. Their grandmother tried to give them some religious education by making the girls read her Psalms and Bible chapters every morning. Any religious aspect in the lives of the elite is not very visible. In the letters of these girls, churchgoing is represented as more of a social activity than a religious one. There is very little evidence, apart from the reference in Mary Berry's diary, that these girls read any religious books, even though the moral teachings for young were still essential for their upbringing. All in

⁴⁴⁵ Wicksteed 1747, 203–204; Bennet 1796 vol. I. 9.

⁴⁴⁶ More 1777, 125, 131–133.

⁴⁴⁷ Fénelon 1708, 1–3; More 1777, 130; Moir 1784, 61, 73,

⁴⁴⁸ Foyster & Marten 2010, 3–4.

⁴⁴⁹ Karppinen-Kummumäki & Kaartinen 2016, 16.

⁴⁵⁰ MB, 4, 7.

all, Mr. Berry appears in a very unfavourable a light. Even though females conducted the education in practice, it was the father of the family who had the responsibility to organize his children's education. Moreover, ideally the male was supposed to take financial care of his wife and children.⁴⁵¹ This Mr. Berry clearly failed to do. Sometimes, unevenness of education was simply human failure. It was tempting for some parents to favour their more talented children. For instance, Fanny Burney was less brilliant as a scholar than her sisters as a child. Therefore, Mrs. Burney, who suffered from ill health, and died, when Fanny was nine years old, simply focused on the teaching of her elder daughters. Years later, Fanny wrote to her sister Hetty that

At that very juvenile period, the difference even of months makes a marked distinction in bestowing and receiving instruction. I, also, was so peculiarly backward that even our Susan stood before me; she could read when I knew not my letters.⁴⁵²

As Fanny was a slow learner, she received less instruction than her more talented sisters Hetty and Susan, but she did benefit from the instruction they received:

She [Mrs. Burney] very early indeed began to form your taste for reading, & delighted to find time [---] to guide you, in your most tender years, to the best authors; & to read them with you [---] I perfectly recollect, Child as I was, & never of the party, this part of your education [---] I could read when I knew not my Letters. But though so sluggish to learn, I was always observant [---] Well I recollect your reading with our dear Mother all Pope's Works, & Pitt's Aenead. I recollect, also, your spouting passages from Pope, that I learnt from hearing you recite them.⁴⁵³

When Mrs. Burney read the books of Pope with Hetty, young Fanny carefully observed the lessons. She claims that she learnt to recite Pope just by hearing her sister and mother read. It is also possible that by emphasizing her lack of talents Fanny Burney downplayed her breeching of proper female behaviour as a published authoress. It may have been yet another strategy for her self-fashioning.

As mentioned above, the female scholar presented a problem in the eighteenth century. Several educational authors warned girls about too much learning, and even some female authors were doubtful about it. Hester Chapone (1777) did not recommend "learned languages" i.e. Latin and Greek, to everyone, only those who had a particular genius for it, as the "labour and time which they require are generally incompatible with our natures and proper employments." These studies took too much time from other female duties and were, therefore, not ideal for girls. In 1796 John Bennet listed

⁴⁵¹ Bailey 2007, 221–222. See also Parland-von Essen 2005, 101–143.

⁴⁵² Cited in Seeley 1900, 11.

⁴⁵³ Cited in Doody 1988, 21.

other subjects prohibited for girls as politics, philosophy and metaphysics, as “they would damp that vivacity and destroy that disengaged ease and softness, which are the very essence of your graces.” As we saw, pedantry was very unpleasing in a young lady. Too much learning caused envy. A lady who was too learned was vain and sneered at other women. It was not only other women who might think a learned lady unappealing. Dr. Gregory warned that if a girl had “any learning” she should “keep it a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and a cultivated understanding.”⁴⁵⁴ When a female pursued an ambitious literary career beyond writing letters and diaries, she put her good reputation in danger. A connection was frequently made between female authors and prostitutes and actresses who similarly advertised their work and consequently themselves. It was thought inappropriate when a woman was known outside her family circle as other than a wife or a daughter.⁴⁵⁵ This attitude prevailed even though the Enlightenment celebrated female artists and intellectuals. Yet again, we can see that girls were not supposed to show off their skills. A well-bred elite girl should acquire enough literary skills to be able to interact in contemporary society by fulfilling her role as mother, wife and mistress of the household. Pursuing anything further was thought problematic.

Some girls treated their possible writing career as a light-hearted joke. Taking their writings lightly might have been a way to minimize the possible censure that faced literary talented females. For instance, they might claim their writing was nothing more than a hobby. The twenty-one-year-old Lady Sarah Spencer told to her brother that if he kept complementing her penmanship, she would be dazed by it and would “expose myself in some strange way; perhaps have all my letters published, and say in my preface that I do it pressed by the importunities of my numerous and judicious friends.”⁴⁵⁶ This may have been her secret wish, but Lady Sarah would never have admitted publicly that she was seriously thinking of publishing her letters, as it was not thought proper for a lady of her social standing. Even though she was legally an adult, and technically free to do whatever she liked, it was not advisable for her to put her reputation at risk if she was ever to find a husband and keep her status in society. Publishing one’s letters would have been putting oneself under the public censure and commenting. Yet this was exactly what happened when her descendant published her correspondence after her death. We can only guess whether Lady Sarah would have liked the idea or not.

Other girls were more determined in their literary pursuits. The Robinson sisters Elizabeth and Sarah both became published authors during their adult lives. Even in their youthful correspondence, experimentation in the genre of the familiar letter can be

⁴⁵⁴ Chapone 1777, 174–175; Bennet 1796 vol. I. 81; Gregory 1794, 12.

⁴⁵⁵ Pyrhönen 2014, 32.

⁴⁵⁶ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 29.5.1808, 14.

detected.⁴⁵⁷ Not all girls were willing to accept the restrictive terms that (mostly male) social commentators would like to impose on them without comment. At the age of twenty Lady Mary Pierrepont took up the question of the female scholar;

There is hardly a character in the World more Despicable, or more liable to universal ridicule than that of a Learned Woman. Them [sic] words imply, according to the receiv'd sense, a tatling, impertinent, vain, and Conceited Creature.⁴⁵⁸

Lady Mary was obviously aware that learned women were heavily criticized for all sorts of evils. Displaying her own knowledge, she cited Erasmus of Rotterdam in Latin claiming that this learned man shared her opinion. She also cited Abbé Bellegarde's statement that women talk too much because the female mind is receptive to a multitude of ideas, but without good education, they do not know which ones are worth contemplating to her own advantage.⁴⁵⁹ Lady Mary was clearly an advocate of female learning from an early age. Had Lady Mary but known that her granddaughter, Lady Louisa Stuart, also someone of literary talent, would choose to burn "from dejection and bitter disgust, every line of verse" she "had ever written"!⁴⁶⁰ This occurred in 1780s when Lady Louisa was in her twenties. Were these just girlhood trifles that Lady Louisa wanted to forget? Or was she afraid of suffering her grandmother's fate and becoming a criticized female author? Apparently, she later changed her mind about writing and literary females, but at the age of seventeen, for whatever reason, she rejected that possibility.⁴⁶¹ Louisa's grandmother Lady Mary was, even as a girl, one of those who stretched the limits of proper female education by becoming authors. She apparently started her literary career very early. The earliest poems that have been preserved are from 1704–1705 when Lady

⁴⁵⁷ Pohl & Shellenberg 2013, passim.

⁴⁵⁸ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, 20.7.1710, 43–46.

⁴⁵⁹ *Faemina quae vere sapit, non videtur sibi sapere; contra, quae cum nihil sapiat sibi videtur sapere, ea demum bis slulta[sic] est.* MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, 20.7.1710, 43–46. It is curious, however, that she did not educate her own daughter according to these opinions. Instead, her daughter's upbringing was a very traditional one. Isobel Grundy thinks this was because of the family will rather than her own. According her, Lady Mary wanted her granddaughters to have a proper education because their marriage prospects were low due to family's meagre income. In Lady Mary's mind education provided them with a means to cope with lonely single lives. Grundy 2004 (1999), 309, 524. See also Sheffrin 2006, 186; Karppinen 2012, 75.

⁴⁶⁰ LS2 Lady Louisa Stuart to Louisa Clinton, 25.2.1822, 239–244. Other girls also tested the air as writers. The 12-year-old Maria Josepha Holroyd wrote a novel called *The Duchess of C*, but complained that she had only time to write on Sundays as her time was taken up by work, dancing and music. MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd, 16.2.1783, 6–7.

⁴⁶¹ LS2 Lady Louisa Stuart to Louisa Clinton, 25.2.1822, 239–244.

Mary was only fourteen. Her family included several literary talents, so it is no wonder that young Mary followed their path.⁴⁶²

Although Fanny Burney may at times have appeared modest in her achievements, she was also very self-conscious when writing her journals. This strongly indicates that she had literary ambitions as a girl. At the age of sixteen, she wrote that “To have some account of my thoughts, manners, acquaintance and actions, when the hour arrives in which time is more nimble than memory, is the reason which induces me to keep a Journal.” She also read parts of her journal to an acquaintance, Miss Young, to get feedback on her writing.⁴⁶³ According to Margaret Doody, Fanny started scribbling in secret at the age of ten. Doody suspects that the death of Mrs. Burney was the trigger for Fanny’s writing. It became her solace at the time of grief.⁴⁶⁴ Her earliest still surviving poem was written when she was eleven years old. When she turned fifteen, she burnt almost all that she had written before. Of her reasons for this she wrote that she had grown “too old for scribbling nonsense [sic]” but despite of that she found it irresistible to put down her thoughts on paper.⁴⁶⁵ These “scribblings” included the earliest draft of her first novel *Evelina* then titled *The History of Caroline Evelyn*. The editor of her girlhood journals Lars E. Troide suspects that Fanny burned her writings because of her stepmother’s attitude. The new Mrs. Burney thought writing was a waste of time and even improper for a girl of Fanny’s age.⁴⁶⁶ The stepmother did not prevent Fanny from pursuing a literary career. At the age of twenty-four she was old enough and mature enough to send her first novel *Evelina* for publication. She contacted the bookseller

⁴⁶² These included her maternal cousins Henry (1707–1754) and Sarah Fielding (1710–1768). See Karppinen 2012, 77; Grundy 2004 (1999), 3–5, 10–11, 16–17, 93.

⁴⁶³ FB1, 20, 23.

⁴⁶⁴ Doody 1988, 21–22.

⁴⁶⁵ This line can be found on page 303 in *The Early Diary of Frances Burney 1768–1778* vol. I. (ed. by Annie Raine Ellis. George Bell and sons, London 1889), but does not appear in FB2. Fanny explained her reasons: “So early was I impressed myself with ideas that fastened degradation to this class of composition, that at the age of adolescence, I struggled against the propensity which, even in childhood, even from the moment I could hold a pen, had impelled me into its toils; and on my fifteenth birth-day, I made so resolute a conquest over an inclination at which I blushed, and that I had always kept a secret, that I committed to the flames whatever, up to that moment, I had committed to paper. And so enormous was the pile, that I thought it prudent to consume it in the garden. You, dear Sir, knew nothing of its extinction, for you had never known of its existence. Our darling Susanna, to whom alone I had ever ventured to read its contents, alone witnessed the conflagration: and – well I remember! – wept, with tender partiality, over the imaginary ashes of Caroline Evelyn, the mother of *Evelina*. The passion, however, though resisted, was not annihilated: my bureau was cleared; but my head was not emptied; and, in defiance of every self-effort, *Evelina* struggled herself into life.” Cited in Doody 1988, 35–36.

⁴⁶⁶ FB1, xv. Also Doody 1988, 35–36.

Thomas Lowndes without letting her family know.⁴⁶⁷ This procedure was unusual as most female authors, like Jane Austen, used their male relations as middlemen when they negotiated with publishers.⁴⁶⁸

The focus of this section has been the experience education for the girls of the study, something, that has received very little attention in previous research. Eighteenth-century elite girls received a thorough education that was to furnish them for their future adult roles as socialites, mothers, and wives. If the education they received was inadequate, they did not hesitate to express it. The girls were also aware of the contemporary disputes about female education. Even if their literary knowledge was extensive, and they spoke several languages fluently, they knew that exhibiting such talents too much was not proper for the ideal young female. Yet some of them chose to break the mould by becoming publishing authors. Thus many girls knew how to play along with the social norms and still make their own decisions about their lives. In the next section, I show how schoolroom education was put into practice.

3.2 The young lady in society. Social life and material environment

When a girl left the room for schooling in the home or returned home from school for the final time, her education was over and it was time for her to enter society. Girls were instructed in several ways to improve their minds and behaviour, so that they could act properly and according to their rank in societal events. This section focuses on informal education of elite girls. After enough training at home, girls started gradually to participate in adult social life.

Jessica Parland-von Essen emphasizes that the basic idea of elite education in the eighteenth century was that only by growing up within the elite could a girl learn its rules. Girls learned these rules by example, by following, and by emulating. Learning the rules of sociability was essential, as it was the most important channel of influence for females. The art of pleasing was the key feature to learn.⁴⁶⁹ According to Soile Ylivuori, Fanny Burney was one of those who used her journals to build her polite identity. They were filled with observations about polite society, ideal femininity and family relations.

⁴⁶⁷ FB2, 213, 214–219, 232, 285–286, 287–288. Fanny wrote the following description of her laborious writing process in her diary: “The fear of Discovery, or of suspicion in the House, made the Copying extremely laborious to me; in the Day Time, I could only take odd moments, so that I was obliged to sit up the greatest part of many Nights, in order to get it ready[---]I had hardy Time to write half a page in a Day; & neither my Health, nor inclination, would allow me to continue my Nocturnal scribbling for so long a Time as to write first, & then Copy, a whole volume. I was, therefore, obliged to give the attempt & affair entirely over for the present.” FB2, 231–232.

⁴⁶⁸ Pyrhönen 2014, 32–33.

⁴⁶⁹ Parland-von Essen 2007, 96–97, 102. See also Ylivuori 2018, 38–45.

Ylivuori notes that Fanny presented herself as a domestic, chaste and quiet young woman. However, she also tried to balance the polite ideal with her role as a socialite.⁴⁷⁰ In this section, I show that Fanny Burney was not alone in struggling with the above problems. Girls had to balance the ideal of modest femininity suitable to their sex and age and the demands of their social positions as members of the elite.

Additionally, this section looks at the material environment of the girls, its significance for the experience of elite girlhood, and how this environment changed when the girls grew up. Isobel Grundy, Katharine Glover and Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos suggest that there was a youth culture in the early modern period, especially in the eighteenth-century. The life of young girls included their own standards and attitudes. They were not mini-adults, but constituted a group of their own. Especially in urban social life, young girls were the principal actors of polite sociability.⁴⁷¹

Learning to please: acquiring the rules of politeness

The accomplishments, discussed in the previous section, were meant to furnish girls for the next stage in their education, namely, entering society and ultimately the marriage market. The “coming out” and the first season of balls was the climax of this gradual process. At this time, the elite girl’s value on the marriage market was at its peak, so the entry had to be planned with care by the girl’s parents.⁴⁷²

It is clear that being able to attend social events and thereby learn the rules of sociability, and eventually finding a husband, was seen as an important part of girls’ education and girls demanded it from their parents. In January 1795, sixteen-year-old Betsey Wynne wrote in her diary that she and her sisters had to leave a ball early because their parents did not dance and became easily bored at such events.⁴⁷³ A slight hint of disapproval or disappointment can be detected in this comment. It was, after all, the parents’ duty to acquaint their daughters with the rules of social life. This could be done only by attending social events. However, it seems that Betsey’s parents put their own interests first.⁴⁷⁴ Betsey was more straightforward in her criticism when she commented that the Miss Norths received “the greatest compassion” as their “nasty beast of a mother will not let them go out anywhere and the youngest is seventeen years of age.”⁴⁷⁵ Other girls were more fortunate. There are several references to mothers (or stepmothers) and aunts chaperoning their daughters and nieces to balls and court introductions.⁴⁷⁶ This practice seems to have lasted throughout the period covered in this research. It was also

⁴⁷⁰ Ylivuori 2015, 226–227.

⁴⁷¹ Krausman Ben-Amos 1994, chap.8; Grundy 2002, 186; Glover 2011, 88–89.

⁴⁷² Worsley 2017, 133.

⁴⁷³ WD 15.10.1794, 165.

⁴⁷⁴ Karppinen-Kummumäki & Kaartinen 2016, 17.

⁴⁷⁵ WD 13.1.1795, 170.

⁴⁷⁶ FB1, 25; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Georgiana, Dowager Countess Spencer, 17.5.1805, 2–3.

possible for an acquaintance i.e. a respectable married woman, to act as a chaperone for a young girl visiting the capital. At the age of eighteen, Harriet Pitt reported to her mother from London (where she was living at her sister Lady Mahon's home) that a Lady Middleton, a family connection, chaperoned her to "publick places when ever [sic]" she chose to go. However, Harriet duly stated that she would not do anything her mother disapproved of.⁴⁷⁷ In the end it was the girl's parents that decided what was appropriate for her. As Lucy Worsley has pointed out, sometimes girls were simply told where to go and how long to stay, for instance on visits. They themselves didn't have much say in the matter.⁴⁷⁸ The noteworthy point is that especially mothers and other female kin played a crucial role in introducing young girls to society and instructing them. Early guidance was thought essential as public life was full of dangers that could lead a girl astray or even rob her of her virtue.⁴⁷⁹

What, then, were the rules of sociability that the girls were supposed to learn? The key word of eighteenth-century sociability is politeness.⁴⁸⁰ Polite behaviour was displayed through easy social interaction. It was essentially an art of pleasing. Politeness had to appear natural, and through this naturalness to represent one's good birth, education, and social standing. Politeness was regarded as essentially female, and women were perceived to have a refining influence on men in heterosocial gatherings. However, distinguishing "natural politeness" from artificial forms of behaviour posed a problem especially to women. Virtuosity demanded "naturalness", but how was politeness to be, at least appear, natural? Moreover, if she was not natural and virtuous she was not truly feminine. A new concept emerged: sensibility. Sensibility stressed emotion and spontaneity.⁴⁸¹ Ylivuori reminds us that being feminine also required feminine behaviour. Any indication of masculine or childlike carelessness for decency or decorum was highly unsuitable. Romping was thought to be the result of bad education, but it was also indication of indecent libertine behaviour. A rompish girl would try to attract men with seemingly artless behaviour.⁴⁸² Politeness was closely connected to gender construction.

The elements of proper behaviour for girls were modesty, reserve and being pleasant. The ideal young girl of the eighteenth century mixed gravity with sweetness in her behaviour. Especially in conversations, girls were warned against too much forwardness. Hester Chapone wrote in 1777 that "a very young woman can hardly be too silent and reserved in company; and certainly, nothing is so disgusting in youth as pertness and self-

⁴⁷⁷ HP Lady Harriet Pitt to Hester, Lady Chatham, undated 1776, 5–6.

⁴⁷⁸ Worsley 2017, 133.

⁴⁷⁹ Tague 2002, 170–172. See also Glaser 2006, 191–192.

⁴⁸⁰ Politeness has been widely studied among historians. For example Cohen 1996; Langford 1998 (1989), esp. chap. 3&10; Kekäläinen 2012; Ylivuori 2015, *passim*. See also Klein 1989, 583–605; Klein 1994; Bryson 1998; Berry 2001, 65–81.

⁴⁸¹ Tague 2002, 189; Spacks 2003, 89–92; Cohen 2009, 103; Ylivuori 2015, 37–40, 51, 58–59, 95; Ylivuori 2018, 38–45.

⁴⁸² Ylivuori 2015, 48–49.

conceit.”⁴⁸³ François Fénelon thought that “A Maid ought not to speak but for Necessity.”⁴⁸⁴ Girls were advised to follow the conversations attentively and to wait for the questions. Answers must be suited to their age and prudence. On public occasions they must avoid entering into too familiar conversations, especially with men, and pay special attention to people of superior rank.⁴⁸⁵ Yet, J. Burton thought that girls possessed “a greater share of vivacity, and a readier talent for Conversation than Boys.”⁴⁸⁶ Some commentators at least found that girls were the ones who excelled in polite conversations and had a natural capability for it. Outer appearance was important in the eighteenth-century world, as it was thought to manifest the inner self. As we have seen, mind and body were closely linked. A person’s character could be read from his or her face. A well-behaved girl manifested her good upbringing in all her doings. Every gesture, word, or even thought had to be carefully monitored. Impure thoughts, let alone talk, might tarnish a young girl’s virtue. Modesty was to be the key element in her behaviour. Girls were supposed to be like open books that men could easily read. This openness supposedly stemmed from their sexual inexperience. There were no secrets or knowledge to hide.⁴⁸⁷ One could say that an elite lady distinguished herself by her appearance.

It might not come as surprise that the girls occasionally failed to follow these rules of society, even though they were perfectly aware of them. The expectations of parents and other relatives were important and the girls duly sought their blessing.⁴⁸⁸ The girls of this study were also very self-reflective and even censorious about both their own behaviour and that of others. Betsey Wynne defended her own conduct in her diary in 1795 by stating that

There is many complaints of us by the society, we seem to be proud, disdainful and are excessively rude to every body. I am very sorry they think we do but that’s my manner of behaving and would not wish to change it and to take their hipocrisy grimaces and affectations.⁴⁸⁹

The context of this remark is obscure. Betsey did not specify who exactly thought they were proud or rude. It is probable that she had a certain ideal in her mind about how she should behave in society and was constantly comparing it to others. According to Elaine Chalus, as Betsey grew up with émigrés, she increasingly equated “natural” politeness with Englishness. In contrast, she believed French manners were affected and French

⁴⁸³ Chapone 1777, 165.

⁴⁸⁴ Fénelon 1708 (1693), 213.

⁴⁸⁵ Essex 1722, 25, 91; Chapone 1777, 165; Allen 1789, 86–87.

⁴⁸⁶ Burton 1793 vol. I. 165.

⁴⁸⁷ Karppinen-Kummumäki 2015, 197, 199, 210–211. See also Revel 2001, 27–30, 53, 74–85; Davidoff & Hall 2002 (1987), 344, Steele 2010, 5; Ylivuori 2015, 70, 97–104.

⁴⁸⁸ HP Lady Harriet Pitt to Hester, Lady Chatham, 29.11.1777, 20–21; FB1, 136.

⁴⁸⁹ WD 16.10.1795, 181.

“politeness” hypocritical.⁴⁹⁰ Lady Louisa Stuart described herself as “pretty conceited when a girl and had a great hankering after bel esprit and liter-a-pudding; in other words, much inclination to become a female coxcomb.”⁴⁹¹ She thought that as a young girl she had been the worst kind of social butterfly, keen to attract the attention of other people. Then something happened that changed her for good. Whatever that something was remains a mystery. It is possible that her parents were not delighted at her showing off her wit and literary knowledge in company, a characteristic she had no doubt inherited from her maternal grandmother Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. By contrast, twelve-year-old Eugenia Wynne saw herself very inconstant. She would change her mind several times and could not control her feelings. She was very irritated with herself:

I have two persons in me, one scolds me and disapproves of all I do, the other flatters my passions and counsels me to follow their dictates indeed I am an enigma to myself and wish to know myself in vain. I have the vanity of a devil. I have wit without wisdom (so I am told and I well believe it) I have in short a thousand faults which I long to correct but always the evil vanquishes the good in me.”⁴⁹²

Eugenia’s outburst gives an example of the double-expectations eighteenth-century girls had to face and deal with. Eugenia tried desperately to please her parents and fulfill the expectations of her, in short of being “a good girl,” even though her adolescent mind was as yet unable to discern what she really wanted. Her sister Betsey also had worries of her own. She was embarrassed that she did not know how to be civil and satisfy all the guests who were visiting their home. On one occasion, seventeen-year-old Betsey seems to have been puzzled by the way young ladies should behave in company. She confessed that she loved “to dance laugh and sport as any young girl” of her age, but thought that some were “little devils” and “thoughtless foolish girls.” However, she also disapproved of those who “preferred to keep a serious (old womanish) conversation with the fine ladies than to stay in all the noise that the other society was making.”⁴⁹³ In conclusion Betsey wrote:

I think the consequences of all this is that young people should amuse themselves honestly and at the same time heartily but not romp about and show so much love for pleasure as to be justly ridiculed by everybody.⁴⁹⁴

Young people were allowed, to some extent, gaiety, thoughtlessness and freedom from grave behaviour. However, Betsey’s contemplations clearly show that the pressure to

⁴⁹⁰ Chalus 2019a, 230–231.

⁴⁹¹ LS2 Lady Louisa Stuart to Louisa Clinton, 25.2.1822, 239–244.

⁴⁹² WD 25.6.1792, 118.

⁴⁹³ WD 2.6.1795, 177.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

behave like a civil and polite member of the elite was also lurking in the back of her mind at every step. The balancing act must often have been difficult.

Being young could nevertheless prove an excuse when a girl's behaviour did not meet with expectations. Captain Henry Napier related an anecdote from his mother's early childhood. Lady Sarah Lennox was less than five years old when she met the royal family in Kensington Gardens. Their governess reminded Sarah and her sister Louisa how to curtsy and spread their gown in the manner their dancing master had taught them, when the royal family nodded to them. But Lady Sarah "who was a lively, volatile disposition" was very impatient to see the king in person without having to watch the endless-seeming procession of courtiers. So she ran from her French governess and went to address His Majesty in French: "Comment vous portez vous Monsieur le Roi, vous avez une grande et belle maison ici, n'est ce pas?" The king was astonished and turned red at such an impropriety. Luckily, the little girl remembered the dancing master's instructions and made a pretty curtsy that saved the situation.⁴⁹⁵

It seems that those girls, who managed to fulfil the ideals of a modest and silent female, occasioned approval even among their peers. Fanny Burney remarked on the girls she had met on several occasions. The qualities that she approved of were modesty and silence, but also sensibility, good understanding and smartness.⁴⁹⁶ She made one especially interesting comparison between a Miss Fitzgerald and a Miss B in 1776. The former was good-natured and sprightly in character and spoke

her mind as freely & readily, before a Room full of Company, as if with only a single Friend; she laughs louder than a man, pokes her Head vehemently, Dresses shockingly, & has a carriage the most ungainly that ever was seen. [---] Miss B_ [---] a young lady quite à la mode, every part of her Dress, the very pink & extreme of the Fashion; her Head erect & stiff as any statue; her voice low & delicate & mincing; her Head higher than 12 Wigs stuck one on the other, her waste Taper & pinched evidently, her Eyes cast languishingly from one object to another, & her Conversation very much the thing.⁴⁹⁷

These two young ladies represented the opposite extremes of polite (or not so polite) female behaviour. The former was easy and free in her conversation, perhaps too impertinent for her age, and most definitely not genteel in her dress. The latter followed strictly the stiff rules of decorum. Every part of her dress conformed to the current fashion and her behavior was that of the modest and chaste young female in every detail. Such observations show that being a female required constant regulation, not only from oneself but also by other females, both young and old. Being a polite female required a

⁴⁹⁵ LSL vol. I. 87; Curtis 1946, 22; Tillyard 1995 (1994), 120.

⁴⁹⁶ FB1, 123; FB2, 5.

⁴⁹⁷ FB2, 211–212.

certain type of dress, acts, and speech. Others watched and commented if a girl did not perform her role properly.

The observations presented above indicate that elite girls actively constructed normative behaviour by criticizing their own and others'. It was not just men and potential husbands to whom they had to show themselves at their best, but to other females as well. It is in letters and diaries of fellow elite females that we can read about the misconduct of girls and women of the eighteenth century. Later in this section, we will see how the girls of this study also broke these rules to their own advantage.

The vices that girls had to avoid in polite interaction were, among others, excess gaiety, impertinence and wit. Even if girls were supposed to be pleasing in company, too much gaiety was improper. Excess gaiety and mirth was thought especially the sin of youngsters. Therefore, girls should not speak so loud that everyone in the room could hear them. Too much or excessive loud laughing was also unbecoming. It was not necessary to keep the company amused with laughter, the didactical authors advised. Especially while at church, girls should avoid giggling and chatting and other signs of impiety. As we already saw, church was not the arena where young girls should go to be seen.⁴⁹⁸ Being a wit was also a double-edged sword. To be a clever conversationalist was a good thing, but this could easily lead to excess. The French pedagogue François Fénelon warned girls against acquiring the reputation of being a wit as then "they will continually be intriguing, will be forward to speak of every thing, and be criticizing on Matters beyond their capacity."⁴⁹⁹ Girls who wanted to pass themselves off as wits easily turned into chatterers who talked about anything even matters they did not know anything about. It is also possible that a female wit was thought very close to a female scholar. Literary educated females were usually described as constant chatterers and self-conceited. It was not thought possible that a woman could have enough mental capacity to gain full understanding of anything. Therefore, her scholarship must be merely superficial.⁵⁰⁰

Curiosity and gossiping were yet another condemned habit among females and the girls gladly made fun on such assumptions. Educational authors thought gossiping as typical vice of females and girls were warned against it. Curiosity too was a sin to be avoided. A curious girl wanted to hear gossip, but was also keen to pass it on. By doing so she slandered people. Who would tell only good news about other people?⁵⁰¹ Historians see talkative and gossiping women as a standard misogynist motif of the early modern period. Female speech was described as loud, endless and useless. Their talk was not important or meaningful, just idle gossip. Dismissing women's conversation as

⁴⁹⁸ Essex 1722, 25; Wilkes 1740, 57; D'Ancourt 1743, 7, 20; Wicksteed 1747, 326–327; Chapone 1777, 167.

⁴⁹⁹ Fénelon 1708 (1693), 213.

⁵⁰⁰ Browne 1992, 26; Whitehead 1999, x.

⁵⁰¹ Boscq 1753 (1632), 136, 138.

frivolous or worse was one way to diminish their role in society vis-à-vis men's.⁵⁰² However, it is arguable that censure of gossiping had more to do with politeness than gender-hierarchy. Entertaining speech was essential in polite eighteenth-century society. But in that and in everything else excess was prohibited.

Conversation, with or without gossip, excess wit or chat, was, however, the most valued and most important accomplishment a young girl should learn. Katharine Glover stresses that girls had to demonstrate their good understanding, taste, and education in mix-sexed company. Without being too pedantic, girls had to be able to talk about history and current affairs. Glover stresses that this demand for conversational adeptness was one of the most important factors that enabled girls to obtain wider literary knowledge.⁵⁰³ Michèle Cohen sees the criticism of female behaviour, evident in the material used in this study, as an attack on education that focused only on appearance and the capacity to shine in society. Girls were taught only the art of *appearing* socially adept so that they could entertain their company, but no deeper understanding was taught.⁵⁰⁴ I would also argue that the demand for modest and silent behaviour from girls stemmed from the power-relations of age in eighteenth-century society. Girls were still at a stage of learning the rules of adult life. They were to follow the example of their elders in order to know how to behave. It would therefore be ridiculous if a minor who had not seen enough of the world would express serious opinions about anything. Additionally, it was rude to appear disobedient and impertinent in front of one's parents or elders.⁵⁰⁵

Entering into the world of adulthood and its social events were sometimes nerve-racking situations for young girls. Lady Sarah Spencer was very nervous at her first appearance at Court when she was eighteen. She believed the princesses thought her "dumb" because she did not answer their questions.⁵⁰⁶ Being too shy and silent was no more proper than being too garrulous. In 1777 Hester Chapone wrote in her didactical book that even though girls were thought to be modest and chaste, shy creatures who sat silent like statues, it did not meet the demands of polite society. Therefore, Chapone advised her reader not to become a burden to the mistress of the house by being unwilling to take part in conversation.⁵⁰⁷ Girls had to balance the ideal of modest and chaste unmarried maids with that of being entertaining society dames. They were not supposed to be too forward and impertinent, but too shy and bashful either. Sometimes the rules of decorum were more of a strain to follow than a pleasure. For young girls, on an occasion it might even be impossible to understand why certain rules had to be followed. At the age of seventeen, Fanny Burney complained about what an "unworthy way of spending"

⁵⁰² Browne 1992, 21, 23–25; Capp 2004 (2003), 26–63; Korhonen 2013, 42, 45–46, 51, 52.

⁵⁰³ Glover 2011, 29–30.

⁵⁰⁴ Cohen 1996, 65, 69.

⁵⁰⁵ Karppinen-Kummunmäki 2015, 200–201.

⁵⁰⁶ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Georgiana, Dowager Countess Spencer, 17.5.1805, 2–3.

⁵⁰⁷ Chapone 1777, 165–166.

one's time it was to have constant rounds of visits to people who were completely indifferent to her presence. "Why are we not permitted to decline as well as accept visits & acquaintance?" young Fanny stormed on the pages of her diary.⁵⁰⁸ In order to be polite, sometimes one had to bear even physical discomfort. When she was fourteen, Betsey Wynne danced a few waltzes "out of politeness," even though she had a "great pain" in her stomach. When she got home, she "vomited a great deal" before going to bed.⁵⁰⁹

Interaction with the opposite sex was the field where these social skills and virtue were put to the test. Properly behaving young lady, according to didactic authors, was careful not to pay civilities that could easily be misinterpreted as encouragements. Men were said to be apt to interpret "every obliging Look, Gesture, Smile or Sentence" to their own benefit. Girls should not have a conversation with, or even listen to, a man who might say something indecent. Cold civility was the best response to men of loose morals.⁵¹⁰ However, those gentlemen whom the girl's parents thought suitable, she should treat with frankness and simplicity. A young girl with true modesty would never transgress the proper bounds while conversing with a man.⁵¹¹ But, not all girls cared for the proper manners and some played with several men at the same time. Miss Mary Blair was one such young lady, and seventeen-year-old Betsey Wynne could only criticize such behaviour. At a ball, Miss Blair preferred and danced almost the whole evening with a young count Betsey characterized as "the greatest fop...that gives a bad reputation and loses the character of all young ladies." The problem occurred, when Miss Blair failed to keep her promise to dance with another gentleman, and danced with the count instead. This led to a quarrel between the men. The situation escalated to the point where they prepared to fight a duel. Luckily, other people present managed to prevent this. Betsey found Miss Blair's indifference to good manners appalling. The young lady's only concern was that her parents might hear about it. Betsey clearly thought Miss Blair foolish for thinking that the men fought for her love: "Those gentlemen only fought for the point d'honneur as they both make game on her."⁵¹² In Betsey's view, the men were just being gallant without any real affection for Miss Blair or intentions other than to preserve their own prides. Miss Blair was deluding herself about their regard and had failed to maintain good manners when she refused to dance with the man to whom she had promised she would.

Girls often had to confront criticism of female behaviour, as some authors thought girls were not innocent maids, but flirting coquettes who knew exactly how to deal with men. They claimed that girls drove men to love without true inclination. This was

⁵⁰⁸ FB1, 83–84. See also FB1, 14.

⁵⁰⁹ WD 24.1.1792, 83.

⁵¹⁰ Halifax 1716, 69, 73; Essex 1722, 23, 25, 89–93; Wilkes 1740, 108; D'Ancourt 1743, 27–28, 55; Wicksteed 1747, 326; Chapone 1777, 170.

⁵¹¹ D'Ancourt 1743, 25; Chapone 1777, 170–171.

⁵¹² WD 10.2.1795, 172; WD 11.2.1795, 172–173.

condemned as cruel and detestable.⁵¹³ Yet again, outer appearance signified inner self. According to Glover this supposed truth demonstrated that young women were seen as, and were expected to be, open books that were easily read through their gestures. Being sexually inexperienced, they had no shameful or indiscreet secrets to hide.⁵¹⁴ Sometimes, this openness was less straightforward, and the silent messages could be easily misinterpreted. Theresa Braunschneider has studied the character of a coquette that appeared in British literary discourse by 1700. This hypothetical lady attended various social events from operas to social gathering in pleasure gardens, wore the latest fashions and bought luxury items. More importantly, she did not want to submit to matrimony and motherhood but instead kept several lovers at the same time. Braunschneider regards this discourse as an aspect of the criticism of fashionable female behaviour.⁵¹⁵

Occasionally, girls, or even young women, simply failed to notice male intentions. In the spring of 1775 Fanny Burney met Mr. Barlow. She was already twenty-three at the time. Fanny was not very impressed with the man. She had noticed how excessively civil he was towards her but did not think it in anyway extraordinary or a sign of serious intent. After all, she had occasionally received more gallantry from other gentlemen. But soon a declaration of love and an offer for marriage followed. Fanny refused, but it seems that the gentleman did not take her refusal seriously enough or assumed she resisted to test his resolve.⁵¹⁶ What were the signs that Fanny failed to notice? Did Mr. Barlow make significant glances towards her? Did he try to win the esteem of Fanny's family and friends? Did Fanny receive his attentions with approval and, therefore, encourage him further?⁵¹⁷ In the end, when Fanny met him, she desperately tried to make her point clear. Over and over again she assured him that her refusal was final. Without saying it outright, Fanny used all the manoeuvres that were allowed for a well-behaved young lady when turning down a man's proposal. She treated him with cold civility and kept her answers short. Whenever possible, she turned her back on him. Fanny's frustration is clear: "What can a Woman do when a man will not take an answer?"⁵¹⁸ In the exchange of letters between Lady Mary Pierrepont and her future husband Edward Wortley Montagu, it is also clear how difficult it was for a young lady to navigate in contradictory demands of female modesty and sexual appeal. Lady Mary complained that she tried to write "with all the plainness" she was capable of, and implied that she did not like the way he always

⁵¹³ *The Lady's Companion* 1740, 88; Gregory 1794, 32–33.

⁵¹⁴ Glover 2010, 5. See also Karppinen-Kummunmäki 2015, 211.

⁵¹⁵ Braunschneider 2009, 1–3, 11–12.

⁵¹⁶ FB2, 116–117.

⁵¹⁷ For instance the suitor was advised "Not ever be gazing when the beloved Object is in your View, but only use Glances and such Motions as may be most significant and intelligible, often turning your Eyes away, looking with a Side-look or Amour-leer, but not in a fleering manner, lest she takes it as an Affront." *City and Country Recreation* 1705, 12–13.

⁵¹⁸ FB2, 141–146, 152.

misunderstood her words.⁵¹⁹ In another letter, she wrote that “You seem to reproach me with being upon my guard...I have been foolishly otherwise.”⁵²⁰ When they exchanged letters about their possible marriage, Lady Mary professed that she wanted to “deceive you in nothing” and explained to Montagu that her father was not going to give her much money.⁵²¹ Alongside the culture of sensibility in the eighteenth century arose the rhetoric of sincerity. Especially women of quality promoted their own virtue by condemning the politeness of fashionable society and its apparent insincerity. As Tague points out, this created another problem: the “natural” once again became conventional rhetoric.⁵²²

Gallantry was an essential part of the elite life-style and polite interaction. Girls had to put up with it, even if it was not pleasant. One such scene was painted by twenty-one-year-old Fanny Burney in her letter to her sister Susan. A gentleman complained that “my little Burney” treated him badly, and that they did not get on very well. He claimed that he was too passionate a lover for her and that even though he took all possible pains he could not please her. He also followed Fanny around by seating himself next to her at every opportunity. Other present merely found this amusing.⁵²³ Fanny endured this kind of behaviour in front of others, but to Susan she confessed:

Now, to tell you my private opinion, my dear Susy, I am inclined to think that this gallantry is the effect of the man's taking me for a Fool; because I have been so much surprised at it, that I have hardly ever had a Word of answer ready. [---]He is much of a gentlemen, [---] but he has lived so long abroad that I suppose he thinks it necessary to talk Nonsense to the fair sex.⁵²⁴

In Fanny's view, men's gallantry was merely a sign that they thought ladies fools and that the only way to entertain women was to talk nonsense to them. Fanny concluded “'Tis quite enough to be young, my dear Susey, to be an object for gallant raillery.”⁵²⁵ Twenty-one-year-old Lady Mary Pierrepont criticized male gallantry more bluntly: “All commerce of this kind between men and women is like that of the Boys and Frogs in L'Estrange's Fables. Tis play to you, but tis death to us.”⁵²⁶ Men had license to talk freely, but young girls had to be careful. One wrong step and they could be ruined. Both

⁵¹⁹ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 14.11.1710, 64.

⁵²⁰ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 3.5.1710, 32–33.

⁵²¹ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, s.a. [c.1711-12], 178–183.

⁵²² Tague 2002, 189, 192.

⁵²³ FB1, 286–287, 289.

⁵²⁴ FB1, 288. Fanny also commented on a Mr. Twiss that “He is of that Number of men who conclude that all Women take Nonsense for politeness.” FB2, 24. Fanny complained on other occasions that men spoke to girls and young women as if they were children. FB2, 84.

⁵²⁵ This line can be found from page 241 in *The Early Diary of Frances Burney 1768–1778* vol. I. (ed. by Annie Raine Ellis. George Bell and sons, London 1889) but, for some reason, it has been removed from FB1.

⁵²⁶ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 5.5.1710, 34–36.

Fanny and Lady Mary were legally adults, but because of their unmarried status they had to be very careful not to get trapped by the false gallantries of men. In the game of courting, men had all the freedom to say and do whatever they pleased and young ladies were bound to keep their thoughts and feelings to themselves, unless the gentleman had serious intentions.

These views are connected to a much wider discourse in the period. Although the common discourse, written by male authors, was that women had a refining effect on men, female authors found the British gallantry much more complicated. They complained about the inconvenience of responding to the forced compliments they received, just as Fanny Burney and Lady Mary Pierrepont above. Besides, male discourse was universally deemed ambiguous. No wonder girls were warned against believing male compliments; there was no way of knowing their true intentions! The language of gallantry enabled men to speak freely without committing themselves to anything. It was the lady's duty to decide whether a man was just being polite or had any serious romantic intentions. The line between polite flattery and seduction was very fine, and misunderstanding was quite possible.⁵²⁷ What the consequences might be when that error occurred I look at more closely in section 4.1.

Historians generally agree that whereas boys learned the rules of manhood at schools (but also from their fathers and at homes), girls were trained at the actual scenes of their future adult roles, at home and at social events. However, the informal lessons of sociability were something both boys and girls shared to some extent. Early in their lives children participated in the occasions where they could learn the rules of social life. For instance, they attended balls especially meant for them so that they could practice with their peers.⁵²⁸ It is clear from the evidence used here, that the girls I have researched learned the rules of sociability in a mixed-sex environment.

The key feature of the education of eighteenth-century girls into the world of politeness was to teach them how to balance between entertaining and the ideal of polite conversation and the chaste and modest ideal of womanhood (especially in mixed-sex company). This was especially emphasized among those girls whose position in the age-hierarchy demanded that they showed their subordination to their elders. Womanhood was something that the girls had to learn. It was not seen as innate or natural, but something constructed through rehearsal and practice.

To improve oneself: choosing one's friends

Not only the company of their elders was important to the education of girls, but also their peers in age were seen as essential to learning the rules of politeness. As I have already dealt with relationships of siblings in the previous chapter, I won't discuss them

⁵²⁷ Runge 2001, 52–54. See also Taylor 2007 (2005), 33–34, 37.

⁵²⁸ Tague 2002, 168, 170; Fletcher 2010 (2008), 259, 267.

again here; they were very important to the girls, but there were many other sources of friendship as well.

When girls approached their teens, their friends were often of the same sex but not necessarily close in age. For instance, Lady Mary Pierrepont's regular correspondents were, among others, Mrs. Frances Hewet who was married and twenty-one years her senior and Miss Anne Justice two years her junior. Miss Philippa Mundy was born in the same year as she was.⁵²⁹ Lady Mary Pierrepont took great pains to ensure that she would remain equal to her friends. When her father was created a duke, Lady Mary insisted to Philippa Mundy: "Let us retrench the superfluous words of Madam and Ladyship, to give place to the Agreeable Freedom of our usual Conversations."⁵³⁰ According to David Garrioch, early modern writers believed that true friendship between people of different rank was impossible. This kind of relationship was based on self-interest and need, not pleasure or virtue. Moreover, it was believed that women were not able to experience true friendship, despite the many fictional descriptions of it. Classical and biblical models of friendships were all male. True friendship depended on reason, something that males possessed in much greater measure than females, whereas love or passion was incompatible with friendship. Males leaned on reason, but females were guided by their emotions, hence the difficulty of forming real friendships between the sexes.⁵³¹ Yet these were true friendships and not something to do with self-interest or charity. Of course both Marys had friends of their own rank, but they had some from the lower orders as well.

Contemporary writers did not think that friendship between the sexes was impossible. Friendship was bestowed on people of true merit so it was not, therefore, impossible that the other person was male. However, in that case, a lady should be watchful. Her good opinion and regard could easily turn into love. This could be dangerous for a young girl's reputation and virtue. Esteem for a man of good sense could easily go further than was initially intended. A man could also have devious intentions. He could easily make an innocent girl believe that he sought only friendship, when in fact he was a seducer. Besides, it was a very short step from a man's friendship to his love: a lady might seek a friend and soon find herself with a lover instead. Additionally, females were more prone to form intimate relationships than men and this might easily cause them to make the wrong choices. Additionally, females had difficulties in maintaining sincere relations with each other when there were conflicting interests in love, ambition or vanity. Between male and female there was no rivalry or jealousy of this kind.⁵³²

The right kinds of friends were important for the improvement of the young mind, and for the reservation of a girl's good name. However, they were not always the ones the young girl preferred. Lady Caroline Fox was especially keen to monitor the friends of her

⁵²⁹ MWM vol. I. footnote 1, 15; MWM vol. I. footnote 1, 42; MWM vol. I. footnote 2, 106.

⁵³⁰ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Philippa Mundy, 6.9.1711, 108–109.

⁵³¹ Garrioch 2009, 168–170, 174–175.

⁵³² D'Ancourt 1743, 26; Gregory 1794, 24, 27.

little sister Lady Sarah Lennox, who was living with her in the early 1760s. At first, Lady Caroline urged Lady Sarah to get acquainted with other young girls. Fourteen-year-old Lady Sarah confessed that she did not actually want to do so, but for fear of being too impertinent, she agreed to her sister's wishes. To her other sister Lady Emily, she confessed that she found the company of her peers oppressing. She preferred to stay with married women rather than to gossip with young girls in some corner of the room.⁵³³ Then, the older sister encouraged Lady Sarah to make an acquaintance with a certain Mrs. Fitzroy. Instead of spending time with rude young girls, Lady Sarah would thus benefit from the company of a decent lady, who would set her an example of proper and genteel behaviour.⁵³⁴ Also, parents had occasional reservations about the friends their daughters chose to have. When Mary Granville formed her friendships with Miss Kirkham at the age fifteen, her father was initially worried as he "loved gentleness and reserve in the behaviour of women, and could not bear anything that had the appearance of being too free and masculine."⁵³⁵ Not only could friends have a bad influence on the growing minds of girls, they could even be destructive. Fanny Burney commented that "it is impossible & improper to keep up acquaintance with a Female who has lost her character, however, sincerely they may be objects of Pity."⁵³⁶ For females, and for a young girl especially, reputation was everything. Although Fanny was already twenty-three, and therefore legally an adult, in practice she had to maintain her good reputation as an unmarried young lady. The danger was that badly chosen friends would compromise it. Therefore, such connections had to be avoided.

Educational authors advised girls to choose their friends wisely as they could provide help and good advice for the girl. Confidence between friends was vital. However, there were several contradictory views as to who would best suit as a friend. In Dr. Gregory's opinion, a married woman was not a good friend for a young girl, as the latter might slip her secrets to her husband. Hester Chapone felt that peers in age were not always the best possible friends. Friends should improve each other and that was impossible if all parties were young. A good friend introduced young girl respectably and sensibly to the world. Their conversations polished her style and refined her sentiments. However, she warned against entering into confidences and sharing one's secrets with someone of one's own age as these sorts of intimacies were based on gossip. Blood ties were a good guarantee for a solid friendship. If a girl was fortunate enough to possess brothers with honour and good sense, they were the best possible confidants. In that way a girl would get the best from a relationship with a man without it turning it into something more compromising. Giles Jacob, however, claimed that relations were poor friends as there was so much envy

⁵³³ CL vol. II. Lady Sarah Lennox to Emily, Countess of Kildare, Dec. 1759, 80–83.

⁵³⁴ CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Countess of Kildare, July 1760, 290–292.

⁵³⁵ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 15, 16.

⁵³⁶ FB2, 153.

in families. On one thing, however, all agreed: servants were not proper persons to have as confidants.⁵³⁷

The girls studied here certainly followed the trend of sentimental friendship that was so common at this period. Intimacy between friends was emphasized and friendships had several sentimental and even eroticized features, and the language of love was commonly used.⁵³⁸ Although there is no evidence that the girls of studied here sent their friends locks of hair or miniature portraits, it is not impossible. But they did use various nicknames that also indicate this sentimental trend.⁵³⁹ Sentimental friendships were also manifested in cases when one party thought that the other had neglected one. Nineteen-year-old Lady Mary Pierrepont accused her friend of almost killing her through her negligence. Acidly she wrote that Miss Wortley had almost been released from her troublesome friend, as she had been badly sick for a long time with a sore throat. In several of her letters Lady Mary pleaded to her friend not to forget her as she valued their friendship highly. She was also severe on herself if she had been own negligent. In 1709, she wrote that she would “run mad” if her friend Mrs. Frances Hewet thought her ungrateful because she had not received any of her letters.⁵⁴⁰

The connection of friendships and romantic love is also present in the ways young friends found ways to talk despite the physical obstacles. At the age of twenty-one, Lady Mary Pierrepont explained how she had secret conversations with the young ladies in the neighbouring house “after the manner of Pyramus and Thisbe.” They took place in the garden over a three yards high brick wall:

The young ladies had found out a way to pull out two or three bricks, and so climb up and hang their chins over the wall, where we, mounted on chairs, used to have many belles conversations à la dérobe for fear of the old mother. This trade continued several days, but fortune seldom permits long pleasures. By long standing on the wall

⁵³⁷ Jacob 1730, 18–19; Chapone 1777, 75–77, 91; Gregory 1794, 23–27. See also R.G. 1704, 6–9; Halifax 1716, 83–88; Plante-Amour 1732, 155–156; *The Lady's Companion* 1740, 91.

⁵³⁸ Garrioch 2009, 197–198.

⁵³⁹ Lady Sarah Lennox called her friend Lady Susan Fox-Strangways Pussy or Sue. Maria Josepha Holroyd's best friend Ann Firth was Miss Huff. Elizabeth Robinson was known to all as Fidget and her sister Sarah was Pea. Mary Granville called her friend Miss Kirkham Sappho. Lady Mary Pierrepont called her friends as Nanny and Phil. Anne Wortley was dear and Lady Mary even bluntly wrote that she loved her. LSL vol. I. Lady Sarah Lennox to Lady Susan Fox-Strangways, Aug.1761, 110–111; LSL vol. I. Lady Sarah Lennox to Lady Susan Fox Strangways, 15.12, 1761, 114–115; MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 1.4.1793, 218–219; MD vol. I. Autobiography, 15; MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Anne Wortley, 2.5.1709, 3; MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Anne Justice, 3.2.1711, 70–71; MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Philippa Mundy, 4.5.1711, 106–107.

⁵⁴⁰ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Anne Wortley, 25.8.1708, 1; MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Anne Wortley, 2.5.1709, 3; MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Anne Wortley 21.7.1709, 3–4; MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Frances Hewet, 12.11.1709, 18–19.

the bricks loosened, and one fatal morning down drops Miss Nelly, and to compleat the misfortune, she fell into a little sink, and bruised her poor – self [---].⁵⁴¹

These conversations conducted without the knowledge of the old mother came to an end when one of the sisters fell off the wall and hurt herself. Thereafter, their mother forced the girls to meet in a “vulgar manner, visiting coaches, etc.”⁵⁴² It is not likely that a daughter of a duke, like Lady Mary, was thought improper company for her neighbours and therefore was prevented from talking to them. A reference to the story of star-crossed lovers that courted each other from the opposite sides of a wall indicates that secrecy only brought more excitement into the mix. The early eighteenth century, when Lady Mary was a girl, was not yet the of the era when the ideal of romantic love reached its peak, but the undercurrents are already there.

All in all, friends were essential part of the education of eighteenth-century girls. Learning by example from one’s peers was one aspect of the learning process. As one’s associates had so much influence, contemporary writers demanded that girls should choose their friends with care. As part of the polite mixed-sex society, friendship with males was not totally out of the question, but it had some problematic aspects.

Making oneself visible: attending the diversions of society

I have argued that the elite life-style created a contradiction with the ideal femininity of the eighteenth-century. This contrast was most striking when girls took part in social diversions. Appearing in public spaces and socializing in mixed-sex company was the essential element of politeness. Only in this manner could an individual establish her polite identity. For girls, being part of this society and observing its members, was the way to learn its rules. Females, both unmarried and married, had an especially important role in exhibiting the virtues and refinement of taste that contributed this politeness. Additionally, public spaces and social venues offered a place for the marriage market where girls could show off their charms and attract the attention of possible husband candidates.⁵⁴³ Yet, the ideal femininity shunned being in public and seeking attention. This was especially crucial in unmarried girls whose virginity and good name had to be carefully preserved.

Children and young people learned from early on how to preserve propriety when interacting with others, especially members of the opposite sex. The use of different spaces was controlled to maintain propriety. For instance, a gentleman and a lady could be left alone in the drawing room, but when this occurred in the bedroom or a closet the

⁵⁴¹ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Mrs. Frances Hewet, 27.3.1710, 22–23.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ For example Greig 2013, 66; Ylivuori 2015, 79–80

interaction had wholly different meaning.⁵⁴⁴ During the eighteenth-century, bedrooms, dressing rooms, and closets were usually situated on the upper floor and they were used for receiving visitors only in certain circumstances. Women, whether young, old, married or unmarried, more frequently received visitors in those spaces than men. Visitors who had close intimacy with the family were more likely to be let into the more private spaces of the house.⁵⁴⁵ One example on how space and propriety were linked was given by Fanny Burney in her diary in 1774. Her sister Susan and brother James had attended the theatre together. At one point, James went to speak to his friend, leaving Susan in the company of “some very civil & genteel kind of women.”⁵⁴⁶ As a chaperone, her brother would not have left his sister alone except in the company of respectable women. An unmarried girl would have compromised her reputation, if she had been left in the company of men. It was important for girls to know the rules of good behaviour and how they related to spaces and their use.

The use of spaces demonstrated the maturation process. While the girls were little children, the nursery was where they spent most of their time. The Georgian nursery was usually in whatever room was available and conveniently situated, most often on an upper floor.⁵⁴⁷ Young children usually spent some time every day with their parents, especially mothers, most often in her bedroom or sitting room upstairs.⁵⁴⁸ Fifteen-year-old Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd remarked that she felt herself “more of a Woman” at their country seat Sheffield Place, where she was able to dine and have supper “down stairs”. However, Lady Maria added “that is to come even in Town some time or other.”⁵⁴⁹ When a girl was old and wise enough to act properly in society, she would leave the nursery and step into the world of adults.

Eighteenth-century elite girls also had a certain freedom to claim a space of their own. Their houses contained both public and private spaces and even girls could retire to a closet to contemplate or store their books and other valuables.⁵⁵⁰ It is not very clear, whether any of the girls appearing in this study, had a room of their own. There are reports that they occasionally shared a room with a sister or some other female kin. Mary Granville recounted having slept in the same bed as her little sister Ann. However, Mary called it “my room” indicating that this space had a special meaning for her, something she could claim as her own.⁵⁵¹ Contemporary view was that it was odd or suspect if

⁵⁴⁴ Heller 2010, 639.

⁵⁴⁵ Vickery 2009, 147, 150; Heller 2010, 637, 640–641.

⁵⁴⁶ FB2, 59.

⁵⁴⁷ Martin 2004, 112.

⁵⁴⁸ Vickery 1998 (1999), 113; Martin 2004, 113.

⁵⁴⁹ MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd, 13.2.1786, 11–12.

⁵⁵⁰ FB1, 10, 14, 58; MD vol. I. Autobiography, 15.

⁵⁵¹ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 9. The 21-year-old Sarah Robinson wrote in March 1742 that a Miss Nanny Smith would be her bedfellow that night. SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Robinson, March 1742, 24–25.

someone claimed the right to be alone. This could mean that a person entertained bad thoughts or intentions to be carried out without anyone knowing.⁵⁵² As Marjo Kaartinen has stressed, most spaces of the early modern period were both public and private, but these two spheres overlapped in the home. It was almost always open to visitors.⁵⁵³ However, there were some spaces more private than others. Especially the closet was clearly an intimate space to which girls could withdraw to be alone. Closets were usually situated so that they were connected to bedrooms. Sometimes they contained a bed for a servant, but most often they were used as sitting-rooms.⁵⁵⁴

Privacy was not always possible and girls sometimes had to write their letters with people around. When she was seventeen, Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd commented that she was writing her letter in the Library before supper, while company was chatting around her.⁵⁵⁵ Lady Louisa Stuart had to contend with more modest settings: “I write, you must know, upon a chest, for I am not worth a table, but I have no less than three chairs, and there are window seats besides, so that article is nobly supplied.”⁵⁵⁶ The Georgian parlour or drawing room was a multi-functional space, where most social events took place. The family entertained their guests at card and tea tables, and the room usually contained interesting collections of objects and art to provide subjects for conversation.⁵⁵⁷ It is therefore likely that the girls spent most of their indoor time in the drawing room, either writing, like Lady Louisa, or playing some instrument, or having conversations with the guests, while at the same time, perhaps, doing some embroidery.

Goodman demonstrates that a girl’s possession of her own room gave her not just privacy but also an ownership of herself. The room or a cabinet was a space a girl could develop her subjectivity through writing, reading, and conversation. It was a space into which a girl could invite others. Privacy was, therefore, not necessarily being alone, but having the ability to control who could enter into the space currently occupied, and where the girl herself could withdraw from others’ influence.⁵⁵⁸

Girls could also claim privacy in public spaces outside the home. Dena Goodman claims that girls of the eighteenth-century were not allowed to go about the way they pleased. They could, of course, live in their family home freely, but the outside world was another matter entirely. They could not go on a visit or leave the house alone.⁵⁵⁹ This is not entirely correct. It is true that the girls did not go out and about “alone” in the modern sense of the word. Most likely, they were accompanied by a servant, but in their minds they were, in fact, alone. For instance, Elizabeth Robinson reported several times that she

⁵⁵² Spacks 2003, 88.

⁵⁵³ Kaartinen 2002, 93, 95.

⁵⁵⁴ Spacks 2003, 27–28; Martin 2004, 80.

⁵⁵⁵ MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd, 1788, 23–24.

⁵⁵⁶ LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson, 7.7.1778, 8–15.

⁵⁵⁷ Heller 2010, 636.

⁵⁵⁸ Goodman 2009, 253, 256.

⁵⁵⁹ Goodman 2009, 259–260.

came home from evening parties or visits, without mentioning that there was anyone of the family with her. Elizabeth was only fourteen years old at the time of the first reference.⁵⁶⁰ She clearly mentioned her family when they visited a place together, supporting the argument that they would have been mentioned had they been with her.⁵⁶¹ It is also possible that girls in Britain were allowed more freedom to go about “alone” than, for instance, in France, as in Goodman’s study. However, this “being alone” is closely connected to space and its private or public nature, which I turn to next.

Elite social diversions usually took place either in the family homes or more public spaces. The latter posed a problem for ideally behaving young girls, even though social diversions were an essential part of the elite life-style. It was very common in the eighteenth century that educational authors complained about women abandoning their domestic duties while romping about town. Like following the fashions, attending these social activities posed a threat to female chastity. Girls were constantly on display and therefore, vulnerable to the undermining of their reputation.⁵⁶² For young girls these diversions were deemed very improper. However, some of the didactical authors were willing to allow a few exceptions. For instance, John Moir (1784) accepted theatre under proper management both as a “school of useful and virtuous instruction” and as a “scene of innocent recreation.”⁵⁶³

But, attending these events was not only for entertainment. Social occasions demanded that both males and females adopt certain manners and the best way to learn them was through imitation. Children were for the most part observers rather than participants. A lady’s social status, age and marital status determined what was thought proper in certain situations. As long as a girl’s education was unfinished, she was supposed to be almost invisible, or at least not attracting attention to herself. This did not mean that younger girls were not able to attend family parties and so on, but the role of a society dame, who conversed politely with guests and visited concerts and theatres, was reserved for the older ones. When the girl was “out” she was also allowed to attract male attention. Social events enabled girls to show off their skills in dancing or playing in an appropriate environment. Glover points out that girls were, in fact, the principal actors on the main stages of polite society. They showed themselves in the theatres, assembly rooms and public walks. Girls were performing their polite femininity. At stake was the

⁵⁶⁰ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 21.6.1734, 11–13; EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 4.9.1736, 14–16. Lucy Worsley notes that Georgian females were accustomed to have servants around, even on their most intimate moments. Worsley 2017, 96.

⁵⁶¹ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Mrs. Anstey, 15.7.(1736?), 16–18; EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 15.10.1738, 19–22.

⁵⁶² Greig 2013, chap. 2; Tague 2002, 49, 55–57.

⁵⁶³ Moir 1784, 202. See also Burton 1793, 8.

ultimate goal of a good marriage. Despite the restrictions, these social environments did enable girls to have independence and autonomy.⁵⁶⁴

Despite the warnings, elite girls took part in social diversions at a very early age. Lady Louisa Stuart recollected that she was only seven years old when Lady Hervey insisted that she should attend her evening circle (obviously with her parents), before going to bed.⁵⁶⁵ She was not the only one, who got to stay up late. Eugenia Wynne stayed up after midnight, at the ages of eleven and nine respectively, when a masquerade ball was arranged in their home. A year later, Betsey went to the opera and afterwards a ball, where she stayed until three o'clock in the morning.⁵⁶⁶ Since the Wynne sisters grew up abroad, it is therefore possible that they had privileges that their counterparts living in England did not have. All the same, Peter Borsay concludes that the age of six or seven was the earliest age when children were present at fashionable social events.⁵⁶⁷ So the girls did not enter into the world of adults exceptionally early.

When a girl grew older, her calendar was filled with more social obligations. In May 1794 Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd gave a timetable for her week's social occasions to her friend:

To-night.—We go to an Assembly and a Ball.

To-morrow.—Ball at Mrs. Bruce.

Friday.—Dine at Lord Pelham's, and in the Evening Mrs. Clive's Assembly.

Saturday.—Probably the Opera.

Sunday.—Concert and Supper at Lady Sykes.

Monday.—Concert at Mrs. Lockhart's, and Lady Hudson's Ball, which I expect to be very pleasant.

Tuesday.—Unless we go to the Opera again I do not know what will become of us.

Wednesday.—Ranelagh.

Thursday.—Mrs. Boone's Assembly.

Friday.—Ranelagh again, and I know nothing farther.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁴ Glover 2011, 79, 88–89, 91. See also Borsay 2006, 56–59; Ylivuori 2015, 78–80, 85, 112–113.

⁵⁶⁵ LS2 Lady Louisa Stuart to Miss Louisa Clinton, 1822, 225–231.

⁵⁶⁶ WD 8.9.1789, 5; WD 5.2.1790, 26.

⁵⁶⁷ Borsay 2006, 59.

⁵⁶⁸ MH Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 14.5.1794, 281–283.

Lady Maria had already grown up as a young lady. At twenty-three she was legally an adult, but, still unmarried, and her social calendar was full. Every night there was some place to go to, such as a concert, dinner, play, assembly and a visit to an amusement park. With slight variations, these were the venues that all elite girls regularly attended. They usually went to operas and theatres with their mothers or some other female relations. There were, of course, males present in the opera boxes, such as cousins or some acquaintances.⁵⁶⁹ Greig points out that a theatre or opera was very hierarchical environment. Occupation of boxes, the pit or the galleries indicated social differences and divided the audience. They were places where both personal relations and group networks were consolidated. In this kind of environment even subtle gestures had major impact. These were keenly observed and discussed. Regular attendance thus enabled access to inside knowledge about the lives of the elite. For example, when a lady shared a box with her chosen one, marriage had already taken place.⁵⁷⁰

Balls and assemblies were also favoured occasions. Dancing was especially the diversion of young girls and youths. Country dances, waltzes and cotillions were included in the repertoire.⁵⁷¹ The girls gave very particular reports on their dancing partners, how many couples had danced at the ball, and how many dances they had danced themselves. The delight of dancing is clear from these reports, and usually the girls commented that they had danced all night without ceasing.⁵⁷² Sixteen-year-old Fanny Burney wrote in August 1768 that she had never been in a public assembly, but she had attended school balls often and was “once at a private Ball at an Acquaintance.” On one such occasion, she danced only one country dance. The room was hot and Fanny became very fatigued. Fanny laughed that it was rather ridiculous that a girl of sixteen would complain about dancing.⁵⁷³ Instead, at the age of twenty-one Lady Sarah Spencer commented that she was “quite old enough to have preferred walking about and talking” instead of dancing at an assembly. However, that did not stop her from occasionally reporting to her brother about the balls, how many dances she had danced and with whom. In Lady Sarah’s opinion, at a perfect ball young girl would be able to walk around and show off her dress, fine walking style and grace of posture. Airy and cool rooms would prevent the hair and dress from becoming soaked in sweat, as might happen in crowded ones.⁵⁷⁴ It is obvious that Lady

⁵⁶⁹ MD Autobiography, 12; EM Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 4.9.1736, 14–16; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 9.5.1808, 10–11; HP Lady Harriet Pitt to Hester, Lady Chatham, s.a. (1776), 8–10; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 5.6.1808, 15–16; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, s.a. (1808), 19–21.

⁵⁷⁰ Greig 2013, 81, 90–91.

⁵⁷¹ WD 1.2.1791, 49; HP Lady Harriet Pitt to Hester, Lady Chatham, 13.12.1777, 27–29.

⁵⁷² MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 8.1.1795, 316; WD 12.12.1804, 373.

⁵⁷³ FB1, 25–26. If elderly women were keen dancers, it was an occasion for wonder. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, for instance, loved to dance and even as an elderly woman she took part in energetic country dances. Grundy 2004 (1999), 419.

⁵⁷⁴ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 29.2.1808, 6–7; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 11.5.1808, 12–14.

Sarah wanted to demonstrate her maturity. Dancing was for young girls and she was a legally mature woman, albeit not yet married. Balls and assemblies were proper venues to make contact with the opposite sex. When a gentleman asked Fanny Burney if she loved dancing, she answered that she never went to assemblies.⁵⁷⁵ Perhaps Fanny did not want to appear to be a young girl searching for a husband. In fact, in public assemblies, for example in Bath, marriageable young ladies were allowed to sit on the front row of benches near the dance floor. In this way eligible young men could easily spot them. Married ladies and girls too young to be presentable had to sit in the back row.⁵⁷⁶

Girls had to learn the secrets of dressing correctly from early on because clothing was a very important part of the elite life-style and on the construction of womanhood. Clothing was, therefore, an essential factor in “becoming a woman” and the maturation process and girls marked their maturation through clothing. Until the 1740s, when a little girl outgrew her baby clothes, she was dressed in a miniature version of her mother’s clothing. The dress consisted of a tight bodice over stays and a skirt, sometimes worn with under-petticoats. The only difference was that the bodice was fastened at the back, a sign of dependence, as the child was not able to dress herself. A toddler might have leading strings attached to her dress while she learned to walk. Headgear was usually a cap with lace and ribbons. Girls like Lady Mary Pierrepont (b.1689) or Mary Granville (b.1700) had to get used to these restricting clothes, as soon as they took their first steps. In the second half of the century, babies and young children were more and more frequently dressed in white linen. When girls grew older, they could wear the same sort of back-fastened dresses from their childhood until their early teens. Then they would proceed to the front-opened silk gowns worn by their mothers. We can imagine that girls like Lady Sarah Lennox (b.1745) learnt to walk in her little girl’s dress before received her first silk gowns. We have one testimony that shows how important it was for a young girl to leave her childhood style behind.⁵⁷⁷ After her 16th birthday, Betsey Wynne reported that her hair was “drest quite” that she was “no more a Child.”⁵⁷⁸ For Betsey, entering more and more into the adult world was demonstrated in the way her hair was dressed, although this included some change in the style of dress as well. After the 1780s, adult women’s clothing started to resemble girls’ clothes with white muslin dresses and uncorseted high waistlines.⁵⁷⁹ Lady Sarah Napier complained in 1794 that her step-daughter had caught a cold because she was so thinly dressed:

⁵⁷⁵ FB2, 20.

⁵⁷⁶ Worsley 2017, 142.

⁵⁷⁷ Rose 1989, 15–21, 23, 31, 43.

⁵⁷⁸ WD 28.4.1794, 149. Jewellery had similar function in indicating changes of social status. It was a sure sign of a new marriage when the bride appeared at social events wearing her in-laws family gems. Greig 2013, 48.

⁵⁷⁹ Rose 1989, 37–43.

[---] as Louisa chose Christmas for clothing her body with a shift and two thin calico petticoats (gown one of them), and unclothing her breast by cutting down her stays and going literally naked; [---] and never wears a cloak to come home in - all this considered I may, without being an old cross stepmother, venture to say she herself has deranged her constitution by slow means of repeated ill management [---].⁵⁸⁰

The new fashion saved girls from wearing tight stays, but the light fabrics of the dresses were rather chilly in cold weather compared to wool and silk. Worse still, the young girls who followed the latest fashions were almost naked in the minds of their elders, who had been accustomed to wearing more concealing outfits.

The girls usually acquired the information needed for proper clothing and appearance from their mothers, sisters and other relatives. This included everything from how to dress one's hair properly to the size of hoops.⁵⁸¹ Girls also recorded in minute detail the sort of clothes they wore,⁵⁸² and prepared for social engagements with care. Fourteen-year-old Betsey Wynne slept late in the morning "in order not to be sleepy at the ball." Then she "spent the afternoon until three o'clock at" her "toilet."⁵⁸³ Four years later, the two Wynne sisters "held a council of war" as to what they would wear at a ball. "Womanish, childish will a rigid censor say, but very natural I think", sixteen-year-old Eugenia commented on this procedure.⁵⁸⁴ From an early age, girls were aware that proper behaviour demanded proper clothing. This is clear from Mary Granville's description of her nine-year-old sister Ann complaining about her clothes: "when the maid was going to put on her frock, [she] called out 'No, no, I won't wear my frock, I must have my bib and apron; I am going to Lord Townshend's.'"⁵⁸⁵ The little girl wanted to look her best on a visit. Clothes had an important function in the construction of womanhood that girls had to learn. The hoops, large dress hems, corsets and high heels forced the girls to move in certain ways. To look presentable and graceful, they needed instruction, some of which they received in dancing lessons.⁵⁸⁶ Earlier research has seen this as a demonstration of womanhood was closely linked with being looked at. Girls learned from an early age to move and gesture in certain ways to make graceful and feminine impact. They had always to keep in mind those who might be watching, namely males.⁵⁸⁷ Elite girls, as Ylivuori states, grew up knowing that every detail of their dress would be carefully observed.⁵⁸⁸ It

⁵⁸⁰ CEL vol. II. Lady Sarah Napier to Emily, Duchess of Leinster, 12.4.1794, 350–353.

⁵⁸¹ MH Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd to Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd, 5.3.1786, 13; SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Robinson, 25.2.1740, 16–17. See also Korhonen 2005, 33.

⁵⁸² AT 30.11.1723, 86; AT 8.12.1723, 86; AT 15.2.1724, 92.

⁵⁸³ WD 24.1.1792, 82–83.

⁵⁸⁴ WD 22.12.1796, 238.

⁵⁸⁵ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 10.

⁵⁸⁶ Karppinen-Kummunmäki 2014, 29.

⁵⁸⁷ Kaartinen & Korhonen 2005, 143; Korhonen 2005, 14, 17, 108. See also Ylivuori 2015, 71.

⁵⁸⁸ Ylivuori 2015, 73.

was not only the male audience that girls had to consider, as contemplation of what to wear or how they looked took place in all-female society. Other females were in fact those whose opinion mattered most, as it was they who commented on one another's appearance.⁵⁸⁹

Despite its importance in elite culture, fashions were one of the favourite topics of criticism for contemporary commentators. All agreed that the female sex was fond of dress and fashions, but contemporary modes of dress always caused concern. Overuse of cosmetics or masculine style of dress was thought highly indecent. Dressing above one's station was also criticized, while dressing as suited to one's social status was not only highly appropriate but even compulsory for an elite girl. She should not set the fashion, but neither should she fall behind it. In sum, all excess adornment was thought problematic. Some authors agreed that fine appearance was important for the fair sex as their "natural" destiny was to please the opposite sex. If fine appearance helped a girl to gain the attention of a proper husband-candidate, that was acceptable. But, it was not advisable to teach girls to adorn their outer form from infancy. Cleanliness and neatness were all that a modest girl needed. Lavish dress only provoked vanity. Additionally, appearance was linked to a girl's morality. If a girl was extravagant and she showed vanity in dress, she would be so in character. The inner and the outer self corresponded.⁵⁹⁰

This anxiety about female fashion stemmed from the paradoxical idea that such love of dress was both natural to women and a serious threat to their chastity. At the same time, outer appearance was deemed important as a part of self-expression. Clothes betrayed many things about their wearers: age, sex, social status and even profession. They created a network of meanings. Above all, clothes manifested the wearer's social group. For the elite, it was important to display one's good taste with fashionable and lavish clothes and elaborate jewels. It was even expected of them. Especially elite women had to balance proper female behaviour and manifestation of their elite lifestyle. Certain

⁵⁸⁹ For instance, MD vol. I. Mary Pendarves to Ann Granville, 30.5.1724, 98–99; LSL vol. I. Lady Sarah Bunbury to Lady Susan O'Brien 16.12.1764, 150–156; LSL vol. I. Lady Sarah Bunbury to Lady Susan O'Brien, 9.1.1766, 176–185; LSL vol. I. Lady Sarah Lennox to Lady Susan O'Brien 30.12.1777, 263–265; MH Lucy, Lady Sheffield to Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd, 25.1.1790, 24–25; MH Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd to Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd, 6.6.1791, 30–32; MH Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 14.5.1794, 281–283; WD 31.5.1799, 296; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Georgiana, Dowager Countess Spencer 6.7.1805, 3–4; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 11.5.1808, 12–14.

⁵⁹⁰ Fénelon 1708 (1687), 201–203, 206–208, 212, 299; D'Ancourt 1743, 66–68; Moir 1784, 188, 191, 193, 196, 198–200; Burton 1793, 140, 148–149; Bennet 1796, vol. I. 113–114; Bennet 1796, vol. II. 3. However, leading the fashions was expected for married society matrons. Thus Lady Sarah Lennox commented to her sister Emily, Countess of Kildare in 1760: "I hope you know that one only wears black silk. Everybody mourns in the morning here, but there is no necessity in Ireland – if you won't, nobody will. For it's only the ladies that choose to mourn, for everybody was in doubt, till Lady Mary Coke and some such conceited people said it was not proper not to mourn; and when anybody does everybody must." CL vol. II. Lady Sarah Lennox to Emily, Countess of Kildare, February 1760, 90–92.

clothes were appropriate in certain situations. There were no universal rules for all women in all situations, so women could justify their choices in various ways.⁵⁹¹ There was no identifiable general attitude to fashion, nor any such thing as everyday wear. Amanda Vickery points out that the relationship between fashion, age and decorum caused discussion among the elite. She concludes that everyone, not only the young, was expected to dress fashionably but different styles were seen as appropriate to different ages and social statuses.⁵⁹²

All this concern and anxiety about female behaviour was strongly connected to gender performance and the gaze. Ylivuori explains that the hierarchical system of the male gaze not only made men gazers and women their objects, but also conditioned both sexes to make visual observations through the male gaze. As a result, women as well as men valued and criticised each other by the same standard. A woman could not evaluate a man with such a gaze.⁵⁹³ As I have already indicated, it was the opinion of other females that the girls sought. The evaluating male gaze does not appear in the source material used in this study, but this is not say that it did not appear at all in a textual form. Males watched girls with a critical eye and it is entirely possible that criticism of other females was based on the standard of pleasing males – that is to say, attracting their gaze. The performing of femininity was thus constructed and upheld by the same standards by both men and women.

Girls were fully aware of the double-standards concerning clothes and fashions. They knew how to balance between neat and modest ideal femininity and the lavish good taste appearance demanded of and by the elite.⁵⁹⁴ Nineteen-year-old Sarah Robinson hoped that hoop size would not increase any more, as the size was already unreasonable. She added with a twinkle in her eye:

I am not so presumptuous as to care to be without any defence; as our sex are only to be upon the defensive, I wou'd not provoke the Enemy by breaking his shins, altho' I wou'd lay myself too liable to his invasions.⁵⁹⁵

Sarah's light joking about keeping the enemy (i.e. men) at bay with enormous dresses enlarged with hoops reveals the everyday problem of moving while wearing such apparel. Large dresses prevented girls and women from moving freely. Although at nineteen Sarah

⁵⁹¹ Barnes & Eicher 1993, 1–2; Batchelor 2005, 8–9; Berg 2005, 42; Tague 2002, 50, 140; Vickery 2009, 139, 143; Greig 2013, 48; Karppinen-Kummunmäki 2014, 30; Ylivuori 2015, 136–137, 140–41. The decline of sumptuary laws, the expansion of consumer society and the dominance of French fashions highlighted anxieties about fashion. For further discussion of this, see Berg 2005, 28–29, 40–43; Tague 2002, 50.

⁵⁹² Vickery 1999 (1998), 175, 177.

⁵⁹³ Ylivuori 2015, 71, 76.

⁵⁹⁴ Karppinen-Kummunmäki 2014, 31–33.

⁵⁹⁵ SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Robinson, 25.2.1740, 16–17.

was happy to have some form of defense against the advances of the opposite sex, she did not want to break their shins. Lady Mary Pierrepont expressed her opinion, or at least her view of the common opinion, about fashions more directly. At the age of twenty, she wrote:

Nature is seldom in the wrong, custom always; it is with some regret I follow it in all the impertinencies of dress; the compliance is so trivial, it comforts me: but I am amazed to see it consulted even in the most important occasions of our lives; and that people of good sense in other things can me their happiness consist in the opinions of others, and sacrifice every thing in the desire of appearing in fashion.⁵⁹⁶

Perhaps this was a rebellion against precisely the politeness and strictures of good behaviour. Lady Mary obviously thought that customs and rules of behaviour were merely arbitrary constructions and did not accept that. Keeping abreast of fashion and obtaining the good opinion of others meant more than personal happiness. She also rejected the common assumption that all women were keen on fashion: “I can say there are some of us that dispises [sic] charms of show, and all the pageantry of Greatnesse[sic], perhaps with more ease...”⁵⁹⁷ This comment can be read a criticism of the assumption that it was primarily duty of female to please men. Women and girls were said to love fashion and adorning of their appearance in order to attract the approving male gaze. The double standard was clearly there and understood by the girls.

To return to the social occasions where girls learnt the rules of adult life, besides dancing, musical performances were also a typical form of entertainment. Private concerts were often held at family homes. In February 1790, the Wynne family arranged a concert for the ambassador of France. Ten-year-old Eugenia wrote of the preparations:

Preparatives all the morning for the concert of this evening so much wished by me. We dined at our Aunts for not to dirty the rooms or make such a mess in them. At 6 o'clock came about 50 people and as it was all for the Ambassadors we went to play with the children of France in another there was tea coffee and ices served about we went to bed at one o'clock after midnight.⁵⁹⁸

Although the children were allowed to take part, they had to stay out of the way when the preparations were in progress. Eugenia and her sisters hosted the children of the ambassador and played with them. And even ten-year-old Eugenia got to stay up until one o'clock in the morning. Her sister, twelve-year-old Betsey, reported that she performed a

⁵⁹⁶ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Anne Wortley, 8.8.1709, 5–7.

⁵⁹⁷ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 28.3.1710, 24–25.

⁵⁹⁸ WD 21.2.1790, 29.

sonata and the concert ended at 12 o'clock.⁵⁹⁹ Although the Wynnes lived in Italy, English families acted the same way in Britain. For instance, the Burney siblings regularly performed in home concerts. Lady Sarah Spencer entertained others by playing the piano and her cousin Harriet occasionally performed with a harp for the family and friends in the evenings.⁶⁰⁰ On occasions like these the girls could exhibit their skills and good taste in a proper environment without reproach.

Spending time in the capital was considered an important part of finishing a girl's education, by the girls themselves as much as anyone else. On returning from London to their family's country seat when she was eighteen, Elizabeth Robinson wrote that it was "like the different seasons of youth and age; first noise and public shew, and then after being convinced that is vanity, retirement to shades and solitude, which we soon find to be vexation of spirit."⁶⁰¹ In another letter, Elizabeth confessed that she loved company.⁶⁰² At the age of fifteen, Mary Granville, who had lived in the capital with her aunt and uncle since she was eight, had to move with her family to the countryside. Her mother's health was poor and country air was thought to suit her better.⁶⁰³ Young Mary dutifully followed, even though she lamented the change:

At the age I was when I left the fine world (as I then thought it), I may own, without fear of much reproach, I left it with great regret. I had been brought up with the expectation of being Maid of Honour. I had been at one play and one opera, and thought the poet's description of the Elysium fields nothing to the delights of those entertainments; I lamented the loss of my young companions, and the universal gaiety I parted with when I left London.⁶⁰⁴

Mary was brought up expecting to become the queen's maid of honour. Moreover, the capital provided company of girls her own age and different kinds of entertainment, such as

⁵⁹⁹ WD 21.2.1790, 28–29.

⁶⁰⁰ FB1, 43; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 21.4.1808, 8–10; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 28.12.1808, 55–57.

⁶⁰¹ EM vol. I. Decemeber 1738, 31–33.

⁶⁰² EM vol. I. 18.7.1739, 35–37.

⁶⁰³ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 8.

⁶⁰⁴ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 12. It was also possible that a girl went out in public too often, as Lady Caroline Fox worried about her younger sister, the 15-year-old Lady Sarah Lennox doing: "She goes about a great deal to plays, not at all of mornings, [---] I hope, dear siss, you don't hear that she goes too much in public. She goes to the play perhaps five times in one week; the next we are here and she is not seen for a week or ten days. My going so little in public myself is the only thing that makes me fear people may take notice of her doing it, but it would be very improper for her to lead my life, and more so for me to live in public, if my health and disposition would permit me. I have too much vanity to be one of those oldish ladies that are always carrying about un visage de quarante ans to every assembly [sic] and public diversion in London." CL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, Countess of Kildare, 8.4.1760, 278–282.

opera and theatres. If Mary lamented the loss of social diversions, twenty-one-year-old Lady Sarah Spencer complained to her brother about “the dull sameness” of her pastimes.⁶⁰⁵ No doubt endless visits, assemblies, parties and theatre-pieces were sometimes boring and tedious obligations rather than delights. Parties were crowded, the conversations frequently less than entertaining and the heat often uncomfortable. Lady Sarah had already entered adulthood in legal terms. Perhaps she felt that she had to give up the delights of youth and its gaieties. Taking pleasure in social events was a trait of girls, not adult women. As a twenty-year-old, she too nearing legal adulthood, Lady Mary Pierrepont assured her correspondent that she was happy enough at their family country seat and had almost forgotten there was a place called London. Yet she also complained (in veiled form) that she did not have enough to do when she was finally back in the capital: “I believe am the only Young Woman in Town that am in my own house at ten a Clock to Night.” While in the country, she moaned that nobody visited her. The only diversion was walking: “you may walk 2 mile without meeting a living creature but a few stragglng cows.”⁶⁰⁶ It is curious that in this case Lady Mary terms herself a young woman. At twenty, she was still legally a minor. It is possible that she wanted to present herself to her friends, one much older than herself and the other her junior, as “almost an adult”, someone who had already become a fully-fledged member of the elite social world. Being busy with social obligations and the diversions of the capital was, after all, a frequent excuse for the elite ladies to neglect their correspondence with friends. This negligence they tried to compensate for later with vivid stories about the latest balls and gossip.⁶⁰⁷

Besides London, Paris was also a place where girls could finish their education. Fanny Burney’s step-sister Bessy Allen was sent to Paris in 1775

for the purpose of compleating [sic] her Education, & refining her manners [---] We miss Bessy very much, but still rejoice that she is gone, for we hope much from the improvement of 2 years residence in Paris, & she was unformed & backward to an uncommon degree.⁶⁰⁸

For young aristocratic males, the Grand Tour had been a standard part of their education for centuries, and by the eighteenth century the edifying trip abroad was also possible for elite.⁶⁰⁹ In the case of Fanny’s step-sister, the family hoped that a stay in Paris would refine her manners.

⁶⁰⁵ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 7.4.1808, 7.

⁶⁰⁶ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Anne Wortley, 8.8.1709, 5–7; MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Frances Hewet, 13.2.1710, 20–22; MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Anne Justice, s.a. 42–43.

⁶⁰⁷ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 4.9.1736, 14–16; EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Mrs. Anstey, 15.7.(1736?), 16–18.

⁶⁰⁸ FB2, 192.

⁶⁰⁹ See for instance Lagerstam 2007. On women on the grand tour see Dolan 2002.

A girl's presentation at Court was a significant moment, and girls anticipated it with mixed emotions of excitement and nervousness. The presentation showed that the girl was old enough to participate in adult social life and was consequently ready to be married.⁶¹⁰ For fourteen-year-old Lady Sarah Lennox, this great event occurred in 1759. She started to tremble when the royal family, the king, the prince of Wales and other princes and princesses, entered the Kensington Palace drawing rooms. She was at first so nervous that when the king spoke to her, she could only say "Yes, Sir" and "No, Sir". For Lady Sarah, even more awkward was the fact that the Prince of Wales came to speak to her, though they were not introduced. He even said he thought her beautiful. Lady Sarah revealed to her sister that she almost burst into laughter, but dared not to do so in that company.⁶¹¹ Despite the situation, her young and playful spirit got the better of her. Lady Sarah Spencer was presented in May 1805 when she was eighteen. "Thank Heaven, I may now say is over, and even better over than I expected, for I did not quite knock the Queen down", she exclaimed to her grandmother. Young Lady Sarah was worried that her curtsy would not be low enough, but everything went well: the Queen offered her cheek to be kissed and then Lady Sarah made her curtsy.⁶¹² Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd was also pleased that her little sister Louisa's first appearance at court went well in 1796: "She acquitted herself extremely well; managed her Hoop very well and nothing could be better than her manner when presented, as if she had been at Court all her life."⁶¹³ The occasion was the pinnacle of growing up that showed that the girl managed her dress and the rules of politeness sufficiently well to enter the high society of London.

Attendance at Court was more or less an obligation for many noble families, especially if some of their members held a court or ministerial post. It was a public show that demonstrated the family's place among the elite. The gentry also visited court, although less frequently. The timetable of social events varied according to the sovereign and daily politics, but the most typical events were drawing rooms gatherings and royal birthdays. Coronation day and Twelfth Night were also common festivity days.⁶¹⁴

Court attendance required its own clothing, and the dress that had to be worn, followed specific protocols. Eighteenth-century female court dress consisted of an embroidered gown (called a mantua), wide hoops and richly laced head-dresses. By the end of the century, this type of clothing was already old-fashioned and was not used outside court-circles.⁶¹⁵ This, of course, meant that large sums of money had to be expended to get appropriate dress purely for the court. Girls have left very detailed accounts of their outfits. In 1759, at her first court attendance fourteen-year-old Lady

⁶¹⁰ Martin 2004, 101. Presentation could also take place when one received a peerage, got married or acquired a parliamentary post. Greig 2013, 108.

⁶¹¹ CEL Vol. II. Lady Sarah Lennox to Emily, Countess of Kildare, Nov. 1759, 75–79.

⁶¹² SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Georgiana, Dowager Countess Spencer, 17.5.1805, 2–3.

⁶¹³ MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Miss Ann Firth, 15.4.1796, 372–373.

⁶¹⁴ Martin 2004, 101, Greig 2013, 100–101, 103, 109–111.

⁶¹⁵ Greig 2013, 115.

Sarah Lennox wore a black silk gown and petticoat and a white feather, blonde ruffles, white shoes and blue bugles. Her hair was powdered and she had a cross on white ribbon and pearl earrings.⁶¹⁶ Eighteen-year-old Lady Sarah Spencer's court dress in 1805 was white crepe train and petticoat, silver embroidery on the sleeves and round the waist. She wore "a very pretty bandeau of diamonds and five white feathers."⁶¹⁷

The political world, apart from court attendance, manifested itself in very different ways in the lives of the girls studied here. For the most part politics, wars and other major events appeared very little in the girls' writings, even though they might have had an impact. Wars took brothers to foreign lands and to sea, perhaps into battle. Political upheaval kept fathers in the capital and away from home. In aristocratic families, where political participation was greater, daughters were clearly keener to follow and report on the events. For instance, when eighteen-year-old Lady Harriet Pitt stayed in the capital in 1776, her letters were filled with the latest news of parliament. Both her father and brother acted as MPs and Prime Ministers in their turn. Lady Harriet also duly recorded with whom she had dined and attended social diversions such as opera and soirees. These lists consisted mainly of members of highly influential families.⁶¹⁸ Famous scandals of the day also received remark in Lady Harriet's letters. On one occasion, she was indecisive about whom she would go with to see the Duchess of Kingston's trial for bigamy. However, Lady Harriet duly asked her mother's opinion on whether it was suitable for her to attend.⁶¹⁹ Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd also reported news to her friend from France in the 1790s.⁶²⁰ Sometimes girls received major news with indifference. The Wynne family socialized with local political figures, such as ministers and princesses⁶²¹, but Betsey wasn't, at least at the age of fourteen, very interested in major political events. She wrote in her diary in August 1792:

I was quietly playing the harpsichord this afternoon when Mr de Calissance came and brought the new that the King of France had been kil'd the Queen and the Dauphin hanged[---]as it did not touch me much I was always in a mind to laugh, seeing all us women talk Politic with the Colonel[---].⁶²²

The rumoured grim destiny of the French king and queen had little effect on young Betsey. She was rather amused about the way ladies talked eagerly about it. One can

⁶¹⁶ CEL vol. II. Lady Sarah Lennox to Countess of Kildare, Nov. 1759, 75–79.

⁶¹⁷ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Georgiana, Dowager Countess Spencer, 17.5.1805, 2–3.

⁶¹⁸ E.g. HP Lady Harriet Pitt to Hester, Lady Chatham, undated 1776, 5–6; HP Lady Harriet Pitt to Hester, Lady Chatham, undated 1776, 7–8.

⁶¹⁹ HP Lady Harriet Pitt to Hester, Lady Chatham, undated 1776, 8–10.

⁶²⁰ MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 13.12.1793, 252–253; MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 17.6.1794, 287–289.

⁶²¹ WD 8.10.1794, 163; WD 14.10.1794, 164; WD 11.11.1795, 182.

⁶²² WD 3.8.1792, 122.

sense that it was not something that Betsey considered a suitable subject for ladies. In fact, it seems to her to have been rather ridiculous. This is not to say that she would not change her mind later on when political life affected her own life more acutely, as demonstrated by Elaine Chalus.⁶²³ Sometimes girls observed with amusement how political feeling manifested itself even in dress. Lady Mary Pierrepont described how “all the High Church Ladies “ [i.e. the Tories] wore “Heads in the Imitations of Steeples, and on their Muffs roses exactly like those in the...Hats. On the other Side, the low Party (of which I declare my self) [the Wigs] wear little low Heads and long ribands to their Muffs.”⁶²⁴ Chalus has shown the various ways in which the elite women of the eighteenth-century took part in political life and how they acted on behalf of their family interests. They entertained possible voters and used the means of social politeness to impact on their male kin’s political careers both in the town and in the countryside. Moreover, they demonstrated their political allegiances through fashion and choice of colours and clothing.⁶²⁵ Although unmarried girls could not make similar actions to their married mothers, they too followed carefully the proceedings of political life, reported news to home and socialized with the families that enhanced their own family interests. This shows that even girls were active agents in politics.

All the girls of this study were active shoppers. Spending money was of course an essential part of the elite life style, but sometimes this went too far. In February 1740 Sarah Robinson warned her sister Elizabeth that when she came back home her parents might chide her on her travelling expenses. However, Sarah comforted her by saying that their father did not know the exact sum and their mother would be so glad to see her again that she would soon forget such matters.⁶²⁶ Elizabeth’s spending was also an issue in March 1742 when Sarah wrote:

We were in full expectations to day[sic] of a letter from You to my Father to ask for money but none came, however my Mamma strangely thinking you more likely to be forgetfull than? rich, (I can’t imagine how she cou’d take a thing into her head which she had had so little reason for)had ask’d my Father what she shou’d send you [---]⁶²⁷

Sarah was rather amused by her sister’s spendthrift habits. The little sister concluded that she was glad Elizabeth could give good account of her expenses and make her parents believe these expenses were reasonable: “I fancy your oeconomy will be approv’d which as it is a rare thing with you.”⁶²⁸ In October 1743 Sarah herself boasted on her economics,

⁶²³ Chalus 2019a, passim.

⁶²⁴ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Anne Justice, 3.2.1711, 70–71.

⁶²⁵ Chalus 2005, esp. chap. 6. Chalus 2019b, 92–112. See also Tague 2002 182–188.

⁶²⁶ SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Robinson, 13.2.1740, 10–11.

⁶²⁷ SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Robinson, March 1742, 24–25.

⁶²⁸ SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Robinson, March 1742, 24–25.

when she stated that in order to reduce expenses of their visit to Bath, she and her friend acted more like “precise old Maids than giddy young women.” They did not attend either the assembly rooms or the Pump Room. However, they would do so the following day.⁶²⁹ Another young girl with spendthrift habits was fifteen-year-old Lady Sarah Lennox. In 1760, she confessed to her sister that she had already spent her allowance and even owed some money besides. She insisted that she had only bought what was necessary for life in the capital and would, in the future, be able to judge expenses more carefully.⁶³⁰ The family’s financial concerns did not go unnoticed by girls either. Fifteen-year-old Betsey Wynne reported that her father had not got any money from England (as the family was living in Italy). If some money would not come soon, they did find their purses empty.⁶³¹ Shopping was part of the elite’s routine. Although the girls rarely mention any companions, most likely they were chaperoned by a relative or servant. According to Helen Berry, ladies of elite families, mothers and daughters alike, went shopping in the mornings after breakfast. Afternoons, before dinner, were reserved for visiting. This pattern was followed by women in both the metropolis and provincial towns.⁶³²

Being part of the elite world meant that females had to demonstrate their place in society, and that of their fathers and husbands, with elaborate consumption. The absolute minimum that a family needed to acquire a genteel lifestyle was £500 per annum. Each further hundred pounds would make a great difference in dress and lifestyle.⁶³³ Daughters of nobility could boast a similar yearly allowance of their own. For instance, Lady Mary Pierrepont had £200.⁶³⁴ Besides that, females shopped for pure pleasure and to construct their own identity. When the girls were little, the person in charge of their material wellbeing and shopping was usually a mother, a governess, a chambermaid or some other female in the family. When the girls grew older and especially, when they entered society, they gained more control of their own purchases.⁶³⁵ These instances do show, however, that girls had allowances to spend on their personal requirements. They were part of the consumer society of the eighteenth-century as active shoppers.

While in the countryside, the family, especially the ladies, had more time to have round of dinner parties and visits. Visiting formed the basis of polite social practices. It affirmed social bonds and networks. Visits were made and received almost every day of the year. Besides short visits at tea time, there were longer visits that could take days or weeks. Every lady in the household had their own role in these social settings, depending on their age and status. And of course, visitors had their own roles as well.⁶³⁶ This form of

⁶²⁹ SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Montagu, 7.10.1743, 27–28.

⁶³⁰ CL vol. II. Lady Sarah Lennox to Emily, Countess of Kildare, 26.1.1760, 84–90.

⁶³¹ WD 14.1.1793, 135.

⁶³² Berry 2002, 379–380.

⁶³³ Worsley 2017, 29.

⁶³⁴ Grundy 2004 (1999), 58.

⁶³⁵ Ilmakunnas 2011, 183, 198; Worsley 2017, 29.

⁶³⁶ Martin 2004, 103; Heller 2010, 624; Glover 2011, 82.

social life was so important that twenty-one-year-old Lady Mary Pierrepont harshly criticized the gentlemen of the neighbourhood, who were so inconsiderate as to not let the ladies have coaches to make their rounds of visits.⁶³⁷ When the lady of the house was away, the eldest daughter present had to act as the mistress. Especially if the party consisted of girls of her own age, it was the daughter's duty to keep them company.⁶³⁸ This daunting task of a mistress was once laid at the door of twenty-year-old Fanny Burney:

About three O'clock, the rest of our company came. And from that Time, was my comfort over – for my uncle is so – disagreeable, I must say – that I really do declare he set a damper & restraint upon every thing – but yet, I should not have regarded him, if Mama had been at Home – but upon my word, appearing as mistress of the House, distressed me beyond imagination - & before so criticizing an Eye - & one who makes no allowance – I would not go through such another Day for the World.⁶³⁹

Fanny abhorred the duty of being a hostess to the horrible company of her uncle, but she had no choice, as she was the eldest daughter at home and her stepmother was away. The tea-table symbolized this domestic social environment. It was an essentially English tradition: as Betsey Wynne noted in her diary in July 1792, "Everyone drinks tea after dinner in the English fashion."⁶⁴⁰ The popularity of tea grew in the first half of the century, and British imports increased fivefold between 1720 and 1760. Serving tea from delicate chinaware was the essential polite activity. Pouring tea for visitors was such an important act that it was not left to servants. This too was the lady of the house's duty, or if she was not present, the eldest daughter's.⁶⁴¹

Social gatherings, especially evening visits and dinner parties, usually included gaming. Once again this was prohibited amusement for girls. Some educational authors were, however, inclined to allow them some form of social card playing, but especially young girls were thought prone to be too enthusiastic about gaming. The greatest concern was that they would spend all their time in idle gaming, rather than something more useful and improving.⁶⁴² Still the girls attended card games, and on a regular basis,

⁶³⁷ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Frances Hewet, 2.8.1710, 49–50.

⁶³⁸ Chapone 1777, 167.

⁶³⁹ FB1, 207. Fanny gave the following description of a dinner party in 1774: "The discourse, till supper, was entirely in Parties. Mrs. Young, Mrs. Allen and Mama talked upon fashions, which is an ever agreeable subject to Mrs. Young & constantly introduced by her; Dr. Shepherd, Mr. Twiss & my Father conversed upon foreign Countries, & Susy and I sat very snug together, amused either by ourselves or them, as we chose." FB2, 13.

⁶⁴⁰ WD 16.7.1792, 120.

⁶⁴¹ Glover 2011, 83.

⁶⁴² Moir 1784, 207; Burton 1793, vol. I. 1–2, 7–8.

especially when there was company in the house.⁶⁴³ Eighteen-year-old Anne Tracy even taught her younger sisters to play cards.⁶⁴⁴ It is obvious that the girls didn't think card playing particularly problematic. Anne Tracy's only reproof was that on one evening they were "very ungenteel to win & let the Toddington ladys lose."⁶⁴⁵ Twenty-two-year-old, Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd gladly attended card parties, unlike her sister Louisa. Lady Maria confessed that she was "a professed Gambler."⁶⁴⁶ She wrote to her friend

I get a game at Casino which is a treat, but I am afraid you will be shocked when I tell you we play half-crowns; however, I have not been a Loser, tho' not much of a winner yet. I cannot help playing tho', unless I took the Alternative of falling Asleep, as everybody plays either Whist or Casino, and I should be left like Q. in the corner.⁶⁴⁷

Lady Maria felt obliged to gamble as that was the only way to be part of the company. Being left alone would have been quite boring. As Marjo Kaartinen shows in her study of *ennui* in the eighteenth century, being left without company was the source of boredom. Even with company the repetitive social life could cause frustration.⁶⁴⁸ Young girls had to fill their time as best they could. Sometimes it was simply a matter of killing time. In the case of Lady Maria, she chose to play with the rest of the company. The other alternative would have been long boring nights and falling asleep in some corner of the room.

Becoming an eighteenth-century elite woman required years of learning. Before a girl could take her place in elite society as an equal with adults, she had to learn a variety of literary and social skills. Every gesture, look and action had to be carefully rehearsed so that she could act as a carefree and elegant socialite. Every letter she wrote would have to demonstrate her good birth and accomplished nature. This learning not only took place in the schoolrooms but also among friends during everyday activities, often in mix-sex company. A girl learnt the rules by observing others. But this is not to say that she didn't find these rules irksome and even criticize them from time to time.

⁶⁴³ HP Lady Harriet Pitt to Hester, Lady Chatham, 10.12.1777, 26–27; AT 11.12.1723, 86; AT 21.12.1723, 87; AT 27.12.1723, 88; AT 13.1.1724, 89; AT 14.1.1724, 89; AT 15.1.1724, 89; AT 17.1.1724, 90.

⁶⁴⁴ AT 17.11.1723, 85.

⁶⁴⁵ AT 29.1.1724, 91.

⁶⁴⁶ MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 13.10.1793, 244–245.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁸ Kaartinen 2017, 152

4 BECOMING A WOMAN. THE EXIT POINTS OF GIRLHOOD

Throughout this study I have stressed that girlhood is a process: a procession of multiple events that transformed a girl into a woman. In this section I look at love and sexuality, the most contradictory part of girlhood and womanhood of the eighteenth century. To study something as intimate as human sexuality in the past is a very difficult task for a historian. How can one study something that is usually seen as private, hidden and, to some extent, even forbidden? It was something that people avoided talking about. The task of studying this in relation to unmarried girls in the eighteenth century might seem impossible. Girls were not supposed to know anything about sex before marriage. They were not allowed to speak of it. At first sight sexual matters are not spoken of at all in diaries and letters.⁶⁴⁹ However, as Robert Shoemaker has pointed out, by studying the restrictions on and practices of sexuality one can find out how gender was perceived in a given historical period.⁶⁵⁰ Faramerz Dabhoiwala has shown how in early modern society sexual conduct was regulated not only from above, by the Church and the state, but also by the people themselves in their everyday lives.⁶⁵¹

In the first section, I will ask how conceptions of sexuality and love were expressed in eighteenth-century society and what they can tell us about gender and age hierarchies. How did girls adapt to contemporary ideas of human sexuality? I, therefore, combine gender relations and conceptions about sexuality and emotions with considerations of age. I look at this topic from three different angles. Firstly, I look at conceptions and ideals of virginity, female sexuality and especially chastity. How did the girls of this study, especially after they had reached puberty, experience their own sexuality and the contradictory pressures they faced? How did they balance their desires and feelings with the ideal chaste maiden they were supposed to be? Secondly, I look at the role of love and emotion, and thirdly, I combine these two by looking at cases when things went wrong. What happened when the ideal was transgressed?

In the second section, I focus on courtship, marriage negotiations, nuptials and eventually motherhood, the final stages on the path from girlhood to womanhood.

⁶⁴⁹ See for example Crawford 2008 (2004), 69; Fletcher 2010 (2008), 26.

⁶⁵⁰ Shoemaker 2013 (1998), 59.

⁶⁵¹ Dabhoiwala 2012, 22–24.

Finding a husband enabled a girl to enter society to be thought of an adult with the prospect of her own household, a person of some influence in society. She was mature enough onto move into the next step, the final step, towards adulthood and filling her future role as wife and mother. But, it was not the girl alone, who took part in this process: the whole family and friend network followed it and advised the future young bride on how to enter into her new life.

First, I look at the level of freedom elite girls had to decide on their own future and choose their own spouses. Correspondingly, I look at the ways in which family members and friends influenced and interfered in these matters. And finally, I ask whether it was after the wedding bells, that a girl became a woman. How did the girls feel about their new role as married women? Enlightenment authors wanted women to see marriage as the fulfillment for their lives. Marital happiness and prestige would be the reward for their subordination to male patriarchy. What did motherhood mean to them? Procreation was thought of as one of the most important responsibilities of adulthood.⁶⁵² I argue that rather than seeing marriage as the final point of girlhood, we should regard the transformation from maid to matron as a process that included marriage, motherhood and embracing the responsibilities of the mistress of the household.

4.1 Problematic virgins. Female sexuality and youth

Unacquainted with men

Eighteenth-century attitudes towards virginity were conflicting. Girls were often paralleled with virgins, at least linguistically. What was the “chaste maiden” that contemporary writers so eagerly depicted as the ideal girl? In the definition written by John Maubray (1724), a virgin was simply a female who had not had sexual intercourse, whereas virginity was a state of nature, which indicates that it included qualities other than physical ones.⁶⁵³ In contemporary medical thinking the hymen was seen as the sign of virginity, but medical writers of the period agreed that it did not exist in all females and knew that it could be broken through means other than intercourse. Some physicians strongly doubted its existence, as this was only confirmed when it disappeared. The hymen was not considered the only sign of virginity as several other parts of the body such as the womb, cervix and vagina were thought to be different in virgins and non-

⁶⁵² Goodman 2009, 274–275.

⁶⁵³ Maubray 1724, 37–38. The French physician Louis François Lingnac also acknowledged the dual and elusive nature of virginity by stating in 1798 that theologians and physicians understood it in different ways: it is both a “virtue of the soul” and a physical fact that a girl “has not been approached by any man.” Lingnac 1789, 181–182.

virgins. All in all, authors agreed that it was difficult to be certain if girl was a virgin or not.⁶⁵⁴

I have no way of knowing whether the girls in my study had sexual intercourse prior to their marriages. I would guess that most of them were “intact” to use a contemporary phrase. Fifteen-year-old Lady Sarah Bunbury (née Lennox) reported that, after her wedding night in 1762, she had not been “so frightened as Louisa [her sister married in 1758 at the age of fifteen] was yesterday [---] for I am ten thousand times more terrified now” indicating that her first sexual encounter as a married wife had been somewhat nerve-racking.⁶⁵⁵ Even though indications of premarital sexual encounters are largely lacking, it does not mean that nothing of the kind could happen. For example, the Lennox family biographer Stella Tillyard suspects that fourteen-year-old Lady Emily Lennox had some sort of sexual encounter with her fiancé James, Earl of Kildare on Christmas Day 1746 at her father’s summer house. Lady Emily alluded to this event in a letter to her husband sixteen years later.⁶⁵⁶ The surest evidence of a premarital sexual encounter can be found in the Burney family. Charles Burney and Esther Sleepé were married in June 1749, but their first daughter Esther (Hetty) was already born in May. This was something that Fanny most likely knew, but she left this information out of *Memoirs* of her father.⁶⁵⁷ There are no indications to this matter in her diaries, either, suggesting that it was a family secret. After all, it is difficult to imagine that such things went totally undetected in households where people lived in close proximity with each other. Julie Peakman shows in her studies how servants were keen to expose their master’s or mistresses’ sexual misconduct. They were present everywhere and saw everything.⁶⁵⁸ How could the daughters of the family escape such scrutiny? Most likely they did not. However, whether evidence of such encounters has been suppressed, and if so how, is another matter.

This is rather interesting as other historians seem to agree that especially girls of the elite were considered virgins before they married. Robert Shoemaker points out, that lower down the social scale it was possible for an engaged couple to have full intercourse, or at least mutual fondling, but this was not common practice among the elite.⁶⁵⁹ Men had more freedom in these matters than women. Elizabeth Foyster notes that it was important for men in early modern society to prove their sexual competence before marriage.

⁶⁵⁴ Harol 2006 chap. 2; Read 2013, 124–127, 132–144.

⁶⁵⁵ CEL vol. II. Lady Sarah Bunbury to Emily, marchioness of Kildare, 3.6.1762, 105. See also Tillyard 1995 (1994) 141–142.

⁶⁵⁶ Tillyard 1995 (1994), 57–58.

⁶⁵⁷ Doody 1988, 16.

⁶⁵⁸ Peakman 2016, 52. It is not clear whether they believed their employer’s should show a good example in their behaviour or whether they were derived by some inspired by some personal vendetta, or simply the desire to gain advantage over people whose socially superior position they could not challenge otherwise. Peakman 2016, 52.

⁶⁵⁹ Shoemaker 2013 (1998), 73. See also Peakman 2016, 5–6.

Therefore they had more freedom to engage in sexual relationships without commitment. Only when serious marriage negotiations began did their behaviour come under closer scrutiny.⁶⁶⁰ The demand that girls maintain their virginity has been seen as the foundation for maintaining the patriarchal order in society. Anthony Fletcher states that a girl had to preserve her body intact until her father would hand her over to her husband. Virginity was the symbol of a daughter's loyalty to her father. This also ensured that the inheritance, land and titles, passed on to lawful heirs. Elizabeth Foyster points out that, if the bride was not a virgin on her wedding day, the husband could not claim her as his property. After all, it was the husband who was supposed to have the ultimate control of his family and estate. Female conduct was connected to man's honour.⁶⁶¹ Corinne Harol, on the other hand, notes that the connection between virginity and inheritance, and therefore the maintenance of the patriarchal order, is not that straightforward. The elusive intact hymen was rather shaky evidence and a poor guarantor of lawful property transfer.⁶⁶²

Forms of physical contact were not unknown to even the youngest girls, without having experienced full intercourse. Chaperoned by her sixteen-year-old sister Fanny, Esther Burney, or at least her suitor Mr. Seaton, felt comfortable with pressing each other's hands. Yet, there was still something slightly suspect in this gesture, as young Fanny suspected that "perhaps he thought it was too Dark for me to see him."⁶⁶³ Some girls faced even more direct caresses. In 1798 nine-year-old Eugenia Wynne noted in her diary that her father's secretary "gave me great pleasure, he kissed me tenderly." The editor of the diary has pointed out that this entry was later scratched out. The following month Eugenia wrote that she received, once again, "many of his importunate kisses." When eleven-years old she was kissed by a count at a ball, on which occasion, her sister Betsey teased her. The sister claimed Eugenia had been flattered, but she denied it. The count expressed his apologies the following day, but with a twinkle in his eye.⁶⁶⁴ Eugenia seems to have been a constant object of "many follies" of her father's secretary. In 1790, the 10-year-old Eugenia remarked that they were "not remarkable enough to be put in my journell."⁶⁶⁵ I am tempted to conclude that the fact that she mentioned them at all made these advances notable enough. Kissing is an ambiguous gesture and one must not be too hasty in interpreting it as purely sexual. The kiss can also be interpreted as sign of

⁶⁶⁰ Foyster 1999, 42.

⁶⁶¹ Fletcher 2010 (2008), 25–26. Foyster 1999, 46. See also Phillips 2003, 146; Dabhoiwala 2012, 27–28. The same argument is of course applied to married women as well. See Shoemaker 2013 (1998), 62.

⁶⁶² Harol 2006, 3–4.

⁶⁶³ FB1, 41.

⁶⁶⁴ WD 18.8.1789, 1; WD 28.9.1789, 9–10; WD 1.2.1791, 48–49; WD 2.2.1791, 49.

⁶⁶⁵ WD 25.3.1790, 32.

worship and power.⁶⁶⁶ Helen Berry points out that there were lots of contradictory views on kissing and its meaning in early modern England. Conduct literature did not give straightforward or specific rules for kissing, especially for the young and unmarried. Kisses could have been interpreted as spousal commitment, which is why it was not advisable for unmarried men and women to kiss each other without good reason. Early modern society monitored its members' actions and too familiar gestures could raise suspicions. Conduct literature warned girls repeatedly not to allow men to get too close. However, especially in the eighteenth century, the idea of platonic love and friendship between men and women might disguise the erotic significance of the kiss.⁶⁶⁷ All the same, we have enough instances to give an indication that, occasionally at least, kisses were interpreted as part of social gallantry or mere fun. What this means is that virginity and the purity of unmarried girls was not as strict or straightforward as we have tended to believe.

Even if physical contact was acceptable in certain cases, there certainly were cases when the physical advances of men were not desirable. Eighteen-year-old Betsey Wynne was rather ashamed that a gentleman “gave me a hearty kiss in the midst of the street.”⁶⁶⁸ Compared to the cases shown above, the clear difference in this instance was that Betsey was kissed in the street by Mr Udley, the British consul to Livorno, in public where anyone could see the interaction. Not only was the kiss clearly unwelcomed – it made her “ashamed”, as if she was a child. At the time Betsey was courting with her future husband, Captain Fremantle. Possibly Betsey was worried that her good reputation would be tarnished if she was thought have intimate connections with more than one man. Unwanted physical advances might also happen in more private surroundings. At a ball, eighteen-year-old Fanny Burney had to endure the advances of a gentleman who put his arm around her waist. Unfortunately (or fortunately), nobody could see the gesture as they sat so close to each other. Then he tried to snatch a curl of Fanny's hair with his scissors, but she managed to prevent it. Fanny was “quite disquieted” at all this.⁶⁶⁹

Regarding the sexuality and the sexual harassment of young girls in the eighteenth-century, a clear contradiction is apparent. Sarah Toulalan explains that in contemporary thinking children were thought incapable in engaging in a sexual act either physically or mentally before puberty. Their “unripe” bodies could not experience sexual feelings; desire or pleasure and engaging in sex too early would also be physically harmful. Nevertheless, in some cases it was thought possible to sexualize pre-pubescent children by exposing them to sexual acts. Toulalan finds this problematic as it also made children

⁶⁶⁶ Of different aspects of the kiss see *The Kiss in history*. Karen Harvey (ed.) Manchester University Press 2005.

⁶⁶⁷ Berry 2005, 64–65, 68, 70, 71.

⁶⁶⁸ WD 3.7.1796, 201.

⁶⁶⁹ FB1, 127.

responsible for their actions, for example in cases of rape.⁶⁷⁰ Jennie Mills shows in her study how it was thought that a female could not be raped if she put up sufficient resistance to her attacker. Even though rape was generally seen as a capital offence, so-called Statutory rape proved problematic to girls and young females. The age of ten was set as the age-boundary that determined which females were and were not available for sex. According to Mills, this was an arbitrary age limit that only served to show how females were seen as essentially sexual beings and always ready for intercourse. Sex with young girls was also seen as acceptable behaviour. Moreover, in eighteenth-century imagination virginity held a strong erotic fascination. Defloration of a virgin and, therefore overcoming her female modesty, was one of the most powerful sexual fantasies manifesting the male will and potency. This sort of violent seduction came too close to rape and blurred the boundaries between them. Added to this, making an allegation of rape most likely tarnished a lady's reputation. In a society where reputation depended on public opinion, the shame of the legal procedure would ensure that her conduct and modesty were questioned.⁶⁷¹ If the law permitted sexual activities with pre-pubescent girls, even though medical opinion was against it, there is no doubt that some men used this option to harass young girls. From the little evidence that I have, it can be surmised that this occurred in elite circles as well as others. More importantly, these incidents show that girls learned their place in patriarchal society early on: females were there to please men. Men were free to use their bodies and even a girl's age was not an issue if she was not vigilant. As I have indicated earlier: youth meant beauty and beauty incited love in early modern thought. To put it bluntly, in this ideology young girls existed primarily to be lusted after by men.

Of course, these instances are not very clear. After all, matters of sexuality were not something that young girls were supposed to talk about in explicit terms. One rare glimpse of a girl's awareness of her sexuality can be found from the letter of Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd, the daughter of Lord Sheffield. Lady Maria was engaged to be married and exclaimed to her friend: "I really cannot be Maidenly enough to help being heartily rejoiced things are drawing to a conclusion."⁶⁷² This comment can be interpreted in two ways. For one thing, Lady Maria must have thought that she was supposed to behave with modest reserve. As I will show later on, it was the lady's role in courtship to keep her feelings to herself until marriage was settled. It was the man's job to pursue. From another point of view, it is not impossible to imagine that this young lady could not wait for her wedding night when she could carnally unite with the man she loved. Female desire was a constant concern among the male writing elite. When it came to virgins, they

⁶⁷⁰ Toulalan 2011, 132, 135, 141, 143, 145.

⁶⁷¹ Mills 2009, 140, 141, 147–149, 156. This sexualization of young girls is also evident in the number of child prostitutes in eighteenth-century London. Cruichshank 2010 (2009), 52–55.

⁶⁷² MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Miss Ann Firth, 11.9.1796, 392–393.

were supposed to be innocent and free from any carnal desires. In fact, they were supposed to have downright disgust for such matters.

Attitudes toward female sexuality varied a great deal during the early modern period. As the weaker sex, women were seen as prone to act upon their impulses and were governed by their reproductive organs. Sex was, however, thought healthy to both men and women within the bounds of marriage. Regular sexual activity helped to release the seed that enabled procreation. Once a girl started to menstruate her sexual longings grew. If everything went well she would soon be married and could satisfy her urges in the marital bed. But if she did not she might suffer from diseases such as mother fits, suffocation of the womb and greensickness. In virgins, it was the hymen that prevented the evacuation of fluids from the body. Virginity was seen at this period as a natural yet temporary stage that was not to be extended unnecessarily.⁶⁷³ According to Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, post-Reformation England usually condemned celibacy as unnatural and virginity was deemed as providing special status only for extraordinary women. Corinne Harol concludes that the pathologization of virginity, and through it celibacy, was a counter-attack of the English Reformation in which virginity was reduced to a medical as opposed to religious topic.⁶⁷⁴ The evidence of my sources shows that, on an everyday level, female sexuality still as acceptable and natural a part of human existence in the latter part of the eighteenth-century as it was over a century earlier, although it had to be expressed within the rules of decorum.

Earlier research has, however, claimed that towards the end of the eighteenth century female sexuality became ever more problematized. In fact, sexual feelings were thought non-existent or even useless to a woman's health. Females were too delicate to have powerful any sexual feelings.⁶⁷⁵ This was especially true of girls. Harol claims that during the eighteenth century virginity became once again idealized and greensickness a fashionable disease to have as it signified controlled female sexuality. And while interest in virgins began to decline in the field of medicine, it increased in culture fields such as

⁶⁷³ Fletcher 1995, 46; Mendelson & Crawford 1998, 20, 23–25; Harol 2006, 60–62; Dawson 2008, 50–54; Crawford 2008 (2004), 56–57, 60–63, 66–67; Shoemaker 2013 (1998), 61–62; Read 2013, chap. 3. Lesbian sexual activity was not a criminal offence and it was recognized by contemporary medical authors. However, it caused concern as it did blur the boundaries between the two genders and threatened the patriarchal social order in which men had access to women's bodies. Mendelson & Crawford 1998, 20–21.

⁶⁷⁴ Mendelson & Crawford 1998, 66–67; Harol 2006, 62–63. The sources used in this study vary as to whether they give support to these arguments. It is true, for example, that some French authors who were published in England in this period stressed to some extent Catholic values in which virginity also had religious and mental qualities. See for example Venette 1720, 82–85. This semi-religious aura of virgins still prevailed to a limited extent in Protestant England. For example, it was believed that copulation with a virgin cured venereal diseases. Peakman 2016, 76.

⁶⁷⁵ Mendelson & Crawford 1998, 29; Shoemaker 2013 (1998), 62–64; Peakman 2016. Dan Cruickshank dates this change in the 1720s and 1730s. Cruickshank 2009 (2010), 447.

literature.⁶⁷⁶ Vivien Jones concludes that although conduct literature of the period depicted passive asexual virtue as truly feminine, its aim was to limit female sexuality for the good of society by confining it to the duties of motherhood. Female sexuality was seen, for example in medical texts, as deviant and mysterious whereas male sexuality was the norm. Sexuality was both natural and unnatural.⁶⁷⁷

In the case of girls, I suggest that earlier research has not taken into account something of vital importance, the maturing process of the human being. Contemporaries widely agreed that puberty was a time of turmoil for the young. Awakening sexual feelings made girls unpredictable and uncontrollable. They were not yet adults, who could control their actions and thoughts. For example, in 1798 the physician Jean François Lingnac advised that the best cure for a young woman suffering from “pale colours” (greensickness or clorosis) was her lover. This indicates that a young girl’s sexuality was anything but passive and asexual. Besides, girls were thought to mature faster than boys and they reached the critical point of puberty sooner. Although excessive carnal urges were thought more common in boys, some medical authors recognized that girls as well could feel ardent passion. In their case, it was more often diagnosed as a medical condition such as *furor uterinus* or nymphomania.⁶⁷⁸ This shows that in contemporary medical thinking the sexuality of pubescent girls was seen as normal for their age and stage of development.

There were, however, plenty of concerns about girls’ sexuality. Although there is no surviving evidence that the girls practiced any private pleasures, masturbation was a concern of contemporary educational writers. One of the few examples I could find of explicit warnings against girls’ masturbation is in *The Ladies Dispensatory* (1739). The author stated that the secret vice of masturbation was certainly a fault of young members of both sexes. Many were induced to this practice because it was not specifically forbidden in the Scripture or by the law, and it was something one could do in secret. For girls masturbation was more appealing as they were “naturally more bashful than Men, and whom Custom has precluded from making any Advances towards a mutual Commerce with the other Sex.” If practiced often, masturbation spoiled the generative organs, ruined the complexion and caused hysterical fits. It also caused consumption and produced heat in the genitals and internal organs. In the worst case it could cause barrenness. Virgins could “deflower” themselves (i.e. break the hymen) and therefore destroy “that valuable Badge of their Chastity, which it is expected they should not part with before Marriage, but which, when lost, can never be retrieved.”⁶⁷⁹ Masturbation by girls was not only seen physically harmful but it also violated the stability of the patriarchal order. Why would a young lady need a husband if she was able or knew how

⁶⁷⁶ Harol 2006, 5–15, 63–66, passim.

⁶⁷⁷ Jones 1990, 57–58.

⁶⁷⁸ Lingnac 1798, 8–9; 124, 142–143.

⁶⁷⁹ *The Ladies Dispensatory* 1739, 3–7. See also Venette 1720, 21.

to satisfy herself? Moreover, in this way she could keep the deceptive mask of chastity. Patricia Crawford assumes that masturbation was seen as a lesser sin in earlier centuries than it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth. In fact, as virgins were prone to diseases, caused by accumulation of the seed, medical texts discreetly advised doctors to masturbate their female patients to relieve their sexual longings.⁶⁸⁰ Julie Peakman points out that masturbation of females was considered less harmful or life-threatening than it was for males. Vaginal fluid was less important than male seed, so the excess expulsion of it was less damaging. Masturbation affected female minds rather than their bodies. They became rapacious, out of control and hysterical. But as we have seen from the examples above, the physical effects of masturbation were usually a swollen clitoris or problems in the uterus.⁶⁸¹ Mary McAlpin notes that since the 1760s, especially in France, a concern over the physical and moral degradation of the citizens emerged. At its core was the premature sexual awakening of young girls. It was the parents' duty to guide their offspring through the tumultuous time of puberty. Lascivious influences could cause a premature start of puberty for girls. Those who had already reached the years of puberty had to be protected from sexual stirrings. Only when they were physically ready to acquaint themselves with the pleasures of the marital bed should they be enlightened.⁶⁸² In England, as Michèle Cohen states, the discussion about the relative merits of public schooling and private home education for girls was also entwined with their chastity. Some contemporary commentators argued that letting girls live in close proximity to each other posed a threat to their sexual purity. Young girls would soon learn and experiment by themselves the secrets of human generation.⁶⁸³

Even if evidence of sexual activity in the girls is rare, the sources clearly show that elite girls were not ignorant of matters of procreation or pregnancy. Several references to pregnancies and births or "breeding" of friends and family members and even servants are to be found in the sources.⁶⁸⁴ Usually they are just fleeting remarks. On other occasions girls ventured to express their own opinions. In 1793 fifteen-year-old Betsey Wynne noted that their cook "was with Child of Mr. le Gout a monstrous blackguard. This is the fifth maid Servant that has been in this condition in two years time that we are here."⁶⁸⁵ Two years later Betsey wrote that "Mde. de Bombelles is again with child. She will never be tired to make such unsupportable brats? I am glad that I shant be here for her lying in."⁶⁸⁶ If a fifteen-year-old was aware of the facts of life, it was no wonder that in 1744 twenty-two-year-old Sarah Robinson could write to her sister Elizabeth, who was

⁶⁸⁰ Crawford 2008 (2004), 62.

⁶⁸¹ Peakman 2016, 140–142.

⁶⁸² McAlpin 2012, 1–2, 40–41, 43.

⁶⁸³ Cohen 2007 (2005), 228–229.

⁶⁸⁴ AT 6.1.1724, 89; SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Montagu [27.10.1743], 35–38; WD 9.2.1790, 49–50; WD 29.9.1790, 61; WD 28.2.1792, 91.

⁶⁸⁵ WD 19.10.1793, 144.

⁶⁸⁶ WD 22.10.1795, 181.

then already married, inquiring if she was certain she was not pregnant. The symptoms she had had with her first son were fever and a rash and “the learned say it is a very common beginning.”⁶⁸⁷ The girls most likely learned by observing the life around them. It is very unlikely that they received any form of explicit sexual education. Pregnancies and babies were part of everyday life, and it was not necessary to hide them from the knowledge of young girls. In fact, there are indications that even unmarried girls attended child-births.⁶⁸⁸ Historians have presented contrasting views as to the extent of the sexual knowledge of young girls in this period. Patricia Crawford observes that early modern men and women had separate, yet overlapping, knowledge of sexuality that derived from a variety of sources depending on their age and level of literacy. For women, knowledge about pregnancy and childbirth were essential. However, she stresses that this knowledge was not accessible to young unmarried women who could not attend childbirths.⁶⁸⁹ However, the sources of this study show that unmarried girls were knowledgeable about these matters, whether or not they attended actual child-births.

Another approach is to consider the extent of peer guidance. Deborah Simonton points out that even though female sexuality was veiled in coded language girls and young women were not completely innocent. They learnt from people lived with and by word of mouth. Women around them certainly passed on their knowledge and literature was accessible to a growing majority in the eighteenth century. She also stresses that young girls were simply curious. They wanted to know why they were feeling the way they did, and what caused the longings and desires they experienced.⁶⁹⁰ Julie Peakman has made quite a radical suggestion that girls’ first initiation to sex was with other women. In Peakman’s analysis, older girls or women guided them to the secrets of masturbation and sexual pleasure before their first intercourse.⁶⁹¹ Whether or not this was the case, I do agree that eighteenth-century girls were not ignorant of the facts of life. Most likely they learnt from the people around them by observing and listening. But they had to appear innocent, as if they were unaware of sexual matters, as that was the ideal of the time. Only innocent maids (and sexually intact ones) appealed to the eighteenth-century imagination as the perfect brides.

The impact of literature cannot be ignored. Lynne Vallone claims that sex education for girls was provided, to some extent, by courtesy novels, such as Fanny Burney’s *Evelina* (1778) or Eliza Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsey Thoughtless* (1751). Books for younger girls, with their maternal pedagogy, omitted sexual matters, whereas courtesy novels depicted heroines who were at the stage between maternal guidance and a husband’s influence, and who had been uneducated or miseducated on sexual matters.

⁶⁸⁷ SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Montagu [May 1744] 59–61.

⁶⁸⁸ FB2, 54.

⁶⁸⁹ Crawford 2008 (2004), 63, 64, 67.

⁶⁹⁰ Simonton 2011, 27–28.

⁶⁹¹ Peakman 2016, 103–106.

The heroine had to learn how the marriage market functioned. She was both a commodity and a merchant, so to speak: she had to find a suitable husband, but she also had to be capable of resisting or turning down suitors. These novels manifested how a girl's value was based on education that included both sexual desire and social convention.⁶⁹² Elite girls read extensively and the books included the popular novels of their time. It is therefore plausible that the girls also adopted some ideas of sexuality and what was expected of them in dealing with it through their reading.

The evidence here shows that the idea of virginity of girls and its everyday reality in eighteenth-century society was much more vivid than previous research has suggested. The very concept of virgin was elusive even in medical studies. Whether a girl was a virgin or not, was only confirmed when she lost her virginity and then not necessarily with certainty. It is also evident that girls had a much wider knowledge of sexual matters than previously thought. They were not shy about having sexually implicit discussions and they had good knowledge of pregnancy and its implications. Virginity was much more than just a physical phenomenon. Besides, the connection between virginity and its most important characteristic, chastity, was not as clear as one might think.

Free from lewd thoughts

It is said, that eighteenth-century female honour was intricately connected to her sexual reputation and was very easily lost. A clear double standard existed. Whereas men were allowed, and were even supposed to have, sexual experiences, and even some philandering, the ideal woman was expected to be passive, submissive and asexual. She was vulnerable to corruption through her sexuality. Once introduced to it, she became uncontrollable.⁶⁹³ This is why one of the key words in defining eighteenth-century female sexuality is chastity. Didactic authors of the period tried to codify female conduct through the discourse of chastity. It has been established that there occurred a change in this discourse in the early eighteenth century. Instead of relying on biblical commands or social restrictions, contemporary authors started to depict women as innately modest. Their “natural” modesty guided their behaviour and prevented them from carrying out unchaste acts. This also meant that women, as the more chaste sex, were able to improve male self-control and assist them in avoiding licentiousness.⁶⁹⁴ However, as Faramerz Dabhoiwala points out, chastity was very closely linked to social status. Both male and female of higher rank were thought capable of self-discretion when it came to sexuality. It

⁶⁹² Vallone 1989, 65.

⁶⁹³ Peakman 2016, 75.

⁶⁹⁴ Shoemaker 1998, 23–25; Tague 2002, 31–32; Dabhoiwala 2012, 123, 181; Ylivuori 2015, 191–195.

was the lower orders that required more surveillance.⁶⁹⁵ So the chastity of elite girls was taken at face value and they were expected to remain chaste.

The ideology of female chastity had its drawbacks, especially for girls. It has been pointed out that the eighteenth-century ideology of female modesty was very inconsistent as it both promoted chastity as an innate characteristic and suggested that it had to be constantly regulated. Modesty was supposedly to regulate female sexuality, but at the same time, many didactic and medical authors denied the existence of such sexuality altogether. Moreover, as sexual chastity and modesty were linked, any form of immodest behaviour could be read as a sexual threat for women.⁶⁹⁶ This tension was even more acute when it came to girls. Kim M. Phillips concludes that girls were caught between childhood innocence in with its asexuality and mature womanhood.⁶⁹⁷ This is yet another example of girls finding themselves between becoming and being.

What did chastity mean for unmarried girls besides abstinence? Contemporary writers described chastity as something a girl had to cherish, as it brought her the high regard of her friends and family. A failure in this respect could be fatal, as I will demonstrate later in this section. The chastity of young girls derived from their modesty, which regulated their actions and the obedience and humility they showed towards their elders. Modesty was the all-encompassing virtue that guided, or was supposed to guide, the behaviour, speech and gestures of females, and would therefore ensure their chastity. This regulation would extend even to their thoughts. Especially young girls were warned against unchaste speech and thoughts, for fear that they might tarnish their pure minds. Any indecent thought deflowered the mind and would tarnish the body, as well. A maid who took the first step on the path of flirtation and debauchery would be soon doomed to prostitution. Unchaste thoughts would soon lead to unchaste acts. As *The Ladies Library* put it, the virtues of all females had to be even more cultivated in virgins: “Her Look, her Speech, her whole Behaviour, should own an [sic] humble Distrust of herself.”⁶⁹⁸ This kind of thinking again shows how the mind and body were closely linked in the early modern world. The inner character of a human being was thought to manifest itself in her physical appearance and behaviour.⁶⁹⁹

To what extent did this ideal of chastity appear in real life, if it appeared at all? The sources I have used in this study give a varying picture. For instance, married women had no scruples in talking about sexual matters. In 1759 Lady Caroline Fox discussed about the sexual maturity and womanly looks of her sixteen-year-old sister Louisa with Lord Powerscourt. She had grown “immensely tall, fat, and womanly in her looks. From the

⁶⁹⁵ Dabhoiwala 2012, 66–67, 270–278.

⁶⁹⁶ Tague 2002, 31–34; Mitchell & Osland 2005, 7.

⁶⁹⁷ Phillips 2003, 7.

⁶⁹⁸ Halifax 1716, 68–69; *The Lady's Companion* 1740, 20–21; 71–72; A Lady [Richard Steele] 1751 (1714) vol. II. 27; Allen 1798, 186–187.

⁶⁹⁹ Revel 2001, 27–30, 53, 74–85; McMaster 2004. chap. 3& 4. See also Karpinen-Kummunmäki 2015, 199.

time Mr Conolly proposed, by growing fat I supposed he meant her neck and presence.”⁷⁰⁰ By “presence” Lady Caroline most likely referred to the size of Louisa’s bosom.⁷⁰¹ This comment reveals that sexual matters related to supposedly innocent girls were indeed discussed in mixed company. Such straightforward allusions were also made by the girls themselves. When she was fourteen, Elizabeth Robinson commented to a female friend that a certain Miss D. and “her Fubbsey are now one flesh, or rather one fat.”⁷⁰² This biblical reference to marriage included an explicit sexual reference. The marriage was consummated in sexual intercourse. If Elizabeth had been the ideal, well-behaving and innocent maid, as the conduct literature demanded of girls, she would not have written such things. A couple of years later, Elizabeth again joked

I had the misfortune to be overturned the other day in coming from Sir Wyndham Knatchbull’s; and I assure you I but just avoided the indecency of being topsy turvy; my head was so much lower than its usual situation, that it has left my ideas in a perfect litter ever since [---].⁷⁰³

The indecency would have occurred because ladies in this period did not wear any underpants. Throwing one’s skirts up would have revealed very indecent sights indeed. Again, it is noteworthy that nineteen-year-old Elizabeth could write such a thing, even if only to a married female friend. Lady Sarah Spencer, although already twenty-one years old (but still unmarried) told her brother about Mrs. Fox, the widow of Charles Fox, a lady of “not the clearest” character and a Miss W the “natural daughter to Charles Fox.” Lady Sarah’s father had attended a dinner with the two ladies and then passed the description of the events to his daughter. Lady Sarah referred to “so infamous a collection of people”, so it is hard to say whether she approved of her father attendance at such a party or not.⁷⁰⁴ It is very unlikely that she would have socialized with those ladies herself.

These findings are not in accord with statements often made in previous research. For instance, Patricia Crawford claims that women were careful not to talk about sexual matters, especially in mixed company. When that did occur they put themselves at risk of appearing immodest. Unmarried women were not to speak about such matters at all, and even married ones had to be on their guard.⁷⁰⁵ It is possible that attitudes in this regard changed during the early modern period, and that people in the eighteenth-century, even unmarried girls, were freer to talk about sex than in previous centuries. Either way, the ideals and norms of the century were not strictly actualized in everyday life.

⁷⁰⁰ CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, countess of Kildare, 16.1.1759, 190–191.

⁷⁰¹ Tillyard 1995 (1994), 114.

⁷⁰² EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, duchess of Portland, 21.6. (1734?), 11–13.

⁷⁰³ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 18.7.1739, 35–37.

⁷⁰⁴ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 24.9.1808, 29–31.

⁷⁰⁵ Crawford 2004, 67–68.

There is an indication of a change in the latter part of the century that indicates that the ideal of prudent and overly chaste behaviour had become fashionable again. There is already a hint of what was to come in the Victorian age. Conduct book started to promote the importance of blushing as a sign of female chastity and modesty. In 1705, a conduct book advised young girls to use the device of blushing in order to attract males.⁷⁰⁶ In turn, *The Lady's Companion* (1740) complained that current notions of good education allowed women to behave boldly like men. Blushing, formerly a sign of virtue, was then thought the worst of manners.⁷⁰⁷ Possibly the problem was that chaste and modest behaviour had become overly artificial, a part of polite behaviour that was seen to have nothing to do with one's real character. But the tide clearly turned again by the end of the century. Dr. Gregory, in his legacy to his daughters, wrote in the latter part of the century "When a girl ceases to blush, she has lost the most powerful charm of beauty."⁷⁰⁸ According to Marea Mitchell and Dianne Osland, modesty could be adopted through proper behavioural signs: dress, conversation and lifestyle. Modesty was a form of self-control that in females was strongly connected to their sexual virtue.⁷⁰⁹ Soile Ylivuori proposes that although chastity was promoted as an inner quality, in reality it was only confirmed from external signs that would be readable to other members of society. A pure and chaste mind would also manifest itself in outer appearance and behaviour, so the performance of chastity was conducted through speech and gestures such as blushing or downcast eyes. Neat and prudent dress was also an important sign. Nevertheless, evaluating female chastity was very difficult. Females could adopt these signs of virtue and falsely display chaste and modest behaviour. For instance, some women were said to use make up to achieve the effect of blushing. Not only was chastity dependent on the right kind of outer sign but also on the right setting. A virtuous lady could not be seen in compromising situations such as alone with a man or associated with people with dubious reputation.⁷¹⁰ Even if the girls of this study might have been fully aware of sexual matters, they also knew how to depict themselves according to the ideal of the chaste and modest young female.

There was also a clear contradiction regarding the ideal of the chaste maiden. Modest reserve was not only deemed as proper behaviour for young girls, but it was also something that was thought to enhance their attraction in the eyes of men. Modest reserve was one of "the chief beauties in a female character". A modest girl "avoids the public eye and is disconcerted even at the gaze of admiration...." Additionally, as Nicolas Venette wrote in the early part of the period, females were beautiful by nature and that alone caused men to love them. Beauty granted women power over men. Young beauty

⁷⁰⁶ City and Country Recreation 1705, 26.

⁷⁰⁷ The Lady's Companion 1740, 23.

⁷⁰⁸ Gregory 1794, 10.

⁷⁰⁹ Mitchell & Osland 2005, 7–8.

⁷¹⁰ Ylivuori 2015, 191, 195–198.

was irresistible.⁷¹¹ This indicates that modesty was seen as natural for females, it was also the only state in which they were most appealing to the opposite sex. Yet again, this is inconsistent as girls were supposed to be ignorant of precisely the things they were to preserve at all costs, namely their sexual purity. How could they guard themselves against male advances?⁷¹² But, even some didactic authors criticized the over-prudent behaviour that was demanded from unmarried females. In 1796 John Bennet argued that married women were more pleasing as they had abandoned the shy reserve in company that their unmarried counterparts were obliged to practice. This, according to Bennet, “conceals many of their loveliest graces”. He was clearly advocating marriage, as he continued that the company of sensible men improved female minds whereas “the ceremonious coldness of a virgin state” had kept her at a distance earlier.⁷¹³

One can observe from this discussion that in the eighteenth century young girls and virgins held a particular fascination. But even then this emphasis on girls’ sexuality and attraction was seen as problematic. Proto-feminist writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft criticized the way Enlightenment thinkers, educators, and commentators sexualised girlhood. She attacked men such as Rousseau, who promoted girlish behaviour and innocence in women under the guise of virtue. Parents were also to blame, as they raised girls in ignorance and taught them only to captivate men.⁷¹⁴ Soile Ylivuori shows that even contemporary writers found the contradiction between female virtue and male attraction complicated. Conscious seeking of attention was seen as a sign of vanity and immodesty. To be truly feminine, women should attract male attention and admiration, but this should not be a deliberate act, as that would only attract unwanted and unsuitable husband candidates.⁷¹⁵

The girls of this study were fully aware of the expectations laid at their door and moreover, they recognized the contradictory demands of chaste behaviour and female innocence and modesty that made them alluring. Soile Ylivuori shows how Fanny Burney wanted to depict herself as a “known prude”. In her journals she formed the image of an ideal quiet and modest young girl who was reserved with men.⁷¹⁶ The other girls, appearing in this study often made fun of the double standards of the period. In 1740 Sarah Robinson, aged nineteen, commented about her maidenhood to her sister:

⁷¹¹ Gregory 1794, 10; Venette 1720, 162–163. Same kind of allusion is made in the popular Aristotle’s Master-piece (1702): “Virginitie, in a strict sense, does signifie the Prime, the Chief, the Best of any thing, which makes Men so desirous of marrying Virgins; imagining some great Pleasure to be enjoyed in their Embraces.” Aristotle’s Master-piece 1702, 67.

⁷¹² Tague 2002, 33–34; Mitchell & Osland 2005, 8. See also Jones 1990, 14.

⁷¹³ Bennet 1796, vol. II. 72.

⁷¹⁴ Field 2011, 199–200, 208–209.

⁷¹⁵ Ylivuori 2015, 73–74.

⁷¹⁶ Ylivuori 2015, 226–229.

[---] As a maiden I ought to love the word No, & therefore I am for the side where there is most of them; in the last lines they were used very properly, & in the first they are not improper, for irresolution in those cases becomes a Virgin, & we are supposed to be persuaded by pity, rather than inclination, altho' in my private opinion the arguments of the latter have more force & reason in them. [---]⁷¹⁷

She was to appear irresolute an image that perfectly reflected the ideals of the humble and modestly insecure maid. The last line of the citation is especially revealing: girls were supposed to follow their feelings rather than their desires and sexual urges. They were to be persuaded through their tender hearts and their pity, and should probably feel some gratitude, towards the man, who bestowed them attention.⁷¹⁸ However, Sarah believed that sexual desire had more impact. In another letter, Sarah commented on a ball her sister Elizabeth had attended:

[---] those Virgins dancing sure cou'd not offend the most scrupulous, tho' a modest woman might be exceedingly asham'd at the indecorum of giving her hand to a Man & not be able to conquer her modesty so far as to look him in the face all night, which I fancy had been possibility of being try'd might have prov'd the case with some of your company, yet a with a female friend sure there cou'd be no indecency in the little freedoms which are introduced by dancing; for my part I confess I think Men more necessary at a ball than a fiddle, having often thought a Partners voice more musical than the finest Opera, & his eyes more enlivening than the briskest tune which had ever been play'd; this you will suppose has never happened but when those eyes have become fix'd upon *** & a voice has been adorning my praises or expressed the owners affection.⁷¹⁹

Sarah was clearly not at ease with the presumption that a modest young lady should be ashamed of giving her hand to a man, even while dancing, or was not able to look at him in the eye for the whole evening. For nineteen-year-old Sarah, men were the main attraction of a ball. She exclaimed that she could do without music, but not without a dancing partner into whose lovely eyes she could stare. The last sentence reveals that there was certain gentleman in Sarah's mind, and would do so even without the careful scratching out of his name. At the other end of the spectrum, young ladies could easily charm men with their carefully chosen gestures. In 1812 Lady Sarah Spencer explained that her eldest brother, Lord Althorp, had agreed to chaperone their younger sister at balls

⁷¹⁷ SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Robinson 13.2.1740, 10–11. Markings are from the original edition.

⁷¹⁸ I am grateful to Niina Lehmusjärvi for pointing this out to me.

⁷¹⁹ SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Robinson, 27.1740, 5–6. Markings are from the original edition.

and assemblies. Lady Sarah joked to her brother Robert that some young lady would surely catch his heart. Even the most decently behaving young lord could not easily escape the charms of a society belle who was trained specifically to attract men.⁷²⁰ In fact, young ladies were encouraged to use all sorts of devices to make their attraction known to the objects of their desire. These devices included blushing and pretending to fall in order to lean his hand, placing one's feet correctly, sighs and suggestive and inviting glances.⁷²¹ In the case of young girls the physical manifestation of their emotions was even more enhanced, as forward speech was for them problematic. A well-bred young lady would not express her emotions with words, but she could hint at them through various physical signs and gestures.

The girls of this study did also show modest behaviour in various ways. Especially Fanny Burney often described her own reservation and shyness in male company. In a diary entry from 1768, she related an incident, where their family friend, Mr. Young, had tried to enter the bedchamber where she and her sisters were dressing. Fanny said she hid herself in the closet, but luckily Mr. Young “did not pollute my chamber with his unhallowed feet”. She added that “my cheeks are crimsoned with the blush of indignation while I write it.” And when the son of her step-mother sent her “a love-letter”, she took it as a joke and exclaimed how “maidenly demure & prudish & shy” she was.⁷²² In the pages of her diary, Fanny depicted herself as understanding the rules of proper female behaviour and showed that she reacted in the right way to male advances, namely blushing and running away. Such self-promotion is also evident in the autobiography of Mary Granville. When fifteen-year-old Mary received attentions from a twenty-year-old man called Roberto, she claimed that she “was so young and innocent as to imagine it without design.”⁷²³ Mary stressed that she was an innocent young girl, totally unacquainted with sexual matters, who had no idea what this gentleman was about.

However, even if the girls were thoroughly schooled in these principles, it did not hinder them from criticizing such norms from time to time. In her letters to her sister, twenty-year-old Elizabeth Robinson referred to “the solitary state of virginity” and told of a little house they could inhabit together when they were “poor old maidens.”⁷²⁴ Elizabeth is clearly making fun of unmarried females who have followed the rules of modesty too strictly and shunned all men in their lives. Excessively prudent behaviour made women lonely poor old maids. Elizabeth also mocked the, apparently false, prudery of some ladies. In a letter to her sister, she wrote

⁷²⁰ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer 3.3.1812, 128–130.

⁷²¹ *City and Country Recreation* 1705, 26.

⁷²² FB1, 5, 10. Diane Berrett Brown has shown how closet and female body were paralleled in eighteenth-century French erotic literature. Entering a girl's bedchamber was literally a sign of violating her virginity. Brown 2009, passim.

⁷²³ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 18.

⁷²⁴ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Sarah Robinson, [c.1740] 74–76; EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Sarah Robinson, Oct. 1741, 183–186.

You have probably heard Mr. C_ mentioned as Miss M_ 's lover; but being by her rejected with all the pomp and pride of prudery, he sought one perhaps less fair, but more kind. The siege was not so tedious here, the lady not having the double ramparts of beauty and fortune; [---].⁷²⁵

This citation was certainly written with a humorous touch, but it can be read as a criticism of contemporary standards of female behaviour. Miss M had gone, in Elizabeth's mind, too far in her prudency, even though it was the ideal. It was true that ladies were advised to play hard-to-get and not to surrender easily, but moderation was also a virtue and practice was always different than the ideal. No man would wait too long to win over a reluctant maid. He would eventually turn to a more promising object of affection. In this case, it seems that the next lady was more easily persuaded, as she did not possess either beauty or fortune that would make her too choosy. Finding a husband and maintaining one's honour was certainly a delicate balancing act. Even though these contemplations were humorous in tone, they reveal something very important in the lives of eighteenth-century young girls. Even at the age of twenty, with her life ahead of her, young Elizabeth, and her sister two years her junior, were worried for their futures. Would they also end up as poor old maids, and would they find suitable husbands without appearing too eager or needy?

What this section has once again shown is that reality and ideology rarely went hand in hand. Even though the doctrine of proper female behaviour was well known, applied and internalized, girls also acknowledged the double standards that restricted their behaviour and often cause them difficulties, and were not afraid to criticize them. Feelings and desires were recognized as part of female existence. Next, I look at the impact of love on the lives of the girls.

Keeping one's feelings under control

The girls appearing in this study did fall in love and have crushes over and over again and there are strikingly familiar features in their ponderings, yet their comments reveal attitude towards love that was very much tied to the cultural-historical environment they lived in. Nineteen-year-old Anne Tracy had very little to say about her future husband Mr. Travel in her diaries. She mentions him being "no stranger" in the house and enjoyed him parading in women's clothes. He dined, played cards, had walks with Anne and the young ladies and frequently spent time with the family. But there is no hint whatsoever that the pair might be courting. If Anne was particularly infatuated with him, she didn't reveal it. It is possible that Anne and Mr Travell's courtship simply happened alongside the social activities of dining and conversing. Sally Holloway suggests some couples did this in the eighteenth century, even though exchanging letters was almost a rule of courting.⁷²⁶ Perhaps some evidence of

⁷²⁵ EM vol. II. Elizabeth Robinson to Sarah Robinson, s.a. 13–15.

⁷²⁶ Holloway 2019, 45–46.

Anne's situation has been lost. Sometimes love letters were burned as a precaution in case the courting they told of would not be successful. Anne's diaries have survived from 1723 to 1725. It is probable that she kept a diary much earlier and later on as well, but as to their contents, we have no knowledge.⁷²⁷ Or was this simply her style of writing and her persona? It is also possible that we are witnessing a change in the genre. As possible evidence of this, over seventy years later a girl of eighteen expressed her feelings in much more direct terms on the pages of her diary. In the summer of 1796 Betsey Wynne met Captain Thomas Fremantle. The young captain made a good impression on Betsey. He was pleasing and good natured although not handsome and had "fiery black eyes".⁷²⁸ In September Betsey finally acknowledged her feelings to herself:

I am an odd girl! For all I only think of Fr. I can hardly live without him I scarcely believe I am in love. I should like to know whether he thinks so often of his Betsy as I do of him? and whether he wishes as much as I do to meet again? Surely if all he said before he went is true (as I cannot doubt it) it must be so.⁷²⁹

She hardly believed herself that she was in love, but she could think of nothing other than the captain. Betsey wanted to know whether he thought as much about her and was eager to see her as she him. A few days later Betsey concluded: "poor me, I am in great distress for I cannot help confessing I love that man with all my heart."⁷³⁰ Young Betsey was certainly in love. Her sweetheart was fine-looking and of charming character. In the pages of her diary, Betsey was freer to idealize her loved one and dwell on this intoxicating feeling. Sixteen-year-old Fanny Burney also confessed in her diary that she also wanted love. For Fanny, or so she claimed, love was a strong attachment to someone that did not arise from duty, respect or self-interest. Yet she held little hope that this someone would return her feelings. She vowed that the delight of loving someone would be enough, even though this feeling was not reciprocated. How much of this reflected Fanny's true feelings is uncertain. More likely she was carrying out a literary experiment, a pastiche that used the conventional ways to describe love. The entry closes with "Bless me how I run on! foolish and ill judged!"⁷³¹ which might indicate as much. Fanny knew that being head-over-heals-in love was not what a prudent young lady should want. Writing to her

⁷²⁷ AT 83; AT 27.1.1724, 90; AT 16.5.1724, 102; AT 21.5.1724, 103; AT 22.5.1724, 103; AT 23.5.1724, 103; AT 16.7.1724, 108; AT 18.7.1724, 108; AT 14.8.1724, 111; AT 18.8.1724, 111; AT 25.9.1724, 115; AT 30.9.1724, 115; AT 3.10.1724, 116; AT 4.10.1724, 116; AT 7.10.116; AT 16.11.1724, 120; AT 17.12.1724, 123; AT 11.1.1725, 125; AT 13.1.1725, 125; AT 14.1.1725, 125.

⁷²⁸ WD 24.6.1796, 195–196; WD 28.6.1796, 199; WD 5.7.1796, 201–202.

⁷²⁹ WD 1.9.1796, 223.

⁷³⁰ WD 8.9.1796, 224.

⁷³¹ FB1, 10. Later she also sighed: "Would to Cupid I was in love! – Shall I never feel that so much desired passion - & are you not sick, my dear, at so foolish a wish?" FB1, 15.

younger sister, the already matured twenty-one-year-old Elizabeth Robinson expressed a more sober, but not less determined, view on love:

For my part, I only desire a man to love me all my life, whether it happens to be a long or a short lease of liking, I will give him his acquittance, and he may like what and whom he pleases afterwards; but while I live he must be mine and only mine; nay, he must guide his thoughts and looks to me, nor go so far as to like any one besides.⁷³²

Elizabeth wanted loyalty and fidelity from her future significant other, no matter how short or long that joint journey would be. He was to see her and her only. Yet, to her married friends she wrote that she preferred friendship to love as “the presence of a friend is delightful, their absence supportable; delicacy without jealousy, and tenderness without weakness, transports without madness, and pleasure without satiety.”⁷³³ Elizabeth showed her friends that she had very down-to-earth views on love. She assured them that she would not make hasty decisions concerning marriage and love. To her sister she could express much more freely that she desired love and passion as well. Although these sentiments were based on true feelings it must be noted that expressions of love were a literary convention. Sally Holloway has shown that eighteenth-century couples were familiar with the conventional literary expressions of love and used them in their letters according to their own preferences. In that way they could make sure that their intentions were properly expressed and were taken seriously.⁷³⁴

Apart from literary conventions, the comments of the girls echo the common opinion on how young females should think about love and marriage. Didactic authors often warned girls to be on their guard lest they should suddenly fall in love and become captive to the feeling. But the heart was made to love and, within certain limits, love was the sweetest passion there was. However, it must be regulated. The first sensation must be accompanied by affection, friendship and esteem so it would survive. Mere lust and hedonism would soon extinguish the flame. Moreover, love was a creation of the Almighty and it had an important function. It was vital for procreation and the survival of humankind.⁷³⁵ Female hearts were made to love, but it also meant great danger to them.

⁷³² EM vol. II. Elizabeth Robinson to Sarah Robinson, s.a. [c.1741], 13–15. Contemporary commentators had their own views on love. Physician John Maubray described love in 1724 as affecting the appetite and declared that it is “the Cement of Affections, and the Effect of a certain Congruity of Minds; sympathetically arising from the Diastole and Systole of affected Hearts.” He also called it “a sacred Frenzy of the Soul and a Divine Madness” and “a wonderful satisfactory Death” and “a voluntary Separation of Soul and Body”. Maubray 1724, 49–50. Bernard Lynch acknowledged three types of love: one for the Creator, second for people such as children and parents and a third for the opposite sex. Lynch 1744, 319.

⁷³³ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Mr. & Mrs. Freind. 24.?1741, 187–189.

⁷³⁴ Holloway 2019, chap. 2.

⁷³⁵ D’Ancourt 1743, 27; R.G.: *The Accomplish’d Female Instructor* 1704, 13–14; Gravines 1771, 48–50; Maubray 1724, 51.

The Ladies Friend (1771) warned that young girls especially had to be careful as to the object of their tender feelings. From a very early age, even before they were old enough to enter the social world, their hearts were filled with tenderness and craved an object for their feelings. When girls finally entered to society they were easily taken in by the first sweet-talking man who paid them compliments. The author warned that these men may appear to be the most pleasant and witty, but they were not of the highest merit and were usually intent on seduction, not marriage. When a lady gave her heart, she gave her whole self, and such a gift had to be given with caution.⁷³⁶ Because of the instinctive modesty that girls were supposed to possess, in ideal situation men should win the girl they professed to love *or* the girl they loved with some effort. Integrity, according to Merea Mitchell and Dianne Osland, was the mental equivalent of the hymen. A girl or a woman was not to admit her attachment unless a man showed it first or she was sure her feelings would be returned. Some even thought it impossible that a truly modest woman could develop love for a man prior to him expressing the feeling.⁷³⁷

Given the level of discussion, eighteenth-century girls were obviously aware of the common conceptions that young females were easily driven by their feelings. Twenty-year-old Lady Mary Pierrepont had teased her friend:

After giving me imaginary wit and beauty, you give me imaginary passions, and you tell me I'm in love; if I am, 'tis a perfect sin of ignorance, for I don' so much as know the man's name: [---] Recommend an example to me; and, above all, let me know whether 'tis most proper to walk in the woods, increasing the winds with my sighs, or to sit by a purling stream, swelling the rivulet with my tears; may be, both may do well in their turns.⁷³⁸

⁷³⁶ Gravines 1771, 45–47, 50.

⁷³⁷ Mitchell & Osland 2005, 8–9. Anu Korhonen argues that the early modern conception of love was linked with beauty. Beauty was the cause of love. This idea was inherited from antiquity and especially from the philosophy of Aristotle and Plato. Feelings were born in the axis of desire for and rejection of something a person looked at. Men and women were seen as functioning differently in this regard. Men were thought to be less emotional whereas women, who possessed less intellectual capacity than men, were soft and tender. They were more open to feelings and were easily guided by them. According to some commentators women loved more intensely as they were completed by the man they loved. It is paradoxical that it was the universally acknowledged beauty of women that caused stirrings in men and made them love those enchanting creatures more, but men possessed less beauty women were relatively safe. There was, however, a danger in this. As feelings were seen as automatic, it could be argued that it was the responsibility of women to control themselves as men, driven by love, were forced to act. Korhonen 2005, 117–121. See also Lawlor 2007, 23; Korhonen 2008, 342, 349; Ylivuori 2015, 87–88.

⁷³⁸ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Anne Wortley, 21.8.1709, 9–11.

She was not going to admit that her tender feelings really had an object. Of more interest, Lady Mary mocks the conventional style of describing love. If she was indeed in love, she would be compelled to take solitary walks in the woods and sigh and pine for her loved one. Such expressions of love conformed to contemporary ideas about control of the female body. Girls had to control their expressions and emotions,⁷³⁹ so it was only right that a girl in love should show her emotions in a subtle manner, such as withdrawing from company and sighing. Fanny Burney noted in her diary, with a hint of annoyance, the words of her step-mother, who had claimed that she had a feeling heart.⁷⁴⁰ She was sixteen at the time. As sensibility was more or less a literary topos, it is possible that Fanny tried to demonstrate that she was not one of those Pamelas or Clarissas of her age, who would sigh and pine at every single opportunity. In 1778 and in similar fashion, twenty-one-year-old Lady Louisa Stuart commented that “I have nothing to do with love.”⁷⁴¹ It is also possible that as Lady Louisa had already reached legal maturity, she could slowly resign herself to being an old maid. There is little evidence of Lady Louisa’s love life, apart from an attachment to her second cousin, Colonel William Meadows. But Lady Louisa’s father would not consent to a marriage and Meadows married someone else instead.⁷⁴² Also at the age of twenty-one, when Lady Sarah Spencer described men she had met at social gatherings, she made sure to stress that she was not in danger of falling in love with any of them.⁷⁴³ Lady Sarah’s comments were intended to refute the usual expectations that a mature lady still marriageable age would see every man as a future husband. So, whenever she praised these men in her letters, she was quick to mention that they were not potential partners.

Expressions of love in eighteenth-century society were largely physical in form and were also described as such in writing. Kietäväinen-Sirén points out that in early modern society love was observed through acts, words, gestures and expressions. Body language was very important in determining who was in love because it manifested a person’s inner thoughts and feelings.⁷⁴⁴ Sarah Pearsall, among others, has shown that feelings of sympathy and love were described through bodily reactions in letters to loved ones.⁷⁴⁵ Katie Barclay shows how signs of affection were standard part of eighteenth-century courtship correspondence. Concern for each other’s welfare was one proof of this. The language used was very emotive and couples often used nicknames for each other.⁷⁴⁶ This also shows how girls had to control their emotions and bodily expressions just as they had

⁷³⁹ On the passions and the control of body see Ylivuori 2015, 156–161.

⁷⁴⁰ FB1, 6.

⁷⁴¹ LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson, 8.9.1778, 49–51.

⁷⁴² LS1, 27.

⁷⁴³ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to the Dowager Lady Spencer, 6.7.1808, 21–22; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 4.12.1808, 50–51.

⁷⁴⁴ Kietäväinen- Sirén 2015, 47. See also Holloway 2019, 29–30.

⁷⁴⁵ Pearsall 2008, 90–91, 94–95, 98. See also Jensen 1995, 1–2, 4; Holloway 2019, chap. 1.

⁷⁴⁶ Barclay 2011, 87–89.

to protect their chastity and virtue. This balancing act was something that had to be learned. Violent bodily expressions by females could easily be interpreted as evidence that they were not capable of controlling their emotions. Emotions can also be deemed as a way of bodily control. Ylivuori demonstrates that sensibility manifested itself in bodily expressions as an external performance. Women were to demonstrate their sensibility and emotions through tears, trembling and sighs.⁷⁴⁷

If feelings of love could be manifested in physical appearance, so too could the lack of them. Lady Caroline Fox concluded that her younger sister, fifteen-year-old Lady Louisa Lennox, was not in love with a certain Lord Mornington, as she was not embarrassed when she saw him. But Lady Caroline was also certain that Lady Louisa was still too “childish” to know anything of such matters.⁷⁴⁸ Young Lady Sarah, another girl from the Lennox brood, also caused concern to her elders. In 1762, the elder siblings noticed that seventeen-year-old Lady Sarah and her fiancé Mr. Bunbury did “seem not to be much in love according to my notion of being in love; she seems to me to court him more than he do’s [sic] her, in a free way, (but I would not [have] you say so to anybody)” concluded James, Marquis of Kildare, Lady Sarah’s brother-in-law. A couple of days later he wrote: “Mr Fox and I agreed to-day in regard to Lady Sarah and Mr. Bunbury being the coolest lovers”.⁷⁴⁹ The external signs of affection such as touching, kissing and exchanging of gifts, especially with courting couples were deemed important, and the lack of them caused worry. However, these comments can be interpreted as an indication that a young girl was still too inexperienced to know how to show her interest towards men in a proper manner. The code language of courting was yet another thing that girls had to learn on their way to adulthood.

But girls also expressed stronger reactions in regard to love, something that was also regarded as a female trait. When eighteen-year-old Betsey Wynne had to part with her beloved Captain Fremantle, she

felt the greatest pain as soon as I awoke this morning for the first thing that I heard was the fleet is in sight. Directly after being dressed I walked on deck found the poor C.F. who was still more afflicted if possible than I was. We both looked mighty stupid for we could not speak two words. Nothing so dismal as the breakfast we all sat down in painful silence and forced ourselves to eat.⁷⁵⁰

Betsey was suffering and showed her feelings her lover by her sullen face and silence. She even lost her appetite. Because of their sensibility, women were vulnerable to

⁷⁴⁷ Ylivuori 2015, 128.

⁷⁴⁸ CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, countess of Kildare, 26.8.1758, 178–179.

⁷⁴⁹ CEL vol. I. James, marquis of Kildare to Emily, marchioness of Kildare, 20.4.1762, 118–120; CEL vol. I. James, marquis of Kildare to Emily, marchioness of Kildare, 27.4.1762, 123–124.

⁷⁵⁰ WD 14.7.1796, 206.

emotion-related illnesses that could, at worst, be fatal. Their bodies were too fragile to handle deep feelings. Loss of appetite, for example, was a typical symptom of excessive sensibility.⁷⁵¹ Possibly Betsey wanted to emphasise her strong feelings towards her loved-one by demonstrating how she physically suffered when they had to part. When she wrote of it she was direct and to the point: they parted with a broken heart.⁷⁵² Twenty-one-year-old Lady Louisa Stuart also suffered over love. In 1778, she wrote to her sister that their mother had suspected her “for looking melancholy” because a certain someone had neglected her and she had “been fretting about *him*.” Louisa confessed to her sister that there was “something truth in it”, but not to her mother.⁷⁵³ Although Lady Louisa’s reaction was much milder than Betsey’s, her mother’s concern was not unfounded. It was believed that too violent stirrings of the heart could be fatal to a girl’s health. Immoderate passions, such as love or grief, could lead to madness. Greensickness, the signature disease of virgins and young girls, could “proceed from a longing Desire after the Enjoyment of some particular Person; or, in general, from a violent Inclination to exchange a single Life for the State of Matrimony.”⁷⁵⁴ Sensibility derived from the nervous system, and females and young people possessed more delicate nerves than males and adults. Females were thought to be inclined to feel more passionately and more tenderly than men. Thus, in the second half of the eighteenth century the mechanistic Newtonian model was, at least partly, replaced by physiology that concentrated on the nerves and nervous system. Finer nerves caused more delicate feelings.⁷⁵⁵ Lovesickness, which caused consumption, was a fashionable disease in the early modern period. Young and slender people were especially prone to it, and so were women, whose humoural constitution was wet and cold, although, it was deemed more dangerous to young men with their excessive and hotter character. Because of the more delicate constitution of females, violent stirrings of mind might cause them to faint or even go mad. The first impression of love in pure minds of girls might make them obsessive if they could not control their feelings. This emphasis on female passions did not change in the eighteenth century with the cult of sensibility. Sudden passions stretched and damaged the nerves and the loss of the object of love caused consumption, and in the worst case, death.⁷⁵⁶

It also seems that great passions of the heart were reserved for the young and hot-headed. A short entry in her memoir reveals the sentiments of sixteen-year-old Mary Berry about youth and love: “1779. I became acquainted with Mr. Bowman. Suffered as people do at sixteen from the passion which, wisely disapproved of, I resisted and dropped.”⁷⁵⁷ Nothing more is known about this Mr. Bowman or Mary’s feelings towards him. The entry

⁷⁵¹ Ylivuori 2015, 129.

⁷⁵² WD 14.7.1796, 207–208.

⁷⁵³ LS1 Lady Louisa Stuart to Lady Caroline Dawson, 26.7.1778, 25–26.

⁷⁵⁴ Lynch 1744, 322; *The Ladies Dispensatory* 1739, 97.

⁷⁵⁵ Porter 2000, chap. 12; Ylivuori 2015 125–131; Lawlor 2007, 44.

⁷⁵⁶ Lawlor 2007, 16–18, 21–23, 54, 56–57; Holloway 2019, 31–34.

⁷⁵⁷ MB, 9.

reveals that Mary thought at least later in life, that is was a mere trifle of youth something a girl of sixteen would do. Apparently her family disapproved of the match and she was wise enough to drop her fancy. At the other end of the age-spectrum, any such trifles shown by respectable elderly people caused remarks. Seventeen-year-old Betsey Wynne related in her diary that “M. de Bombelles was much afflicted for Mde de Diedes departure. The poor man is indeed grown quite a fool as it is ridiculous that a man of his age qualities, etc etc. should fall in love. Everybody laughs at him.” And in November she mentioned Lord Bristol who “is quite a fool, got himself in several scrapes in England he has been a great favourite of Mde. de Schaden, caused her to separate from her husband, he has been in love with the princess, told her to day in presence of her husband that he did not deserve such a wife.”⁷⁵⁸ Young people had still to develop their self-restraint, so it was thought only natural that young girls had imprudent crushes. But, when such foolishness occurred among mature people, it was ridiculous and out of place. Philippa Maddern, who has studied the late-medieval medical views on children, shows that in contemporary thinking children started to gain reason from the age of seven onwards. Especially children between seven and fourteen were still thought to have been humourally moist and therefore physically and mentally in a stage of change and unstable. Children were not thought capable of experiencing courage or deep joy. Reason was seen as the origin of true emotions. But, children were too mobile and not sufficiently heated by blood so that they could produce reason. As irrational beings they could not experience true feelings.⁷⁵⁹ One can deduce from this that when the inner heat started to grow, being in its peak in youth and adulthood, the feelings were the strongest. Towards the old age, the inner heat started to fade, wherefore the feelings and reactions should have become milder.

Despite the foolery of youth, when it came to the selection of a future spouse, love was not a matter to be taken lightly, and elite girls knew it full well. Young Elizabeth Robinson expressed her views on love and matrimony on several occasions. In 1738, eighteen-year-old Elizabeth told her friends, what sort of man she would desire:

He should have a great deal of sense and prudence to direct and instruct me, much wit to divert me, beauty to please me, good humour to indulge me in the right, and reprove me gently when I am in the wrong: money enough to afford me more than I can want, and as much as I can wish; and constancy to like me as long as other people do, that is, till my face is wrinkled by age, or scarred by the small pox; and after that I shall expect only civility in the room of love,[---].⁷⁶⁰

Her ideal man should have enough good sense that he could be able to instruct her, wit to please her and enough money to maintain them both in a comfortable life. She then went

⁷⁵⁸ WD 20.9.1795, 181; WD 17.11.1795, 182–183.

⁷⁵⁹ Maddern 2014, 126–128.

⁷⁶⁰ EM vol. I Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, duchess of Portland, 11. ?1738, 22–24.

on to list further qualities: he should be good-looking, of pleasing character, loving and understandable and above all constant, sufficiently so to like her still when she became old and wrinkled. Finding a suitable husband was important and she had no false notions that an “obsequious and obedient lover” would not turn into a haughty and imperious husband: after all that would be “a metamorphosis as is not to be equaled in all Ovid’s collection.”⁷⁶¹ Two years later, at the age of twenty, she said that she would not make her decision based purely on love, but also consideration and advice from her friends and family. However, she also thought that love was the necessary foundation for marriage.⁷⁶² Elizabeth’s list corresponds well with the usual contemporary expectations of a good marriage. A good husband was amiable, generous and had enough good sense to guide his wife. A well-made marital choice was based on prudence and reason, not just love. In 1712, Lady Mary Pierrepont had to put her attitude towards marital love to the test. Young Mary had told her relatives that she did not accept the man of her father’s choice.

I told my Intention to all my nearest Relations; I was surpriz’d at their blameing it, to the greatest degree. I was told they were sorry I would ruin my selfe, but if I was so unreasonable they could not blame my Father whatever he inflicted on me. I objected I did not love him. They made answer they found no Necessity of Loveing; if I liv’d well with him, that was all was requir’d of me, and that if I consider’d this Town I should find very few women in love with their Husbands and yet a manny happy. It was in vain to dispute with such prudent people; they look’d upon me as a little Romantic, and I found it impossible to perswade them that liveing in London at Liberty was not the height of happynesse.⁷⁶³

The response of her relations reflects the more material aspects of marriage. Love was not necessary in contracting a marriage. Other factors, such as social position, good connections and wealth mattered more. Lady Mary’s family members thought her fanciful and romantic in objecting to a suitable match, on the basis that she did not love the man. She was not the only girl to receive such reproaches. At the age of seventeen Mary Granville faced similar comments when she refused the advances of a much older man. Her aunt “called me childish, ignorant, and silly, and that if I did not know what was for my own interest, my friends must judge for me.”⁷⁶⁴ Mary’s refusal was not, however, totally ungrounded even according to contemporary thinking. It was thought that proper spouses had to be of equal temper, age and social standing. Mutual affection was ideal, but if excessive passion overruled all other considerations it was considered madness.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid.

⁷⁶² EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, duchess of Portland, 25.1.1740, 50–52; EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Anne Donellan, 1.1. (1740), 60–62.

⁷⁶³ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 26.7.1712, 133–136.

⁷⁶⁴ MD Vol. I. Autobiography, 24.

Excessive passion was also problematic in that it prevented the parents' consent and therefore threatened the patriarchal order.⁷⁶⁵ Tague stresses that the eighteenth-century ideal of marital love was strong but controlled emotional attachment. It was not only sexual passion, but not simply mutual esteem, either.⁷⁶⁶ Although there was no inherent objection to people being head over heels in love, mutual affection and compatibility in age and characteristics were thought good foundations for a successful marriage. It was, therefore, only reasonable that both Marys refused their suitors on those grounds.

Was love actually such an important factor in eighteenth-century marriages? The issue has been debated. Amanda Vickery points out, that new ideas did not necessarily go hand in hand with actual behaviour. It may be that the rise of the culture of sensibility, especially in the novels that emphasized female passion, sympathy and expressions of feeling, exaggerated young people's aspirations and behaviour. It is also worth remembering that the elite, especially landed nobility, might have used the rhetoric of love to give an extra luster to an otherwise suitable or even mercenary marriage contract. Love did not conquer all, but it was a nice bonus.⁷⁶⁷ Ingrid Tague shows that as the control of female sexuality adopted a new strategy in the course of the eighteenth century, so too did the rhetoric of love become crucial. This is evident in the ways societal commentators of the early eighteenth-century showed great concern about of the mercenary nature of marriage. They complained that marriage was a mere business contract formed for the sake of convenience. For women to accept their subordinate role, they had to be in love with their spouse. Love made the matrimonial state pleasurable and enabled women to obey her husband. Love was not, she suggests, understood as an internal feeling, even if it was represented as one, but it created the conditions in which both parties accepted their roles.⁷⁶⁸ That love was in danger of degenerating into mere rhetoric can be seen in the comments of twenty-one-year-old Lady Mary Pierrepont. She wrote:

People talk of Being in Love just as widows do of Affliction [---] I never knew a Lover that would not willingly secure his Interest as well as his mistresse or if one must be abandonnd had not the prudence (amongst all his distractions) to consider, that A woman was but a Woman, and money was a thing of more real merit than the whole sex put together.⁷⁶⁹

For Lady Mary, it was self-evident that there were other factors, more pressing ones than love, when people formed marital alliances. Yet, everyone in the process of courting or

⁷⁶⁵ Vickery 1999 (1998), 39–41; Barclay 2011, 87.

⁷⁶⁶ Tague 2001, 90.

⁷⁶⁷ Vickery 1999 (1998), 41.

⁷⁶⁸ Tague 2002, 39–40.

⁷⁶⁹ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 22.8.1710, 55–56.

making marriage contract claimed they were in love. It was a similar rhetorical device to that used by recently widowed women who claimed that they were poor, afflicted and grief-ridden.

Girls were, according to the ideals of the day, supposed to show their feelings, or lack of them, through strictly regulated bodily expressions, in the same way that they demonstrated their chastity and virtue. This control imperative appears inconsistent with the concept that youth was the time of both mental and physical turmoil. Still, as females were thought prone to excessive reactions due to their innate sensibility and weakness, girls had to learn how to regulate their reactions and learn the proper language of love and courtship. Girls were brought up with the expectations of ideal female behaviour and thus accordingly followed them. Nevertheless, they also expressed much stronger feelings than was thought proper for them. These expressions were written down in the pages of their diaries or letters to siblings and friends. These were, in a way, private contemplations, feelings and thoughts not expressed in interaction with their subject. The writers were not afraid to criticize the social norms on the page, either. They agreed that love was an important part of a marital relationship, but its dangers, especially in excess, were also recognized. Next, I look at what happened when girls could not control their feelings and desires, when their virtue and good reputation were put in danger.

Girls forgetting their place

Love is powerful feeling that could have devastating results if it was not kept under control. So what happened when things actually went wrong? It has been believed that keeping one's reputation was a careful balancing act for women as every indication of immodest behaviour could be read as a licentious behaviour or overt sexual advance. Sexual misconduct could lead to social exile for married women,⁷⁷⁰ but was this also true of unmarried girls? And if not, how was their misbehaviour received and judged.

A good reputation was the greatest possession a lady could have according to the ideal, but young Sarah Robinson was rather disgusted at the way some women enhanced their own good name by censoring others. In 1740, she related a story to her sister Elizabeth about a married woman who had eloped with her lover. "The shame of our sex flies fast" wrote the nineteen-year-old Sarah. Instead of condemning her, she criticized

⁷⁷⁰ Hannah Greig points out that it was not the adultery *per se* that led to social exile but the way that these women acted against social norms and expectations. Pregnancy was a more disgraceful mark of adultery than the affair itself. Retirement to the countryside, for example, was an expected sign of proper penitent conduct in these cases. If they refused to act accordingly, these women could be shut out of the polite social life completely. However, such social ostracism was not the lot of the men involved. Greig 2013, 195–217. See also Tague 2002, 177–182.

other women who were quick to tarnish Mrs. Jennings's name.⁷⁷¹ This was of course a case of a married woman, but girls had to face the questioning of their morality and reputation too. In 1793, the Wynne sisters were in trouble with the young boys of de Bombelles family who was living in the same house with them. Fifteen-year-old Betsey wrote in her diary in January:

My little sisters were found a keeping a very impudent conversation with the Boys they are no more to play with them for my part by what passed to night I have such a good proof Of the naughtiness of Mr. Louis that I shall have nothing more to say with any of all those Children. All the Vices that has Mr. L. is sayed Eugenia gives them him my Sister makes him a chaterer a Gamester and god knows what they say more. If he would imitate her in every thing they might be very happy! But He'll never be much good nor any of his Brothers. They can find some thing to say to others children But cannot see the faults of their own.⁷⁷²

Her younger sister had been in contact with the boys, even though they had been prohibited from doing this. Instead of condemning the behaviour of her sisters, Betsey drew a very unfavourable picture of Mr. Louis, the young son of the family, whom she described as "a gamester". Moreover, Betsey criticized the parents, who were unable to see fault in their own children but were willing to do so with others. The next incident occurred the following March. It was especially the relations between thirteen-year-old Eugenia and the eldest son of the neighbouring family that caused concern. The parents of the boy were convinced that the two of them were falling in love. Betsey did not believe that her younger sister was in love, and her mother agreed, who "knowing which is Eugenia's manner of thinking dont [sic] mind it and laughs at the fears of the young boy's parents." But Madame de Bombelles demanded that the two should be kept apart. Betsey thought that the boy's parents should "hold their tongues and let one mind ones own children alone."⁷⁷³ Unsuitable interaction between the children was of course the concern of their parents. Eugenia's mother clearly knew her, and was not ready to believe rumours of her unsuitable behaviour, and her sister Betsey agreed. This shows that a girl's good reputation was not as vulnerable as one might think. Not every malignant rumour ruined her good name. To cause real damage to a reputation, something of more substance was needed as well. At least Eugenia's family was not ready to believe the worst of her.

⁷⁷¹ [---] the Women are never silent on this head, the immodest want to bring every one upon an equality with themselves, & the ~~im~~modest are desirous of showing their Virtue by their censures & of selling it off by the comparaision of the failing of others, & think to turn to their honour what is really the disgrace of the sex. SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Robinson, 27.1740, 5–6.

⁷⁷² WD 13.1.1793, 134–135.

⁷⁷³ WD 1.3.1793, 136–137.

There were instances when girls were duly worried about their reputation. It was almost impossible for a respected young girl to meet a young man in private, without causing suspicions of an intimate relationship. When she was seventeen Betsey Wynne was annoyed when a young man rode with her to town. She did not find his company flattering at all and worried that someone would see her alone with “that good for nothing Coxcomb.”⁷⁷⁴ Betsey did not want to be thought connected to a man she did not like in the least. Even parents took precautions when there was a danger that an unwanted suitor might go too far. When fifteen-year-old Mary Granville attracted the attentions of a young man, her mother “cautioned me not to leave my room in a morning till she sent for me down, and never permitted me to walk about without a servant, when she or my father could not go with me.”⁷⁷⁵ In these cases the man in question was not to their liking, but even when the male company was pleasing, it was still difficult to organize a rendezvous in secret. Lady Mary Pierrepont was very frustrated, when she planned to meet her secret lover Edward Wortley Montagu and looked for good places to meet, but there was no acquaintance’s home they could use: “It would be impossible to speak without observation”, Lady Mary complained. She finally decided it was the easiest thing to meet at St. James’ drawing room. There they could enter into conversation without raising much suspicion.⁷⁷⁶ She could not come to town without the company of her sister-in-law and could not go anywhere that her sister-in-law did not want to go. Besides, Lady Mary would not rely on her secrecy. “I could not walk out alone, without giving suspicion to the whole family; should I be watched, and seen to meet a man – judge of the consequences!”⁷⁷⁷ Her father was already suspicious. Lady Mary feared that he would soon find out about his daughter’s correspondence with Wortley. She suspected that her own sister Frances acted as a spy for her father, she was not left alone for one minute.⁷⁷⁸ Girls had to learn the proper use of space to preserve their good name. Being unchaperoned with a man was a very compromising situation that could tarnish the girl’s reputation as chaste. The sexual connotation of these situations was self-evident. Therese Braunschneider, who has studied the concept of coquette in eighteenth-century society, demonstrates that young females, who were labeled as such in fact represented in the emergence of the modern individual taking it upon themselves to make their own choices. The discourse of the coquettes includes the idea that these young females chose not to submit themselves to wifhood and matrimony. Instead, they chose to be free. Even more challenging to the ideological chaste image of the eighteenth-century woman, was, that these young ladies chose to have several men at the same time.⁷⁷⁹ Katie Barclay claims

⁷⁷⁴ WD 3.7.1795, 178.

⁷⁷⁵ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 19.

⁷⁷⁶ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 15.2.1711, 76–77.

⁷⁷⁷ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, s.a. 178–183.

⁷⁷⁸ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 7.3.1711, 87–88; MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 7.5.1710, 39–40.

⁷⁷⁹ Braunschneider 2009, 11–12.

the woman had real control in courtship only when she had more than one suitor to choose from. Women were allowed to correspond with several candidates. This happened under the guise of friendship, enabling the lady to withdraw without losing her reputation. As men were less concerned about their sexual reputation they could express themselves more freely.⁷⁸⁰ Even though gallantry and flirting were acceptable behaviour in the elite social world, certain rules applied and these were not to be crossed.

In the game of love and courting, young ladies had to take careful steps. In 1768, Fanny Burney, then sixteen, wrote that Miss Tilson had formed an attachment with Fanny's cousin, Charles Burney. This young lady had good credentials; youth (seventeen years old), high birth, education, beauty and fortune. However, the man in question was not persuaded. It would be tempting to assume that Fanny disapproved of the way Miss Tilson declared her sentiments by making such a romantic gesture as dropping a note in a glove.⁷⁸¹ After all, the gentleman in question made his indifference clear and "she still remains constant."⁷⁸² Miss Tilson made the first move and, even though Mr. Burney refused her, insisted on pursuit. Lady Mary Pierrepont also took a calculated risk by making the first advance towards Edward Wortley Montagu in 1710. She wrote to him: "Perhaps you'll be surprizd at this Letter. I have had manny debates with my selfe before I could resolve on it. I know it is not Acting in Form..."⁷⁸³ Lady Mary was aware that a well-bred young lady should not make such a move, but should only encourage the man to do so, and should only hint at her feelings. Eighteenth-century courtship was an elaborate game in which the female was passive and the man active. The male suitor pursued and tried to win the lady's heart with gifts and declarations of love and the woman was supposed to behave with reserve and avoid showing her own feelings. She was to relent only when the marriage was settled.⁷⁸⁴ Like Miss Tilson, Lady Mary chose to ignore such rules of decorum. In Lady Mary's case, the gamble paid off, but Miss Tilson received merely the ridicule of others. Most girls chose to be more cautious. When Lady Sarah Spencer finally found the man for her, Mr. Lyttelton, she was careful not to raise any suspicion of this, before the matter was more secure. Therefore, she casually described him as a "mixture of brilliant wit, childish nonsense, frivolous small-talk, and a universal sort of scrambling information." To her grandmother, Lady Sarah said that he was a buffoon, although she confessed to her brother Robert that he "dances out of time, and is remarkably handsome."⁷⁸⁵ Obviously, Lady Sarah was very careful not to give any hint of her feelings to her family, until she was herself sure of Mr. Lyttelton's intentions.

⁷⁸⁰ Barclay 2011, 90–92.

⁷⁸¹ FB1, 34. See also footnote 96 on page 35.

⁷⁸² FB1, 35–36.

⁷⁸³ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 28.3.1710, 24–25.

⁷⁸⁴ Barclay 2011, 90–92; Pyrhönen 2014, 212.

⁷⁸⁵ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Hon. Robert Spencer 7.7.1812, 133–134; SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Georgiana, Dowager Countess Spencer 29.8.1812, 135.

Sometimes Cupid's arrows missed their mark. In 1795, fifteen-year-old Betsey Wynne noted in her diary the unfortunate passion of a certain Miss Floyer. She had formed an attachment to a rope dancer, which was highly unsuitable for a young lady of the elite. The lady asked every morning after his health and sent him gifts. Betsey thought her mad and found it inconceivable that someone could fall in love with a person so far beneath herself. The man was not even handsome!⁷⁸⁶ Whether his unattractiveness as an object of affection was caused by his low social position or not can only be guessed. Miss Floyer had given in to romantic passion, forgetting completely her position, and I suggest that this is what concerned Betsey the most. Even at the age of fifteen, Betsey had internalized the rules of proper behaviour towards men. Even though young girls were allowed some freedom in their behaviour, cross-class relations, especially with sexual connotations, were prohibited and harmful.

We can conclude from these instances that the rules of sexuality were far more complicated than just drawing the line between prohibited and suitable behaviour. As Kim Phillips points out, between the extremes of obvious rule-breaking were flirtation, play, humour and titillation. The sexuality of elite girls was carefully channelled: it could include anything but actual sexual contact.⁷⁸⁷ Katharine Kittredge argues that the line between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour has never been clear or consistent. Female virtue and sexual status were monitored in two ways: firstly by controlling the woman's own desires and secondly by restraining the sexual desire of males around her so that she would remain physically chaste. Therefore, just the possibility of sexual transgression was thought problematic. The punishments for inappropriate behaviour were usually subtle but had heavy impact. Social ostracism was in particular a very efficient way of controlling people's actions. Those who failed to deliver the perfect female gender performance would soon find their friends disappearing and the doors to society closing.⁷⁸⁸

4.2 Changing statuses. From the marriage market to motherhood

All girls anticipated womanhood, and at some stage they must have felt that girlhood was coming to an end. But how they recognised that last stage is not clear, nor is it easy for the modern researcher to define it. I have already mentioned that legal maturity at the age of twenty-one did bring certain freedom, but unmarried girls were still under the rule of their elders in many respects, unless they had enough economic independence. Marriage certainly changed the lives of every woman. And what about motherhood? After all, creating new life was then considered the purpose of every marriage. Was motherhood

⁷⁸⁶ WD 28.4.1795, 175–176.

⁷⁸⁷ Phillips 2003, 162–163.

⁷⁸⁸ Kittredge 2003, 4, 6.

the final mark of adulthood? These are the questions I ponder in this section. I will start by looking at the complicated road to wifedom, where the girls yet again had to balance with their own desires and the wishes of their family and friends, who invariably intervened. Lastly, I will study what happened when the new mother held her firstborn in her arms. Did she and her associates finally regard her as a woman?

The perfect match

The elite girls were clearly aware of the significance of marriage and its impact on their future happiness. They tried to tread carefully, thereby showing that they were obedient daughters and youngsters needing the guidance of their elders in such an important matter as marriage. Ideally, they thoughtfully contemplated both the positive and negative aspects of matrimony. Eighteen-year-old Elizabeth Robinson acted as the proper young lady in 1738, when she wrote to her friend, in her usual playful tone, about her prospects of marriage:

I assure you I am not going to tie the fast knot you mention; whenever I have any thoughts of it I shall acquaint your Grace with it, and send you a description of the gentleman with his good qualities and faults in full length.⁷⁸⁹

Elizabeth assured her friend, she would inform and ask for advice, when such an important thing as marriage, was on the agenda. Her comment indicates that eighteen-year-old girl was in no hurry to become a matron. The reason for her hesitation might be that revealed in a letter to her mother in October 1741: “Love has a good right over the marriages of men, but not of women...for men raise their wives to their ranks, women stoop to their husbands, if they choose below themselves.”⁷⁹⁰ Sixteen-year-old Fanny Burney also expressed, in the privacy of her diary, some negative sides of married life. She was strictly against marrying and when she attended a wedding in

⁷⁸⁹ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, duchess of Portland, 11.1738, 22–24. It seems that this was common procedure for all unmarried women regardless of age. Miss Ann Granville (the younger sister of Mary Granville b.1707) sneakily asked her friend’s opinion about the man who was making an offer of marriage for her. This was classic “asking for a friend in secret” situation. Miss Granville wrote that “The person I speak of has no notion of happiness in a married life, but what must proceed from an equality of sentiments and mutual good opinion; and therefore she would be glad to know of Mr. D. has agreeable conversation, generous principles, and is not a lawyer in his manners.” MD vol. II. Ann Granville to Lady Throckmorton, 7.2.1739, 74–76. Companionship and security for life was all she needed. In the proceeding letter Miss Granville wrote that the two parties were going to meet and then friends would be consulted. MD vol. II. Ann Granville to Lady Throckmorton, 20.2.1739, 76–78.

⁷⁹⁰ Elizabeth Robinson to her mother Elizabeth Robinson, 20.10.1741. Cited in Ylivuori 2018, 59. For some reason this letter is not in the collection used in this study.

1768, she exclaimed: “O heavens! how short a time does it take to put an eternal end to a Woman’s liberty! I don’t think they were a ¼ of an Hour in the Church altogether.”⁷⁹¹ Unmarried women had, theoretically at least, a similar legal status to men, whereas a married woman was legally represented by her husband. By marrying, she lost her legal identity. She acquired the social status of her husband. Under the common law, the husband controlled the property that the wife brought into the marriage i.e. her dowry; however, under equity a girl’s family could arrange a legal marriage settlement which gave the girl a separate estate and pin money that secured her financial position and a jointure if she survived her husband.⁷⁹² But she had no self-evident right to these. No wonder then, that both Elizabeth and Fanny were not so keen to lose their liberty, even though being an unmarried lady made them dependent on others in a different way. For an elite lady, the wrong choice of marriage partner might also mean a decrease in social status.

We know that in 1741 twenty-one-year-old Elizabeth turned down a proposal of marriage by gentleman Mr. B. (probably Brockman). Apparently the suitor did not take her decision well, but Elizabeth was determined. But, in August 1742, Elizabeth, at the age of twenty-two, married Edward Montagu, the fifth son of Charles, Earl of Sandwich, a mathematician and a gentleman, twenty-one years her senior.⁷⁹³ Elizabeth, therefore, chose a partner above her and rose in the ranks of society. For Fanny Burney, it took 25 years to tie the knot, but eventually she married a French military officer, M. Alexander D’Arblay, at the age of 41, on 31 July 1793.⁷⁹⁴

Eighteenth-century girls clearly understood that marriage was a matter of great consequence. The wrong choice of partner would haunt someone for a lifetime, as it was not possible to get rid of a bad husband. Marriage was a life-long commitment. Divorce was possible for the wealthy, albeit with some social stigma, but for most women, marriage was “till death do us part.” A well-made marital choice was thought to bring contentment in life and ensure the stability of society. Financial and social status continued to be important factors in the eighteenth century in determining the suitable spouse candidate, but within these parameters, other factors such as love, good reputation and character played a crucial role. For women, a good choice of marriage partner was crucial as their future personal and social opportunities were largely

⁷⁹¹ FB1, 17.

⁷⁹² Erickson 1995 (1993), 24–26; Mendelson & Crawford 1998, 37–38; Shoemaker 1998, 91; Tague 2002, 74; Simonton 2011, 35–36. There were, however, a few exceptions to this rule. A lady who was noble in her own right did not lose her title if she married a commoner. If the title was received from a previous marriage, then she would lose it by such a second marriage. If a dowager remarried to a peer of inferior rank, she would also retain her previous title. *The Laws respecting women 1777*, 5.

⁷⁹³ Doran 1873, 30–32; Climenson 1902, 108, 112–114.

⁷⁹⁴ Dobson 1993, 182.

determined by it.⁷⁹⁵ But what might have appeared a bad choice to many, a marriage to a man of lower social rank, might be a good choice for other reasons. Soile Ylivuori has suggested that women showed a desire for independence when they chose a marriage partner below their station. The difference in social status would enable the woman to have more equality with her husband.⁷⁹⁶ However, Ylivuori does not explain why Elizabeth Robinson, one of her subjects, who was a keen advocate of female independence, chose to marry a conventionally suitable man, when she in fact had opportunities to choose otherwise. If Elizabeth was keen to maintain her independence, why did she choose to marry a nobleman and become a conventional elite matron? I suggest that age was the key factor here. Elizabeth's views probably changed during her lifetime; that happens to us all. Perhaps she became a fiery bluestocking and advocate of women's rights when she was older than twenty-three, her age when she married her husband. At that time her own future and financial security would have been uppermost in her mind.

Marriage was not just a matter of the girl's own choice because young lovers were not thought capable of making a life-long commitment by themselves. It was highly advisable to seek advice from their elders. Some contemporary authors argued that parents should be blamed if girls were thinking of husbands too soon. Girls were told to be good as that was the only way to get a husband. They were exposed to courtship in an age when they had not enough knowledge of the world.⁷⁹⁷ There were, however, some exceptions: among others George Saville, Lord Halifax (1716) was worried that young females were not allowed to follow their own hearts. He concluded that young girls were too modest to refuse their parents' choice for a spouse. This could lead to aversion or even hatred in the marriage, which were not good foundations for marital happiness.⁷⁹⁸ Dr. Gregory (1794) expressed his opinion that girls should marry for their own happiness and not for the public good.⁷⁹⁹ More often daughters duly sought the advice and approval of their parents, especially the father. When she was fifteen Mary Granville showed the proper behaviour of an obedient daughter when a young man called "Roberto" made his proposal of marriage. Mary refused to speak to him until he had addressed her father. Her father assured the young man that his daughter had no fortune, so he thought Roberto's family and friends would most likely not approve his choice.⁸⁰⁰ After vain attempts, Roberto changed his tactics and pressed Mary to elope with him. Mary insisted in her memoirs that she was highly offended at this proposal and refused. At least from hindsight, Mary declared that she was wise enough to refuse the young man's proposal of elopement and

⁷⁹⁵ Vickery 1999 (1998), 39–41; Tague 2002, 73; Simonton 2011, 29.

⁷⁹⁶ Ylivuori 2018, 61–62.

⁷⁹⁷ Essex 1722, 95–97; Seymour 1754, 176, 177, 182.

⁷⁹⁸ Halifax 1716, 19.

⁷⁹⁹ Gregory 1794, 38.

⁸⁰⁰ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 19.

was glad that the whole affair was over. In this way she depicted herself as a well-bred young lady who knew the rules of decorum.⁸⁰¹ When Fanny Burney received an offer of marriage from Mr. Thomas Barlow in May 1775, she turned to her family for advice, even though she was already twenty-three years old. The gentleman made his intentions known in a letter. Fanny could not believe that a man, she had known only for a short time, would be serious in passionate declaration. She was certain that she would never consent to a man she did not highly value.⁸⁰² But, she could make decision alone:

[---] as I do not consider myself as an independant member of society, & as I knew I could depend upon my Father's kindness, I thought it incumbent upon me to act with his Concurrence, I therefore, at Night, before I sent an answer, shewed him the Letter.⁸⁰³

Fanny felt that as an unmarried young lady, albeit a legally mature one, she was not a fully independent member of society and would, therefore, need the guidance of her father. She relied on his kindness and showed him the letter, she had received. Her father first proposed that Fanny should write back to him and explain that their acquaintance had been too short for such a declaration. Fanny herself, feared that such an answer would lead him to believe that further acquaintance would be acceptable. Then, her father concluded that she should not answer at all. Fanny found this also problematic. Then she asked her sister's advice. Hetty favoured the young man and tried to persuade her younger sister to think again. In the end, even her grandmother and aunts were acquainted of the affair. They all persuaded Fanny to accept Mr. Barlow's offer. But Fanny was determined and wrote: "I assured them I was not intimidated, & that I had rather a thousand Times Die an old maid than be married, except from affection."⁸⁰⁴ Her reply to Mr. Barlow was short and firm. Fanny used cold civility to inform Mr. Barlow that she

⁸⁰¹ Ibid. Eliza Dawson showed similar exemplary behaviour when she received addresses from an army officer. The 15-year-old Eliza was tormented by the secret and soon revealed everything to her father. She was immediately told to refuse him. As this was first of her attachments, later in life, Eliza claimed that she had not been in love, was sure that the captain had not been either, and was rather amused at her "simple credulity". This she concluded was due to a romantic imagination cultivated by novel-reading. The following years saw several suitors although there was "nothing of the coquette" in her. Yet, all were refused. Eliza confessed that the only one she could have loved was the eldest brother of school-friend Ann Cleaver. The young man was a Cambridge educated law-student, manly and with an ingenuous mind and pleasing manners. Eliza allowed him to ask her father's permission for courting but at his rejection this relationship came to an end. Once more Eliza said she had accepted her father's better judgment. *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 24–25.

⁸⁰² FB2, 117, 119.

⁸⁰³ FB2, 119.

⁸⁰⁴ FB2, 119.

was in no way able to accept his proposal on the grounds that they had known each other for only a short time.⁸⁰⁵ It is noteworthy that even though Fanny's family favoured the match they let her to decide on her own.

Although marriage required other things besides love, the girls disapproved of blatantly mercenary matches. In 1740 nineteen-year old Sarah Robinson wrote to her sister Elizabeth that a certain Mr Knowler was going to comfort himself from the cruelty of his former love by marrying a woman with £6000 a year. Sarah smartly observed that he has "so proper value for money that he was not likely to repent his choice."⁸⁰⁶ Lady Mary Pierrepont, explained in a letter to her friend that "an old Maid" living in the same street and with no money of her own had married a man with £7000 a year and £40,000 of ready money. The bride was to have £3000 worth of jewels and more besides. Lady Mary said no-one would envy the bride, as the man she was going to marry was "filthy, frightful, odious and detestable." Lady Mary herself "would turn away such a footman for fear of spoiling my Dinner while he waited at Table."⁸⁰⁷ Money clearly was not everything. It would not compensate, for partnership with a man of otherwise awful personality or habits.

Unfortunately the harsh realities of life might still haunt the young couple who had decided to follow their hearts regardless of material consequences. In 1712, Lady Mary Pierrepont eloped with Edward Wortley Montagu, a younger son of a country squire, instead of condescending to a match made by her father. On the eve of the elopement she was, despite her resolution, worried about the outcome. She wrote to her loved-one:

I tremble for what we are doing. Are you sure you shall love me for ever? Shall we never repent? I fear, and I hope. I foresee all that will happen on this Occassion. I shall incense my Family to the highest degree. The gennerallity of the World will blame my conduct, and the Relations and friends of ___ will invent a thousand storys of me, [---].⁸⁰⁸

Lady Mary was certainly anxious and presumably hesitating at the last minute, as she could not be certain that she was taking the right step. She was already twenty-three and

⁸⁰⁵ "Miss Burney presents her Compliments to Mr. Barlow; she is much obliged for, though greatly surprised at the good opinion with which on so short an Acquaintance he is pleased to Honour her; she wishes Mr. Barlow all happiness, but must beg leave to recommend to him to Transfer to some person better known to him a partiality which she so little merits." FB2, 120.

⁸⁰⁶ SS Sarah Robinson to Elizabeth Robinson, 27.?.1740, 5–6.

⁸⁰⁷ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Frances Hewet, 13.2.1710, 20–22.

⁸⁰⁸ MWM vol. I Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 15.8.1712, 159. Lady Mary forbade her own daughter from making a similar step. When Lady Mary Wortley Montagu jr. married the Earl of Bute in 1736, the mother was furious and refused to speak to her daughter for some time. It was her husband that finally managed to restore peace between the mother and daughter. Grundy 2004 (1999), 326–328.

therefore legally able to choose her own husband. Yet, her actions were labelled as elopement. Her marriage against her father's wishes caused difficulties, even though she was theoretically able to choose her partner. In reality, the family dynamics in noble families influenced a girl's life even after she had become adult in the eyes of the law. No wonder that she wanted Wortley to assure her that he loved her. Perhaps this was the thing that would enable her to bear the consequences of her rash act. She knew society would not accept her conduct. The friends and relations of the unnamed gentleman (most likely the man her father had chosen for her) indicated in the letter would try to tarnish her reputation. After all, she would break an engagement regarded as more or less settled by everyone else. According to Isobel Grundy, Lady Mary's marriage divided public opinion. Some thought of Wortley as the knight coming to her rescue, others blamed Lady Mary for being disobedient, foolishly romantic and having no notion of honour.⁸⁰⁹ Both Grundy and Laura Thomason know that marriage was a necessity for Lady Mary for both her financial and her social security. But being an aristocratic young lady meant that her family had more power over the matter than she did. Her name and fortune was something her father could dispose or sell at his will. On the other hand, by marrying Wortley, Lady Mary took control over her own life.⁸¹⁰ Aside from love, this is one possible reason for her act. Wortley was not Lady Mary's ideal choice, but at least their marriage saved her from the authoritarian rule of her father. As we have seen, Lady Mary had other suitors besides Wortley. One man, who has remained unknown, was called "Paradise" in Lady Mary's letters to her friends.⁸¹¹ She wrote that "I have that Aversion to Hell, I shall resist it all my Life, tho' without Hope of Paradise, and I am very well convince'd I shall never go to Hell [---]"⁸¹² One possible reason for her elopement was, therefore, that she chose Wortley, because there was no hope of marrying the man she truly wanted and securing her Paradise. Lady Mary wanted security in a marriage, but was not willing to go to Hell i.e. to enter a dreadful marriage against her own will. So perhaps Wortley was a compromise.

The girls acknowledged the importance of a good marital choice and were willing to seek advice from their parents and friends. For the most part, they wanted to make their own final decisions. Personal happiness meant more than the good opinion of the family, even though the price of disobeying parental wishes might be dear. A daughter's marriage was of great importance to all members of the wide family circle. Family members and friends were keen to get involved in the match-making of their daughters, sisters and nieces. To this involvement I turn next.

⁸⁰⁹ Grundy 2004 (1999), 57–58.

⁸¹⁰ Grundy 2012, 12; Thomason 2013, 42–43.

⁸¹¹ In the coded language of Lady Mary and her friends, Paradise indicated marriage for love, Hell with reluctance and Limbo with indifference. Apparently none of the girls were able to marry into Paradise. Grundy 2004 (1999), 25, 46.

⁸¹² MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Philippa Mundy, 25.9.1711, 109–110.

When family members interfered: widening the kin network

When a girl was looking a suitable husband, the whole family circle and friends took part. Georgian elites lived in relatively close circles, so it was not difficult to find out everything there was to know about the possible suitor. After all, marriage not only affected the couple, but a whole range of people, with varying interests. Marital connections affected the family's financial and social standing. Both money and reputation were at risk. Many historians agree that the lower in the social scale, the lower the pressure of parental control.⁸¹³ For this study, an important factor is the eighteenth-century conception that young people, especially minors, were not capable of making important life-changing decisions without the advice of their elders.

The parents of the girls studied here got involved in their daughters' love life in varying degrees. For the most part, parents do not seem to have had active role in choosing spouses for their children, or at least, their influence is not evident in the sources. The father of Lady Mary Pierrepont is one of the few exceptions. He clearly wanted to decide whom and when his children would marry. The earl was sorry that his eldest daughter Lady Mary declared she was against marrying anybody. Still, the father did manage to arrange some of the marriages for his children to his own liking. His son William was still under-age (nineteen years), when he was married to a wealthy heiress aged only fifteen. The Earl's twenty-one-year-old daughter Evelyn was married to Baron Gower (aged twenty-one) and a large fortune in 1712. The biographer Isobel Grundy suspects that the widowed lord was planning to remarry himself, and therefore wanted to get his children out of his house as soon as possible. Therefore, he had a suitable choice for Lady Mary, as well. But, this heir to a Viscount was not the man for her. It seems that her father went ahead with his plans, despite her opposition and even spent £400 on wedding clothes.⁸¹⁴

Parents could not always be vigilant enough to prevent trouble. In 1797 Betsey Fremantle criticized her father for letting her younger sister, seventeen-year-old Eugenia Wynne, entertain an unwanted attachment with a twenty-one-year-old officer, Captain Senft. Her father had at first encouraged the match, but then decided that the suitor was too young to be a suitable husband. Besides, he had no fortune. Betsey was also convinced that her sister would dominate him, as he was quiet and peaceable man.

⁸¹³ Mendelson & Crawford 1998, 108; Shoemaker 1998, 92–93; O'Hara 2000, 30, 41; Martin 2004, 6–7; Holloway 2019, 14. David Lemmings has argued that the so-called "Hardwick Act" in 1753 was targeted first and foremost against marriages of elite offspring without parental or familial consent. It was of course assumed that an unwanted marriage was naturally improper because it hurt the interests of the family. Lemmings 1996, 347–348. Decision-making was left to fathers. Mothers, especially those who had remarried did not have any right to veto decisions on their children's marriages. Lemmings 1996, 349–350. Historians studying the Marriage Act have disagreed widely about its impacts. See for example Probert 2009.

⁸¹⁴ Grundy 2004 (1999), 31, 42, 45, 46, 54.

Eugenia was obviously very miserable about all this. Betsey hoped that her sister would not see him anymore and would soon forget him.⁸¹⁵ In the following September, Betsey received a letter from her sister. With satisfaction, she noted down in her diary: “That dear girl has behaved like an Angel and has given up all thoughts of Ct. Senft seeing her parents were so much averse to the match. I love her still better now than before.”⁸¹⁶ Like a good daughter, instead of following her own desires, Eugenia had consented to her father’s will. This case shows what a suitable marriage partner was thought to be: a man of sufficient wealth, of a proper age to be the head of the family, and with a character thought to suit the daughter’s character. At least in her sister’s mind, Eugenia would have been miserable as a wife of a poor officer, who could not maintain her previous life style, was too young to guide his wife, and was too soft so withstand her dominant character.

Not only parents supervised the love-life of the young. Aunts and uncles too provided their nieces with plenty of advice for their future happiness. They could chaperone their nieces to balls and were, therefore, able to determine what sort of young men danced with the girls.⁸¹⁷ Or, they could direct their nieces to eligible men that they themselves considered good husband material. It will come as no surprise that the girls in question did not necessarily agree. This happened to Fanny Burney. She was irritated, and concluded that her aunt lacked good judgment, had a headstrong temper.⁸¹⁸ It is improbable that Fanny expressed these feelings to her aunt. But occasionally, aunts and uncles very forcibly influenced the marital choices of their nieces. Young Mary Granville’s route from a maid to a married woman provides an example of aunts and uncles who might try to manoeuvre their nieces into marriage. At the age of seventeen, Mary was invited to go to Bath with her aunt and uncle, Lord and Lady Lansdown, and then to stay at their country seat for the winter. There she met her uncle’s old friend, Alexander Pendarves. Mary started to wonder, why the friend kept staying and concluded that she was the cause of it. “His behaviour was too remarkable for me not to observe it”, Mary wrote in her memoirs. To her great sorrow, the rest of the family seemed to have accepted his intentions. But Mary did not: she was only seventeen and the man nearly sixty!⁸¹⁹ Mary knew that she had no other choice, but to make her dislike towards the

⁸¹⁵ WD 30.3.1797, 272; WD 11.4.1797, 273; WD 16.8.1797, 281.

⁸¹⁶ WD 23.9.1797, 286.

⁸¹⁷ *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 26. Sarah Martha Holroyd, known as Serena, hoped that her niece 25-year-old Maria Josepha would be happy in her future union with Mr. Stanley. But when the match was less than settled, the old aunt wrote: “Don't run wild now and suppose more than necessary, so as to make a disappointment, if it should prove otherwise, but do remember like a dear thing, that all you have to do is to be quiet and prudent, and I suppose the whole of your conduct to be watched. It is indeed most really natural to suppose any rational Man will do so before he ventures to speak. Let him not then see you are to be too easily won. [---]Command your impetuosity, your little whims and hurry of temper.” MH Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd to Maria Josepha Holroyd, 29.1.1796, 363–365.

⁸¹⁸ FB2, 136.

⁸¹⁹ MD vol. I. *Autobiography*, 20, 22–23.

suitor abundantly clear. She used all the possible vices that a young lady could within the limits of good-breeding. She was rude to him or showed indifference towards him. She left immediately when he entered the room.⁸²⁰ But it seems that Lord Lansdown was keen to secure his own interests in matching his niece with a man of some consequence. According to Mary, the uncle needed Mr. Pendarves' services, and was therefore ready to adopt this scheme. Mary bluntly wrote that she was commanded to accept the proposal. It in fact Mary's uncle himself who presented the proposal instead of the groom-to-be. Lord Lansdown asked his niece to stay with him one night in the drawing-room to keep him company. With great difficulty Mary managed to express her gratitude towards her uncle but asked his permission to retire for the evening to think things through. She locked herself in her closet and "wept bitterly for two hours." Mary was heartbroken that everyone in the family thought this a good match for her without considering her feelings. It was thought her duty to relieve her family of the expense of her up-keep. Mary declared in her memoirs that her chief reason for accepting her fate was to prevent her parents' suffering if she disobliged her wealthy uncle. Therefore, she assured her father that she would consent to the marriage.⁸²¹ Again, as this testimony was written years after the event, the memory may have been adjusted somewhat. Even if details of events were amended in the accounts, the extent of involvement of aunts and uncles in their nieces' marriages is clear. Because marriage brought financial wealth and social connections, the marriages of girls were of interest to the wider family circle, including uncles and aunts. They could benefit, if the girls were connected to wealthy and respectable families, and their reputations or finances could suffer if "bad choices" were made.

Siblings were also involved in making matches, at least to persuade their sister or brother to take the correct path. And even if siblings did not get involved in matchmaking, they might still express their opinions more or less directly to others. Letters sent by the girls to their friends reveal that they would comment, for instance, that their sister's marriage was mere convenience, or condemn or even spread rumours about their brother's engagement.⁸²² Even if girls' involvement was not active, siblings were often interested in each others' love life. Sibling rivalry and envy might be one reason why a girl chose to mock her sister's marriage. In this case it is unlikely that she expressed her sentiments directly to her sister. A brother's possible marriage, especially if he was the heir, was also significant matter to his sisters. It would obviously change the family dynamics. The heir's wife would succeed as the mistress of the family estate some day. With such a power in prospect, it would be important for her sisters-in-law to form good connections with her.

⁸²⁰ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 24.

⁸²¹ MD vol. I. Autobiography, 26–29.

⁸²² MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Philippa Mundy, 20.3.1712, 119; CL vol. II. Lady Sarah Lennox to Emily, Countess of Kildare, Dec. 1759, 80–83.

Birth order clearly had an influence on the extent to which siblings were able to get involved in each others' future. Younger sisters had to accept the heavy involvement of their elders in their love life. Fifteen-year-old Lady Sarah Lennox was rather amused at how much effort her sisters made in this matter:

Mr Fox and my sister are always settling every pretty man they see for me to marry; and I am sure, that if they talk so much of it, that Mr Fox will not mind who he talks of it before, and that nobody will marry me from the notion that they are settled for me. It's not of so much consequence to me, for I have not the least set my heart upon any creature here; nor do I desire to live here.⁸²³

For her, it seemed that her siblings were trying to marry her off to any remotely possible young man in town. She joked that no-one would marry her as her sister and brother-in-law scared off possible candidates with their matchmaking. She had no favourites in London, she claimed, and was reluctant to live there in the first place. Lady Sarah was thought to be a beauty, and certainly she was flattered, as every fifteen-year-old girl would be, by the attention she received. There were some young men that might have been to Lady Sarah's liking, but not to her relatives'. An example was Lord Newbattle, whom her relatives thought too untrustworthy. It seems that Lady Sarah's relatives were right to have doubts about some of those she liked. While she was still living in Ireland, young Sarah favoured certain a Lord Kerry. And then there was a succession of possible suitors that her brother-in-law and sisters favoured.⁸²⁴ It is clear that Lady Sarah's views were very different from her sisters'. In February 1760, she wrote:

⁸²³ CEL vol. II. Lady Sarah Lennox to Emily, countess of Kildare, 26.1.1760, 84, 90.

⁸²⁴ It seems that the two elder sisters Lady Caroline Fox and Emily, Lady Kildare, even competed to be the one who would find the husband for Lady Sarah. Lady Emily's favourite was Robert Clements. He apparently had a humble background, although was later created an Earl. In April 1759 Emily was sure that if Lady Sarah was to stay in Ireland and not to move to London, as was planned, Clements would most certainly propose her. Emily's only fear was that the family would not approve. Lady Caroline certainly had some reservations. Her main argument was that Lady Sarah was too young, and it would be better for her to stay for some time in town and enjoy its diversions, and wait for a proper suitor to appear. Lady Caroline was sure that their brothers would not mind if he was good man and in love; after all, their sister Lady Louisa had also married the wealthy but not highly noble Mr Conolly. However, Lady Caroline thought the suitor too young, which would affect negatively Lady Sarah's already wild character. It is not clear whether Lady Caroline really thought at that time, that the 14-year-old Lady Sarah was too young to get married or whether she felt that the potential suitor, a young Irishman belonging to the gentry, was not good enough for her sister. It is also possible that Lady Caroline simply wanted to get her way and have her sister in London. CEL vol. II. Lady Sarah Lennox to Emily, countess of Kildare, Nov. 1759, 75–79; CEL vol. I. Emily, countess of Kildare to James, earl of Kildare, 28.4.1759, 71; CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, countess of Kildare, 8.5.1759, 217–220; CEL vol. I. James, earl of Kildare to Emily, countess of Kildare, 8.5.1759, 77–78. See also Curtis 1946, 62, 65.

My brother and sister and Mr Fox have taken it into their heads that the Duke of Marlborough liked me a little, but that would do me no good as he is determined not to marry; but however, without a joke, I'll tell you just what makes them fancy so. First of all, because he admired me for being unaffected [---].⁸²⁵

Lady Sarah found it an overstatement that the Duke of Marlborough would have been in love with her just because he liked her of having an unaffected personality. For young Lady Sarah, this sort of speculation was merely amusing. However, her sister Lady Caroline triumphantly reported that the attachment was mutual.⁸²⁶ The biographer Stella Tillyard suspects that Caroline wanted to be the one to find her younger sister a husband as Emily had succeeded so well with the matchmaking of their sister Louisa. Their highest aspiration was to get Lady Sarah married to the Prince of Wales, the future George III.⁸²⁷ After many failed attempts, yet another potential suitor appeared on the scene in 1761. Thomas Charles Bunbury was a son of a Baronet. Young Lady Sarah hardly mentions her future spouse in her letters. To her friend, Lady Susan Fox-Strangways, she said that the man followed her around everywhere. She had also heard that his father was mad. Lady Sarah was clearly not very enthusiastic about Mr. Bunbury.⁸²⁸ It is curious, that the Lennox family considered him the proper husband candidate. He belonged to the gentry, and although he was relatively wealthy, Lady Caroline and her brother, the Duke, suspected that the couple might not have enough money to live fashionably in London, as they should.⁸²⁹ Yet, the marriage negotiations continued. Henry Fox, Duke of Richmond and the suitor's father Sir William finally came into agreement and the pair was married in June 1762. Stella Tillyard suspects that the family made this less than ideal choice because they were starting to fear that the time was running out for Lady Sarah.⁸³⁰ It is probable that Lady Sarah believed so herself: even though she had bluntly refused some suitors, in the end she was forced to choose someone who could have her. Siblings' interest in each others' marriages, as Amy Harris explains, was likely a result of their concern to have an influence on the power balance

⁸²⁵ CL vol. II. Lady Sarah Lennox to Emily, Countess of Kildare, 21.2.1760, 92–97.

⁸²⁶ The duke certainly was an eligible candidate in terms of social standing, although even Lady Caroline admitted that he had a wild character, because he was young, and would probably be unfaithful to his wife. Besides that, his mother would not be the easiest of mothers-in-laws. In the end, it seems that the duke was more interested in some lady other than Lady Sarah, as Lady Emily observed to her husband. CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, countess of Kildare, 31.1.1760, 270–272; CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, countess of Kildare, 12.2.1760, 272–275; CEL vol. I. Emily, countess of Kildare to James, Earl of Kildare, 1.9.1761, 109–110.

⁸²⁷ Tillyard 1995 (1994), 135. The affair of Lady Sarah and the king is related in detail in Tillyard 1995 and Curtis 1946.

⁸²⁸ LSL vol. I Lady Sarah Lennox to Lady Susan Fox Strangways, 20.12.1761, 115–118.

⁸²⁹ CEL Vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, marchioness of Kildare, 27.1.1762, 310–312.

⁸³⁰ Tillyard, 1995 (1994), 135–140.

within the family. A brother's marriage could mean that an unmarried sister became a financial burden, especially if parents were already dead. Ideally, it was assumed that a brother would provide for his unmarried sisters, but in reality often difficult or failed to occur.⁸³¹

Other siblings were more involved in keeping unwanted suitors away. Betsey Fremantle (née Wynne) followed the flirtations of her two younger sisters in the early 1800s. A gentleman named Macdonald had approached the nineteen-year-old Justine. The gentleman had given her a love poem that both the girl and her sister found ridiculous. No doubt Betsey felt such a suitor was improper for her sister and decided that the best way to discourage him any further was to ignore the whole matter.⁸³² Their parents being already dead, it was Betsey's duty as the married elder sister, to look after and advise her younger siblings, although she was not their legal guardian. Sometimes all a married sister could do, was to conceal her disappointment, as Mrs. Mary Pendarves (née Granville) did, when her sister Ann informed her that she was going to accept an offer of marriage. On the surface it seemed that Mrs. Pendarves was only too happy at the prospect of her sister's marriage and the coming planning. She wrote that when the legal affairs were dealt with by their brother they could start buying wedding clothes and decide where the ceremony would take place.⁸³³ But, their mutual friend, twenty-year-old Elizabeth Robinson gives a different picture:

Our friend Penny is under great anxiety for the change her sister is going to make; I do not wonder at her fears; I believe both experience and observation have taught her the state she is going into is in general less happy than that she has left.⁸³⁴

For Elizabeth, it was understandable that once widowed from her own unhappy marriage, Mrs. Pendarves did not think it the best option for any woman. The chances were that her sister would be happier being unmarried. The most probable explanation for married siblings' interest on the marriages of their younger sisters and brothers was the keeping or creation of good family connections. Their marriages might either serve or injure their own interests. Besides, married elder siblings were responsible for their younger ones, especially if their parents (especially the father) were dead.

It was not only older siblings who intervened in their siblings' love life. The younger sister of Lady Mary Pierrepont tried to convince her that the man of her liking, Edward Wortley Montagu, only deceived her.⁸³⁵ It is not clear, whether the sister acted on her

⁸³¹ Harris 2012, 154.

⁸³² WD 4.2.1805, 378.

⁸³³ MD vol. II. Mary Pendarves to Ann Granville, 22.4.1740, 81–83.

⁸³⁴ EM vol. I. Elizabeth Robinson to Mrs. Anne Donnellan, 21.8.1740, 70–72. Laura Thomason shares my interpretation that Mary's own bad experiences of marriage made her see it as a trap for women. See Thomason 2013, 85.

⁸³⁵ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 7.3.1711, 87–88.

own accord at the command of her father, who was determinately against the union. Younger sisters involved themselves in concrete ways, as well. When Betsey Wynne herself was still courting her future husband Thomas Fremantle, her seventeen-year-old sister Eugenia observed, with irritation, their “will they, won’t they”-relationship. Eugenia was sure that Betsey was in love, but could not understand why Fremantle was still holding back.⁸³⁶ Eugenia went as far as confronting Fremantle herself:

I had again a great deal of talk with Fremantle, he gives his word that his intentions, his sentiments are the same as they were when he went to Smyrna, and then he adds what would do if you was in my position? as far as delicacy will permit it, I try to hint to him what I would do, if I were in his place. He understands me perfectly and says that he does not want inclination but power to do it. I own that I am quite out, yet the idea of seeing him a member of our family, is too dear to me, is grown too favourite, that I should give it up at once.⁸³⁷

Fremantle assured the younger sister that his feelings were unaltered, and even asked what Eugenia would do in his place. Fremantle was not a husband candidate who was likely to attract their father. He lacked both money and a title. But, of course, Eugenia was not in a position to speak freely, as decorum demanded that she play the role of unaffected and chaste maid who knew nothing of these sorts of things. However, she was sure that they understood each other, and confessed that she would be glad to see Mr. Fremantle as part of the family. This example shows how keen even young girls were to get involved in securing good matches for their sisters.

Marriages of cousins were also duly remarked upon. After all, eighteenth-century family networks were wide and every new member would provide useful connections. Lady Sarah Spencer’s cousin Harriet Cavendish married Lord Granville Leveson-Gower in 1809. It seems that the young lady was keen to escape her father’s control and Lady Sarah approved this as a good reason for the match: “Her situation at home is so extremely unpleasant now, that I should be very happy at her marrying anyone.”⁸³⁸ Marriage was one way for a girl to take her life into her own hands, even though it meant moving the control of her father to that of her husband’s. At least young Harriet had made her own choice. Luckily the husband also seemed sincerely attached to his wife. This was a good sign that he would be a good husband and a happy man. The marriage itself was thought by contemporaries a rather awkward one. For many years Lord Leveson-Gower had been the lover of Harriet’s aunt, Lady Bessborough, and had fathered some of her children.⁸³⁹ However, none of this is apparent in Lady Sarah’s letters. She only expressed

⁸³⁶ WD 3.1.1797, 243.

⁸³⁷ WD 4.1.1797, 243–244.

⁸³⁸ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 18.11.1809, 86–87.

⁸³⁹ See, for instance, Foreman 2001 (1998), 377–378.

her happiness that her cousin would be connected to some high-status families “a great advantage attending the match.”⁸⁴⁰ Yet, Lady Sarah was concerned how she would get along with her new cousin:

An introduction to a perfect stranger, with whom you are henceforward to be extremely intimate, whether you or he like it or not, is not precisely the pleasantest of events, and I am somewhat in terror when I think of it.⁸⁴¹

Lady Sarah was almost in terror when she thought how she would get along with a perfect stranger with whom she would from then on be very intimately connected. Her reflections show once again how important family connections were in the elite life-style. In the eighteenth century elite kinship and friendship networks were wide, as the use of kinship terminology reveals.⁸⁴² Aunts, uncles and cousins were kin, but so too the spouses of siblings were considered sisters and brothers, just as cousins’ spouses were spoken of as cousins.⁸⁴³ The relationship of cousins might be close, so it was only understandable that a new spouse would be included in that intimate circle. So Lady Sarah would form an intimate relationship with her cousin Harriet’s new husband as well.

Friends were also keen to give their advice when marriage prospects were in the wind. In October 1795 a friend of Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd, offered to inquire after a certain Mr. Stanley and find out more about him.⁸⁴⁴ There was clearly some interest on the part of Lady Maria and her friend offered to help to find out whether the young man was a suitable husband candidate. In 1711, Lady Mary Pierrepont, advised her friend Philippa Mundy, who was the same age as her, twenty-two, to accept her suitor, whom she described as a prudent choice, if not a pleasurable one. However, she confessed that she was not able to follow her own advice.⁸⁴⁵ Economic security and respectability were certainly things to consider. But Lady Mary herself was certain that she would not make such choice, even if it was not possible for her to marry for love. It was not only young unmarried girls who observed such matters. Married friends wanted to give their opinion on future matches among their social circles. Mrs. Mary Pendarves observed in 1729 that sixteen-year-old Miss Carteret had no reason to be displeased about her future marriage. She considered the young lady fortunate, as her parents had followed her inclinations and not forced her to marry a man she did not love. Thus, it was highly likely that she would be happy in her marriage. It is also obvious that the future husband, Lord Dysart, fulfilled

⁸⁴⁰ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 18.11.1809, 86–87.

⁸⁴¹ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Robert Spencer, 25.1.1810, 92–93.

⁸⁴² Tadmor 2001, *passim*.

⁸⁴³ Harris 2012, 14.

⁸⁴⁴ MS H. Poole to Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd, Oct. 1795, 105.

⁸⁴⁵ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Philippa Mundy, 25.9.1711, 109–110.

all the criteria required for a good match.⁸⁴⁶ Less prudent choices were also keenly observed, talked about and criticized. Yet again, Mrs. Mary Pendarves commented on how the fifteen-year-old daughter of the Earl of Berkeley showed the utmost inconsideration to decorum by marrying against her parents will. Although the gentleman in question had a considerable fortune, he was also known for his imprudence and immorality.⁸⁴⁷ Money was not everything in elite circles. There had to be many other good qualities in a husband candidate before a sensible girl would even consider a marriage. Friends' interests in each other's marriages can simply be explained by concern for their happiness, but a suitable marriage would also benefit them in the form of useful social contacts.

Some historians, as Mendelson and Crawford, have concluded that as elite ladies married younger than those lower down the social ladder, they had fewer possibilities to decide on their marriages; those families less concerned about dynastic or financial matters allowed their daughters to have more freedom in their courtships.⁸⁴⁸ The instances presented here show that although elite girls did take the opinion of their family and friends seriously, in the end, it was largely their own decision whether they accepted a marriage proposal or not. Below I look in more detail at the difficulties the girls faced before reaching the altar.

Back and forth: The agony of negotiations

Finding the right spouse was a road mixed with excitement, nervousness and disappointments. There were several things that could go wrong on the journey. Additionally the duration of courtship might take from anyway from few weeks to several years.⁸⁴⁹

For girls, the time of courtship usually meant patient waiting, in this case a feeling shared by their future husband. They were obliged to leave the initiative to males. Didactic authors saw this as emblem of a woman's delicate nature. A lady concealed her warm sentiments even from herself. Only when she was sure that her attachment was returned, could she allow these feelings to herself to be shown.⁸⁵⁰

⁸⁴⁶ MD vol. I. Mary Pendarves to Ann Granville, 1.4.1729, 202–205. The good financial prospect gained the approval of Elizabeth Montagu when her friend married a man of simple character, but of some means, namely £1200 a year. The lady had good sense and the gentleman enough prudence to maintain his estate, so Elizabeth saw no reason why her friend would not be sufficiently happy. EM vol. II. Elizabeth Montagu to Margaret, duchess of Portland, 24.8.1742, 23–25.

⁸⁴⁷ MD vol. I. Mary Pendarves to Ann Granville, 19.1.1727/8, 152–158.

⁸⁴⁸ See e.g. Mendelson & Crawford 1998, 108; Vickery 1999 (1998), 40.

⁸⁴⁹ Holloway 2019, 14.

⁸⁵⁰ Gregory 1794, 24.

The reason for precaution was also practical. Especially before the 1753 Marriage Act, defining what constituted a legally binding contract for marriage was not easy. A binding contract was made simply by vowing in the present tense (*per verba de praesenti*) before witnesses and when the parties were old enough to make such a contract (age twelve for girls, age fourteen for boys). Once this was done, an engagement was a legally valid promise of marriage. The Marriage Act changed the situation that agreement to get married had to be solemnized before a clergyman, after public bans, and for minors (under twenty-one years) at the consent of their parents or guardians only. For girls ready to be married, it meant that the scrutiny of their virtue and control of their sexual behaviour now had the force of law. It was much harder to force a man into a marriage in cases of breach of promise. Engaging in premarital sex was more risky, although this was highly unlikely in the case of elite girls.⁸⁵¹

This regulation might explain why a broken engagement seems to have been such a shameful situation for elite brides-to-be throughout the century. Despite the legal reforms, old customs did not suddenly disappear. Possibly the prevailing expectation was that an engaged couple did have some form of sexual intimacy. At any rate, they were allowed to spend some time unchaperoned⁸⁵², an indication that some intimate encounters might have taken place.

There is plenty of evidence that the girls of this study had internalized the complicated rules of courtship well and were able to manoeuvre according to their own liking, even if it meant bending the rules a bit. Even at the mature age of twenty-one Lady Mary Pierrepont played the cautious and indecisive young girl with her suitor Edward Wortley Montagu. For instance, she claimed she had never received some of his letters and considered it self-evident that he would burn hers. She blamed him for being too impatient when she expressed fears and threatened to drop the relationship altogether. But she also made it clear that she had nothing to fear for her reputation. The word “friendship” was frequently used.⁸⁵³ Yet she was also occasionally very straightforward in her sentiments. In August 1709, Lady Mary wrote to him (the letter was directed to his sister Anne Wortley) that “I cannot help answering your letter this minute, and telling you I infinitely love you.”⁸⁵⁴ She also stated that “I know how to make a Man of sense happy.”⁸⁵⁵ Such a plain statement was unusual and she admitted that. But when it came to

⁸⁵¹ Lemmings 1996, 344–346; Bannet 2000, 106, Thomason 2013, 5.

⁸⁵² MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Lady Mar, 2.4.1723, 21–22; CEL vol. I. Caroline, Lady Holland to Emily, Marchioness of Kildare, 8.4.1763, 363–364.

⁸⁵³ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 28.3.1710; MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 17.4.1710, 27; MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Edward Wortley Montagu, 3.5.1710, 32–33; MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 4.5.1710, 33–34; MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 20.7.1710, 47–48.

⁸⁵⁴ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Anne Wortley, 21.8.1709, 11–12.

⁸⁵⁵ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 28.3.1710, 24–25.

the actual marriage proposal, she urged him to speak to her family. She wrote: "If...your proposals can be agreeable to those on whom I depend – I have nothing to say against them."⁸⁵⁶ Even though Lady Mary had taken the initiative in forming her relationship with Wortley, in the actual courting she displayed the usual decorum. She was not going to give up easily and so tested Wortley's attachment towards her.

If Lady Mary Pierrepont chose to bend the rules a bit and took matters into her own hands, for those who followed the rules of proper courtship the waiting and guessing must occasionally have been unbearable! In May 1796, Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd wrote to her friend that: "You may talk of it (the marriage) now to anybody you please; it is so publicly known that it would be absurd to attempt keeping it a secret."⁸⁵⁷ Lady Maria was convinced that her marriage negotiations with Mr. Stanley were at a point when it was safe to conclude that nothing would prevent the union anymore. It was also possible for something to go wrong. Lady Sarah Spencer was rather frustrated when, in April 1812, she told her brother Robert of her strained relationship with Sir W.W. Wynn, who had previously showed attention to her. Lady Sarah now stated that the affair was entirely over. She continued that she had to "humble myself further, by the unfeminine confession, that is was not, this time, over in consequence of a refusal on my part."⁸⁵⁸ It seems that Lady Sarah was ready to accept the proposal, but Wynn had had second thoughts. Despite the evident hurt feelings, she acknowledged that he had behaved honourably and that she was glad to be free from any further engagement with him.

Vickery points out that courtship was not a straightforward or swift procedure, but took time and planning, especially from the suitor. It allowed men more freedom in rhetoric. As we saw, for a lady, it was highly unsuitable to reveal her sentiments before she was sure of her suitor's intentions. But courtship allowed girls to have some power over the events. It was an agreeable adventure that allowed the young lady to be the centre of attention for a while. She could engineer all sorts of delays to test her suitor's true feelings, but all this was to precede betrothal. Shoemaker reminds us that the girl was able to control whether or not she receive the suitor's advances, and use go-betweens, like friends and siblings to encourage him. When engagement was official, the girl's best interest was that things were settled with the utmost speed. A broken engagement was damaging for the lady's reputation. No wonder then that many elite brides lived in agony for the months between the actual promise and their wedding day.⁸⁵⁹

Even when the courting finally led to marriage, the road was often paved with obstacles, delays and mixed emotions. First of all, the young couple had to endure long

⁸⁵⁶ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 25.4.1710, 29–31. Lady Mary also wrote: "I can now hear no more from you, nor can I make any other Answer than what they are pleasd[sic] to direct." MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Pierrepont to Edward Wortley Montagu, 3.5.1710, 32–33.

⁸⁵⁷ MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 17.5.1796, 384–385.

⁸⁵⁸ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Hon. Robert Spencer, 28.4.1812, 131–133.

⁸⁵⁹ Vickery 1999 (1998), 53, 56, 82; Shoemaker 1998, 94–95.

periods of separation. Such periods would be a test to their mutual attachment and love. For instance, Betsey Wynne received a ring from her beloved Captain Fremantle when he had to embark on a sea voyage shortly after they met for the first time.⁸⁶⁰ Exchanging gifts, such as rings, gloves and miniature portraits, was typical among eighteenth-century couples. Touching and kissing the love tokens they received reminded wives of their absent loved-ones.⁸⁶¹

Even though the ring has been seen as the formal sign of engagement, Betsey did not think so. She was plagued by uncertainty as Fremantle did not make his formal declaration before he set sail and therefore their engagement was not confirmed. As if waiting for her loved one for several months in a state of uncertainty was not bad enough, things became even worse for eighteen-year-old Betsey when a competing suitor appeared on the scene, a suitor that her father seemed to prefer. Betsey was quite miserable and she was afraid to communicate her suspicions to her father in case he would prefer Captain Foley. Betsey was worried that her chosen-one might not have enough money to induce her father to accept the match. She was, however, determined not to marry contrary to her feelings. Betsey's parents, especially her father, were not ready to give their consent to the match. In fact, Mr. Wynne constantly changed his mind on the matter. Her mother checked her daughter for not getting her hopes up too soon. Even the younger sister Eugenia expressed her frustration on this endless waiting and guessing. Betsey eventually married her beloved Captain Thomas Fremantle on 13.1.1797, when she was nineteen.⁸⁶² Another example is provided by young Eliza Dawson. Eliza met her future husband Mr. Fletcher in 1787, when she was seventeen. Two years later, the man confirmed his attachment to her. The couple decided to continue their correspondence as friends until he was able to travel to meet her father and ask his permission to propose. Her father, at first, opposed the match as he had other prospects in mind for his only daughter. He did not wish his daughter marry a man without a fortune and a considerably older to boot. Mr. Fletcher was, after all, already forty-five years old at the time. Eliza condescended to her father's wishes but continued the correspondence with Fletcher in secret. Even though a wealthier suitor appeared on the scene, Eliza remained constant. With the help of her aunt and with slight pressure of ill health, Eliza

⁸⁶⁰ WD 14.7.1796, 207–208.

⁸⁶¹ Holloway 2019, 80, 81, 84, 91–92,

⁸⁶² WD 16.8.1796, 220; WD 7.8.1796, 214; WD 14.8.1796, 218 WD 14.8.1796, 218–219. WD 14.8.1796, 218–219; WD 30.8.1796, 222–223; WD 6.9.1796, 222–223; WD 8.9.1796, 224; WD s.a., 224–226; WD 277; WD 5.12.1796, 233; WD 1.1.1797, 242–243; WD 3.1.1797, 243; WD 10.1.1797, 247; WD 9.1.1797, 262; WD 11.1.1797, 247; WD 13.1.1797, 248–249. The couple was first married by an English parson and then blessed by a Catholic priest. The different religious faiths of Betsey and Fremantle clearly caused some trouble as Eugenia wrote about the blessing “We have had a great deal of trouble to obtain this – the greatest difficulties have been made by the Cardinal, and this blessing has been granted, but with the condition that a dispensation shall be got from Rome and that they then will be married again.” WD 13.1.1797, 248–249.

finally got permission to marry Mr. Fletcher, which she did on 16th July 1791.⁸⁶³ The cases of Betsey Wynne and Eliza Dawson exemplify the varying ways that girls were able to act according to their own will in marriage negotiations. As Vickery points out, a suitor with modest references had the lady's advocacy as his only option for success. It was acceptable for a daughter to try to persuade her father to accept the suitor of her choice even by using emotive tactics such as crying or pleading for his kindness.⁸⁶⁴ However, it seems that Betsey and Eliza chose to use the "good daughter" tactic rather than pleading to their father to take pity on them. They behaved as if they did what their fathers told them to do, but at the same time continued to press for their own choice of future husband.

As the courtship was such a delicate procedure, a girl might feel obliged to conceal it in the best way she could. As I have indicated earlier, Anne Tracy said very little about her future husband Mr. John Travell, in her diaries. There are only brief references that make one suspect there is something going on. Twenty-year-old Anne noted down in her diary in January 1725 that she walked with Mr. Travell on several days, apparently unchaperoned. In all previous entries a third party had attended them.⁸⁶⁵ On January 22nd there is an entry: "Affairs of consequence talk'd over by other people whilst I wrote."⁸⁶⁶ This most likely indicates that Mr. Travell discussed asking for his daughter's hand with her father. It is very curious that Anne and Mr. Travell also discussed matters with her mother.⁸⁶⁷ The pair had several serious conversations without others present, but Anne does not give any indication of their contents.⁸⁶⁸ Anne's diary abruptly ends on February 25th 1725 with no mention of engagement or marriage. When the marriage was finally settled, the bride-to-be could finally breathe a sigh of relief. Lady Sarah Spencer ecstatically wrote to her brother of the "new and half painful sort of happiness." Mr. Lyttelton possessed a good heart and was surprised that he showed such attention to her. She resisted his advances at first as he was only a younger son and not rich.⁸⁶⁹ Lady Sarah was aware, and perhaps secretly hoped, that Mr. Lyttelton had feelings for her, she did not want to make any commitment until she was sure of her decision. Lady Sarah declared that she had made her choice for good reasons: she has the approval of her family, which indicates that material prospects were reasonable, and she was a mature woman (in fact at the age of twenty-six she thought herself too old), so she had a proper

⁸⁶³ *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 45–48.

⁸⁶⁴ Vickery 1999 (1998), 48.

⁸⁶⁵ AT 19.1.1725, 126; AT 20.1.1725, 126; AT 22.1.1725, 126.

⁸⁶⁶ AT 22.1.1725, 126.

⁸⁶⁷ "Mama, Mr. Travell & I talked very seriously after Dinner." AT 27.1.1725, 126.

⁸⁶⁸ AT 28.1.1725, 126; AT 6.2.1725, 127. According to Amy Harris, Anne and John Travell married in 1725 and had thirteen children, but this material does not give any further details about their courtship. See Harris 2012, 34.

⁸⁶⁹ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Hon. Robert Spencer 13.1.1813, 136–138.

amount of experience of the world and a sober temper as well as love and respect for her future husband.⁸⁷⁰

Negotiations between the suitor and the bride's father were common, but sometimes the mother acted as the spokesperson. Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd's suitor Mr. Stanley arrived one spring morning with his mother to make his declaration of marriage. It seems that it was the mother who directly addressed young Lady Maria by expressing her son's feelings towards her. Although Lady Maria was not yet certain she confessed to her aunt that she was "a most happy woman."⁸⁷¹ Lord Sheffield, Lady Maria's father, was thrilled with the prospect of his daughter's marriage and was "determined from the first that the affair should not be stopped or delayed by the want of anything in his power to forward it."⁸⁷² Still, the financial side of the union had to be negotiated. In May 1796 it was still uncertain whether the young couple would move to live at a country seat called Alderley or Mr. Stanley's house in London. Two weeks later Lady Maria informed to her friend that they would not have a place in the country for the time being as Mr. Stanley had to join his militia unit and then to attend the Parliament. A month later events took a new turn when Lady Maria reported that they would have a house in Cheshire after all. Maria was pleased as the house was small and suitable to their income. Lady Maria already had pearls and diamonds, so she was not given any, but her fiancé endowed her with handsome presents such as a watch and chain.⁸⁷³ Gifts for the lady were seen a token of the man's intentions of marrying her. These material gifts and the negotiations over where the young couple would live in the future were important aspects of the contract.⁸⁷⁴ In October 1796 Lady Maria was finally able to write to her friend Ann Firth that the deeds had arrived and they would be married in a few days. Young Lady Maria was amused about the huge amount of paperwork involved in a marriage contract. But she was relieved that the waiting was finally over.⁸⁷⁵

New life and duties: Entering the marital state and motherhood

Did the wedding night transform a girl into a woman? I suggest not. It is true that marriage brought a new social status, but being married did not automatically make a girl

⁸⁷⁰ SL Lady Sarah Spencer to Hon. Robert Spencer 10.2.1813, 138–139.

⁸⁷¹ MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd, 5.5.1796, 375–376.

⁸⁷² MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 17.5.1796, 384–385.

⁸⁷³ MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 17.5.1796, 384–385; MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd, 19.5.1796, 386–387; MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 30.5.1796, 388–390; MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 23.6.1796, 391–392; MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 30.5.1796, 388–390. It was possible for betrothed bride to inspect her future home before hand and even make plans for renovations. See Vickery 2009, 84, 86. However, my source material does not indicate that such plans were made among these elite girls.

⁸⁷⁴ Vickery 2009, 100–101.

⁸⁷⁵ MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 7.10.1796, 393–394.

an adult, at least in the minds of her older relatives. Being an adult meant much more. Elizabeth Foyster argues that marriage cannot be considered the dividing line between childhood and adulthood. Childhood and youth were certainly stages of life that were characterized by dependence and subordination, but marriage did not mark a wholesale break from them, at least not for women, who stayed under male rule. The influence of parents or older relatives continued in various ways throughout a woman's life. In that sense, a woman was never fully independent. I concur with Foyster in that those parents, and we might add other relatives, who were heavily involved in the marriage negotiations also took a keen interest on couple's life after marriage. At worst, this interference could take the form of threatening and financial blackmail. The wife's family, for instance, could withhold paying her dowry.⁸⁷⁶ Maturing was a process and it did not happen overnight, and the sudden shift from the relatively carefree life of daughter to a matron of a household was not easy even if one had practiced the required skills beforehand.

The girls of this study married, if they married at all, according to the average age pattern. None of them married exceptionally young. The Lennox sisters, Ladies Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah married at the ages of twenty-one, sixteen, fifteen and seventeen respectively. Lady Mary Pierrepont was twenty-three, Miss Mary Granville seventeen, Lady Harriet Pitt twenty-seven, Lady Sarah Spencer twenty-six, Miss Elizabeth Robinson twenty-four and her sister Miss Sarah Robinson thirty when they married. Elizabeth Wynne entered matrimony at the age of nineteen, and Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd at twenty-five. The only clear exception to this pattern was Fanny Burney, who married at the age of forty-two. It is also clear that before a certain age it was not advisable for a girl to get married. When his second oldest daughter Lady Emily Lennox was courted in 1746, the second Duke of Richmond decided that the engagement should not proceed until the girl turned fifteen.⁸⁷⁷ This would indicate that marriage did not automatically mean adulthood to girls. Marriage and wifhood was meant for adult women. If a girl was too young, physically undeveloped or inexperienced for this role, it was her parents' duty to protect her and educate her further. The age for this role clearly varied from person to person.

No matter what their age, the wedding day was a significant moment for every elite bride. Usually it was a day of mixed emotions. The new bride might feel happy and excited about her future, but also sad about parting from the parents and siblings with whom she had lived for so long. Marriage meant both mental and physical separation from her childhood home. This was the case, for instance, with Eliza Dawson, when she married a Scot, Mr. Fletcher, in 1791 at the age of twenty-one and moved to Edinburgh, a place where she, as an Englishwoman, was a stranger. In her autobiography, Eliza later

⁸⁷⁶ Foyster 2001, 313–314, 317–323. About marriage as the end of childhood. See Vickery 2009, 209; Maynes et.al. 2005, 3.

⁸⁷⁷ DR vol. I. Charles Lennox, the second Duke of Richmond to James Fitzgerald, Lord Kildare 23.3.1746, 608–609.

recounted that the day had been the “most sorrowful” in her life. The parting from her father and family almost broke her heart. Yet she put confidence in her husband and soon recovered. She was also hospitably received among her husband’s circle of friends.⁸⁷⁸ Of course, this is a later recollection and we do not know that the transition was actually as smooth as she later claimed. However, it does indicate that the change was significant. Marriage usually meant not only a change of social status from unmarried girl to a married woman, but a separation from her place of birth and family. She was now first and foremost her husband’s wife. Nineteen-year-old Betsey Wynne shared the same sentiments when she had to sail away with her husband immediately after their marriage. Betsey wrote:

Though I must acknowledge that this event makes me perfectly happy, yet I dread it and the idea of leaving so suddenly my Father and Mother and sisters, distresses me I can hardly make up my mind to it. I was quite miserable after the whole was determined upon. Mamma and my sister burst into tears, I did not know what to say, what to do. I was very low spirited myself, poor Eugenia does nothing but cry, How shall I accustom myself to live without them?⁸⁷⁹

Betsey was to move to England, whereas her family stayed in Italy where they were living at the time. For a nineteen-year-old newly-wed, being torn from people she knew must have been traumatic, even though she was happy to be united with a man she loved. Possibly she also remembered the conversation her mother and Madame de Bombelles had years before: “Mamma and she talked of marriage and of the jealousy of husbands and of the miseries that one suffers when one is married. How queer and wicked men are.”⁸⁸⁰ The risk that the wrong choice had been made might haunt the young bride on her big day. Would the admirable suitor turn into a tyrannical husband? Sometimes the prospect of marriage occasioned pure horror in the mind of the bride. For seventeen-year-old Mary Granville the wedding day was awful, even if the ceremony was elaborate: she was dressed in all finery, but felt like as Iphigenia being prepared for sacrifice.⁸⁸¹ Mary had accepted the offer of a much older man to please her uncle and save her parents from difficulty. No wonder she felt that she was sacrificing herself for the benefit of others. Some girls felt that they were getting married at just correct age, whereas they might not have been ready earlier. Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd tied the knot at the age of twenty-five. In June 1796 she stated that she was “more equal to being a good Wife now than”

⁸⁷⁸ *Autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher* 1876, 62.

⁸⁷⁹ WD 10.1.1797, 262.

⁸⁸⁰ WD 6.3.1792, 91.

⁸⁸¹ MD vol. I. *Autobiography*, 29.

she “should have been two years ago.”⁸⁸² Two years had increased her confidence to the point that she was ready for her new life.

Marriage meant a new identity, but the line between girlhood and womanhood was often blurred. On the eve of her marriage Betsey Wynne wrote in her diary: “For the last time I shall write as Miss Wynne, what a day tomorrow is – I dread it.”⁸⁸³ The coming marriage was to change Betsey’s life. She would have a new identity as Mrs. Fremantle and become a married lady with new responsibilities. Nineteen-year-old Miss Wynne would be gone forever. Lady Maria Josepha Stanley (née Holroyd) had difficulties in accustoming to her new name. She wrote to her aunt three days after the wedding that she still thought it some kind of joke when someone called her by her new name.⁸⁸⁴ Betsey is the only one who put her thoughts on paper, but we can imagine that signing a letter in their married name for the first time was a significant moment for the other girls of this study as well. A new name was one of the symbols of a girl’s transformation. She became part of her husband’s family and lived by its rules, and was no longer, at least in theory, under the influence of her father or his family. For her elder sisters, sixteen-year-old Lady Louisa Conolly was still “a charming girl”.⁸⁸⁵ Even though Lady Louisa was married and thus technically an adult, her elder sister Lady Caroline Fox commented that her behaving very properly for her age was surprising.⁸⁸⁶ Stella Tillyard shows that a similar pattern of behaviour existed between Lady Emily and Lady Caroline several years earlier. To her elder sister the fourteen-year-old Lady Emily was still an “engaging girl” when she married James, Earl of Kildare in 1746. She was still a child searching for her personality. This search is manifested in the ways she experimented with different hand writing styles and signatures.⁸⁸⁷ Adapting to a new role as married lady did not happen overnight. Instead, it was a process that might take a long time. Whatever Lady Caroline thought about her little sisters, changes are often detected in the attitudes of relatives and friends of newly married girls. Maria Josepha, Lady Stanley’s (née Holroyd) aunt expressed this by saying that a person named Maria Holroyd “no longer exists” and the thoughtless days of extreme youth” have passed. Her present situation “calls forth virtues untried before.”⁸⁸⁸ For the aunt, the old Maria had disappeared and married life signified the passing of the joyful days of girlhood. Her friend expressed her fear that, after marriage, she would lose her “charming spirit” and that she would become “tame, wise, and rational.”⁸⁸⁹ In many cases it was, therefore, anticipated that when a girl turned into a

⁸⁸² MH Maria Josepha Holroyd to Ann Firth, 23.6.1796, 391–392.

⁸⁸³ WD 11.1.1797, 263.

⁸⁸⁴ MS Maria Josepha, Lady Stanley to Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd, 14.10.1796, 109.

⁸⁸⁵ CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, countess of Kildare, 6.3.1759, 204–205.

⁸⁸⁶ CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, countess of Kildare, 3.4.1759, 205–206.

⁸⁸⁷ Tillyard 1995 (1994), 52–53.

⁸⁸⁸ MS Sarah Martha Holroyd to Maria Josepha, Lady Stanley, 3.1.1797, 111–112.

⁸⁸⁹ MS H. Poole to Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd, 19.5.1796, 106.

wife, she would change in some ways: she would become more responsible and wiser than the giddy and carefree young girl she had been.

This brings us back to Burke, discussed in chapter 2. The reality and experience is constructed through language. When the girl's name changed in marriage, her identity changed as well. Yet the status of a wife was not automatically earned. She had to earn it through her skills and behaviour. If she didn't, she was still "a girl", not a woman.

Marriage definitely changed the lady's legal identity. It made the wife legally dependent on her husband. Before, she had been under the command of her father. If she was over twenty-one, she could have managed her own property as an unmarried lady. As a wife she could not. It was her husband that had all the power over most of her financial assets, apart from her widow's jointure. Lady Mary Pierrepont became Wortley Montagu when she married. In one of the earliest letters, she wrote to her newly wedded husband, she expressed her uneasiness about the change in her status: "I don't know very well how to begin; I am perfectly unacquainted with a proper matrimonial stile. After all, I think tis better to write as if we were not marry'd at all."⁸⁹⁰ Tague suggests that Lady Mary wanted to stress her commitment and the sacrifice she had made by marrying Wortley against her father's wishes. Besides, she had made a very unfashionable choice as her husband was a younger son of a country squire and she a duke's daughter. She should have chosen a wealthier spouse.⁸⁹¹ This is very possible, although another explanation may be that she simply hoped marriage would not change her life. For Lady Mary, it was easier to think that nothing had materially changed. Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd's wedding ceremony took place in October 1796:

I went through the Ceremony very boldly—that is—did not leave out the word 'Obey.' I pronounced it indeed with as much satisfaction, as much certainty of having a pleasure in Keeping the Vow, as the word Love. And one of us must alter very much before I find it difficult to keep that promise. I cannot say it was pleasant taking leave of all those dear friends I am not again to see for so long [---].⁸⁹²

Lady Maria prided herself in her willingness to accept her faith as a married woman under the command of her husband. She pronounced the word "obey" clearly at the wedding ceremony indicating that submission to male rule was not a problem for her. It would take a drastic change if she were to break her vows. It was not self-evident that a peer's daughter like Lady Maria would obey her husband, and this may be the reason for her strong emphasis on her submission. She chose to emphasize the point in her letter, demonstrating her acceptance of her destiny, as was expected from her, a *femme covert*.

⁸⁹⁰ MWM vol. I. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Edward Wortley Montagu, 22.10.1712, 168–169.

⁸⁹¹ Tague 2001, 93.

⁸⁹² MH Josepha Maria Stanley to Ann Firth, 17.10.1796, 397–399.

Elizabeth Robinson expressed more apprehension about her future life, although, her hopes were high:

I behaved magnanimously; not one cowardly tear, I assure you, did I shed at the solemn altar, my mind was in no mirthful mood indeed. I have a great hope of happiness; the world, as you say, speaks well of Mr. Montagu, and I have many obligations to him which must gain my particular esteem; but such a change of life must furnish one with a thousand anxious thoughts.⁸⁹³

At the altar she was serious but she did not shed any tears. In her letter, Elizabeth did not speak of love towards her husband Mr. Montagu, but instead said that she had “many obligations”. Although she seemed determined about her choice she admits that such a change made her think. These contemplations show, in their different ways that both Lady Maria and Elizabeth recognized, in accordance with the ideals of the day, marriage and obedience to their husbands as their natural destiny as women. They wanted to present themselves as submissive wives, even though contemporary discussions frequently complained that elite women especially exploited their wealth to control and manage their husbands, thus endangering the patriarchal order.⁸⁹⁴

After marriage, the obligations of the mistress of the house were more important than personal pleasure. This was realized by Elizabeth Montagu (née Robinson), who revealed her first impressions on married life to her friend:

I do hourly thank my stars I am not married to a country squire, or a beau for in the country all my pleasure is in my own fireside, and that only when it is not littered with queer creatures. One must receive visits and return them, such is the civil law of the nations.⁸⁹⁵

Elizabeth seemed glad that her husband was an urban socialite, who did not want to spend much time in the countryside. When Elizabeth was obliged to stay there, she wanted to be alone rather than receive visitors – a tedious task albeit one demanded as good manners. Tague believes that Elizabeth found it impossible to combine the roles of a socialite and a good wife, as the two were incompatible.⁸⁹⁶ Elizabeth’s contemplations show that she had at least internalized the rhetoric of ideal womanhood that put marital roles first. One significant change was that through marriage, she became the mistress of her own house. This gave her power and respectability and enabled her to work to enhance the family’s status. At that point, the education she had received on arts and domestic chores became

⁸⁹³ EM vol. II. Elizabeth Montagu to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 6.8.1742, 18–19.

⁸⁹⁴ Tague 2001, 84, 87.

⁸⁹⁵ EM vol. II. Elizabeth Montagu to Margaret, duchess of Portland, 2.10.1742, 29–32.

⁸⁹⁶ Tague 2001, 92.

very useful. By making the right kind of elegant and suitable household purchases, for instance, the lady of the house reiterated her husband's (and her own) elite status. Good economy was not only important, but also reflected the lady's morality. The mistress of the house was also in charge of servants. She selected them and supervised their work. Vickery shows in her studies that eighteenth-century women liked to have the management of the whole of their household and husbands clearly preferred the female eye on decorative and household management issues. This status was deemed so important that sometimes mothers-in-law were reluctant to give it up to the next generation.⁸⁹⁷

But newly-wed young matrons were not always able to fulfill their new roles. Sixteen-year-old Lady Louisa Connolly (née Lennox) confessed to her sister Emily, Countess of Kildare, that she felt odd travelling without her or her other sisters.⁸⁹⁸ She had married only a year before and was still unaccustomed to the independence of a matron, who could travel alone. Lady Louisa's older siblings also seriously doubted whether their sixteen-year-old sister had the ability to execute commissions of purchase, something that was a typical task of married women. The sisters thought she should have consulted someone of "more prudence than herself" such as her mother-in-law.⁸⁹⁹ Especially Emily, Countess Kildare accused Lady Louisa and her husband of being "two such very children" when they planned to buy a house in London.⁹⁰⁰ If Louisa was to be thought truly an adult she should be able to make reasonable purchases. Marriage did not always bring the financial security and easy life for the lady that it was supposed to do. By putting love over economy and marrying a younger son, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (née Pierrepont) had to run her own household with £800 a year. This was a staggeringly low sum, as Lady Mary's allowance as an unmarried daughter, when she had no living expenses, had been £200!⁹⁰¹ Vickery calculates that a comfortable aristocratic lifestyle would have required a minimum of £5000 per annum.⁹⁰²

Marriage brought changes to the lady's social position. When Lady Emily Lennox married Lord Kildare at the age of fourteen in 1746, her sister Lady Caroline Fox rejoiced at the prospect of their reunion. Lady Emily was now free to meet her as she pleased, when previously her parents had banned Emily from seeing her disgraced elder sister.⁹⁰³

⁸⁹⁷ Vickery 1999 (1998), 127–128, 131–134, 146. Vickery 2009, 88, 90, 100, 104. See also Tague 2002, 100–101, 103, 106–108, 123; Karppinen 2012, 50–51. Ingrid Tague sees this as compensation offered to women in return of their total submission to patriarchal rule. Tague 2002, 98.

⁸⁹⁸ CEL vol. III. Lady Louisa Conolly to Emily, Countess of Kildare, ? .11.1759, 2–5.

⁸⁹⁹ CEL vol. I. James, Earl of Kildare to Emily, Countess of Kildare, 17.5.1759, 87–88; CEL vol. I. Emily, Countess of Kildare to James, Earl of Kildare, 22.5.1759, 92–94.

⁹⁰⁰ CEL vol. I. Emily, Countess of Kildare to James, Earl of Kildare, 28.5.1759, 97–98.

⁹⁰¹ Grundy 2004 (1999), 58.

⁹⁰² Vickery 2009, 130.

⁹⁰³ Tillyard 1995 (1994), 49.

The married lady was no longer under the command of her parents. If her husband chose to accept his wife's choice to interact with someone, she was at liberty to do so.

But a young matron did not always receive the respect and reverence her new status should have entitled her to. The Lennox siblings criticized their sister-in-law, the Duchess of Richmond, for unsuitable behaviour in 1759. The Duchess had attended a play with Lady Louisa Conolly (née Lennox), but she left early and the Duchess stayed until the end. The scandal was that she was the only woman in the box with several men. The Duchess defended her conduct by saying she meant no harm and that the critics were such prudes. Lady Caroline Fox (née Lennox) tried in vain to persuade her that "a young woman's character may be vastly hurt without her meaning the least harm, oftener in my opinion than when they do, for then they are if they have any sense at all more prudent."⁹⁰⁴ Even as a married lady there was a danger that she might lose her good name by behaving against the conventions.

Children belonged in a married life. Every couple had a duty to bear children. They secured the family property and blood line and were a comfort and help for their parents in old age.⁹⁰⁵ Motherhood was, therefore, the essence of the female adulthood role. So, after tying the knot, people started to expect little Misters and Misses to appear in the family. The Lennox siblings were especially straightforward in demanding new additions to the family circle. For instance, Caroline Fox and Emily, Countess of Kildare discussed in June 1759 how their sister-in-law the Duchess of Richmond had been "very irregular" (in her menstrual cycle) and contemplated that a visit to Tunbridge might cure her and enable her to breed. Caroline also wondered that their sister sixteen-year-old "Louisa don't breed yet."⁹⁰⁶ Recently married Elizabeth Montagu (née Robinson) received a gift from her friend in the autumn of 1742. The gift clearly indicated that her friend hoped she would have children soon. Elizabeth wrote: "I thank you for your prudent foresight in making the mantle large enough: I hope in time I may be worthy of it; but at present the jumps are of a virginal size."⁹⁰⁷ Young Ann Granville was more discreet in her inquiries. She hoped that her friend had lain in because of a new baby rather than some illness but "as children are precarious blessings" she was afraid to ask too forwardly.⁹⁰⁸

The sources reveal very varying attitudes towards motherhood among girls when they grew up. Fourteen-year-old Betsey Wynne sighed when a friend of the family came to visit with her brood of "brawling children": "why has she got any? I wish she had none."⁹⁰⁹ In October the same year, Betsey wrote: "I like and esteem Mrs. de B. but when her stupid children is [sic] with her I would rather live far from her than with her. I much

⁹⁰⁴ CL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, Countess of Kildare, May 1759, 220–223.

⁹⁰⁵ Simonton 2011, 38.

⁹⁰⁶ CEL vol. I. Lady Caroline Fox to Emily, countess of Kildare. Friday, 22.6.1759, 236–237.

⁹⁰⁷ EM vol. II. Elizabeth Montagu to Anne Donnellan, 10.10.1742, 36–40.

⁹⁰⁸ MD vol. II. Miss Ann Granville to Lady Throckmorton, 20.2.1739, 76–78.

⁹⁰⁹ WD 14.7.1792, 120.

fear that we will pass the winter in their company.”⁹¹⁰ For a fourteen-year-old, young children were merely a source of annoyance. Some clearly enjoyed the freer life of an unmarried lady. Lady Louisa Conolly visited St Cyr monastery in France. She wrote to her brother in law that: “the nuns told us that if we would kneel & pray to the relicts of a saint that there was there, we should have children.”⁹¹¹ Unfortunately, even that remedy did not help Lady Louisa to become a mother.

Other ladies were more fortunate and having become married matrons duly fulfilled their roles as mothers too. Being pregnant for the first time was certainly an experience of mixed anticipation and fears. Betsey Fremantle (née Wynne) soon became pregnant after marrying in January 1797. In August 20th she had a following note in her diary: “Mr Eshelby...gave me some pills to take, for I am not well at all, but I dont [sic] mind it as it is easy to guess what is the matter with me.”⁹¹² When twenty-two-year-old Elizabeth Montagu (née Robinson) was expecting her first child she hoped “it is for the best, and that it will hereafter be a subject of happiness”.⁹¹³ It is only natural that every pregnant woman wished for everything to go well. As a first timer Elizabeth was not sure what to expect from the birth itself and the approaching motherhood. Although it has been calculated that the risk of dying in childbirth was around 6-7% during this period, it was one of the most common cause of death in women of fertile age. As Vickery rightly points out, statistics do not correspond with the emotions of the people.⁹¹⁴ Every mother, just like young Elizabeth, might have feared for her life, and even more so for the life of her yet unborn baby: the point is that, unlike nowadays in Britain, there was a significant chance of death in childbirth, whatever the exact odds. On a practical level, motherhood meant several pregnancies (on average six to seven in a woman’s lifetime) and consequent consumption of physical and emotional energies. Pregnancies also meant that a woman was practically immobile for long periods of time and her social life diminished while she was unable to visit anybody. After the birth she was too busy taking care of the infant even with the help of a wet nurse.⁹¹⁵ When Elizabeth Montagu was pregnant with her first child in 1742, she duly thanked her friend Mrs. Donnellan for sending her a mantle large enough for her growing stomach. One can sense that symptoms of pregnancy were not very welcome for Elizabeth, as she continued that: “Nothing is less divine and angelic than a breeding woman; sick with a piece of toast and butter, or longing for a bit of tripe, liver, or black-pudding.”⁹¹⁶ In November Elizabeth complained that “I am pretty well at present, but I don’t much like this sort of constitution.”⁹¹⁷

⁹¹⁰ WD 6.10.1792, 128.

⁹¹¹ LSL vol. I. Lady Louisa Conolly to Henry Fox, Lord Holland, May 1765, 164–165.

⁹¹² WD 20.8.1797, 282. Betsey’s first son was born on 11.3.1798. WD 11.3.1798, 294.

⁹¹³ EM vol. II. Elizabeth Montagu to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 5.12.1742, 56–59.

⁹¹⁴ Vickery 1999 (1998), 97–98.

⁹¹⁵ Vickery 1999 (1998), 97, 99, 114–115.

⁹¹⁶ EM vol. II. Elizabeth Montagu to Anne Donnellan, 10.10.1742, 36–40.

⁹¹⁷ EM vol. II. Elizabeth Montagu to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 5.11.(1742), 46–47.

Vickery points out, that eighteenth-century mothers rarely left any account of the actual birthing, and this is borne out by my sources. The only reference to the experiences of labour is from Maria Josepha, Lady Stanley (née Holroyd). She gave birth to her first daughter at the age of twenty-six in July 1797. She assured her aunt that she was perfectly happy in her new role. The actual birth was almost a dreamlike event “about an hour and a half” of unpleasantness. If she did not “see and hear the animal all day long” she would have forgotten that she had a child in the first place.⁹¹⁸ Little babies were considered to lack intelligence. In the words of Locke, their minds were empty tablets that would gradually gain knowledge. It was intelligence and reason that separated humans from animals and small babies were thus animal-like creatures.⁹¹⁹ It is no wonder then that Lady Stanley called her newborn child an animal. As a new mother, she may have had difficulties in adjusting to the arrival of this little being. As the mistress of a great estate, she most likely had maids to help with the baby. The hands-on childcare was conducted by the servants, which is why the presence of the child may indeed have felt obscure to Lady Stanley. In December she commented her six-month-old daughter:

The little thing gains intelligence visibly every day. Foley will spoil her sadly, I am afraid [---]. Miss will have a will of her own, if ever young lady had.⁹²⁰

Once the baby had grown and began to show individual characteristics, it was easier for Lady Stanley to react to her. The little girl was no longer an “animal” but had started to show signs of being human.

The lamentation about the restrictions on social life after birth is evident in the experiences of Lady Stanley. She found it tedious to follow the rules of decorum during her month-long lying-in period. She confessed to her sister that she would have liked to attend social events but was forced to stay at home for fear that “gossiping old women” would condemn her for attending. She did, however, bend the rules a bit by receiving her husband’s friend and drinking tea with him.⁹²¹ The lying-in period was usually four weeks. It is not certain how the practicalities were conducted in this period, but if the mother recovered quickly the lying-in period was seen as time of celebration and company. Vickery suspects that elite ladies were not usually restricted from mix-sexed gatherings.⁹²² However, Lady Stanley’s testimony proves that sometimes they were more to the point, for Lady Stanley the drawback of motherhood was her enclosure into her

⁹¹⁸ MS Sarah Martha Holroyd to Maria Josepha, Lady Stanley, 24.7.1797, 133–134; MS Maria Josepha, Lady Stanley to Sarah Martha Holroyd, 4.8.1797, 134–135.

⁹¹⁹ Porter 2000, 339–340; Fletcher 2010 (2008), chap.1.

⁹²⁰ MS Maria Josepha, Lady Stanley to Sarah Martha (Serena) Holroyd, Dec. 1797, 150.

⁹²¹ MS Maria Josepha, Lady Stanley to Louisa Clinton, 9.8.1797, 135–136.

⁹²² Vickery 1999 (1998), 105.

home during the lying-in period. This was a very concrete sign of rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood and the changes it brought with it.

Motherly love was expressed especially through breastfeeding. Betsey Fremantle's (née Wynne) first son was born in March 1798. Betsey recovered from the birth very quickly and breastfed her son herself.⁹²³ Lady Sarah Bunbury (née Lennox) was also determined to breastfeed her first child, a daughter born in 1768. However, the plan did not succeed. Although she had plenty of milk, the baby was too weak to suck. In the end the baby had to have a wet nurse. Only the letters written by her sisters have survived. There is, therefore, no way of knowing what Lady Sarah felt about the fact that she could not nurse her own child.⁹²⁴ The ideal mother was tender, self-sacrificing and nurturing. A good mother would breastfeed her own children as her milk was the best nourishment for the baby. This issue was strongly debated during this period. The menial tasks were most often conducted by nurses, but breastfeeding enabled mothers to connect with their offspring. In fact, a strong emotional bond was the only real power that a mother could have over her children. The English Common Law granted the father the sole custody over his children, a situation that changed only in 1839 when the Infant Custody Act was passed.⁹²⁵ For the most part, it is likely that the mothers studied here did hand over their babies to wet-nurses. But some of them, especially in the latter part of the century, wanted to create this bond with their children, as the medical authors advocated, through acts of careful nursing. This also shows that the ideals of motherhood were truly put into practice in everyday life.

The evidence for this study shows that motherhood was thought as one final point when a thoughtless girl was finally transformed into a serious and dutiful woman. This was so for Betsey Fremantle (née Wynne), who commented in her diary: "Called on Mrs. Bankes who, tho' civil to me, treats me I think rather too much like a child."⁹²⁶ It must be remembered that Betsey was only nineteen at the time. Despite her young age, the role of motherhood made her, in her own mind at least, a responsible adult. A similar hope was expressed by the relatives of an expectant mother. When Lady Sarah Bunbury (née Lennox) was expecting her first child her elder sister Caroline Fox wished that "this little child that's coming may settle her a little."⁹²⁷ Even though Lady Sarah was young, being a mother required that she settled into her responsible role something she had probably

⁹²³ WD 11.3.1798, 294; WD 13.3.1798, 294; WD 14.3.1798, 294.

⁹²⁴ CEL vol. I. Caroline Fox, Lady Holland to Emily, duchess of Leinster, 19.8.1768, 542–543; CEL vol. I. Caroline Fox, Lady Holland to Emily, duchess of Leinster, Christmas Eve 1768, 559; CEL vol. I. Caroline Fox, Lady Holland to Emily, duchess of Leinster, 28.12.1768, 560; CEL vol. I. Caroline Fox, Lady Holland to Emily, duchess of Leinster, 6.1.1769, 561–562.

⁹²⁵ Greenfield 1999, 2; Vickery 1999 (1998), 107–108; Bailey 2007, 223–224; Fletcher 2010 (2008), 94, 96–97. Vickery argues that the role of the mother was preferred those of a daughter or a sister, in some cases even of a wife. Vickery 1999 (1998), 90–91.

⁹²⁶ WD 6.4.1798, 295.

⁹²⁷ CEL vol. I. Caroline Fox, Lady Holland to Emily, duchess of Leinster, 6.10.1768, 544–546.

not shown sufficient sign before. Some young mothers felt themselves ready for their new role. Twenty-two-year-old Elizabeth Montagu (née Robinson) hoped that

I shall find happiness in acquitting myself justly of the humble duties of a private family; I shall aspire to no higher character than that of a good woman.⁹²⁸

Elizabeth was already expecting her first child and despite the discomforts of pregnancy, she was ready to fulfill her role as wife and mother and invest her energies into the duties of her little family. Being a mother and a wife were the requirements of being a good woman.

But having children was not an ideal for all women. Elizabeth Montagu wrote in 1742 that the role of a mother would not suit her friend Mary Pendarves (in this study Mary Granville). She was more of an intellectual.

I am glad Mrs. Dewes [Mary's sister Anne] has not suffered so terribly this time. I hope poor Pen [Mary Pendarves] has not been in such a fear: as for Pen, she is not a daughter of Eve, but of the collateral branch of Enoch, who walked as an angel before the children of men. I know she would not be guilty of such a grosslèreté as having a child for the world: she is a perfect Seraphim, all fine music and pure spirit, and must be grieved her sister should condescend to such mortal matters.⁹²⁹

There are two girls in this study who never married: Lady Louisa Stuart and Mary Berry. They hardly stayed girls for the rest of their lives even though they never entered the marital status. Both of them turned their energy to writing and intellectual pursuits, just like Mary Pendarves/Delany. Lady Louisa wrote, among others, several biographies, including one for her grandmother Mary Wortley Montagu. Mary Berry in turn, published several plays, accounts of her travels, edited correspondences and historical surveys. Her most famous work was to publish the works of Horace Walpole. They also filled their place in the family hierarchy by taking care of their elderly and sickly parents. Lady Louisa and Mary were not alone. Throughout the early modern period there were a significant number of women who never married, or, even if they did, never became mothers. The number of women who never married fluctuated. The eighteenth-century witnessed a decrease in number from the late seventeenth-century, but the number began to rise again in the 1780s.⁹³⁰ For elite girls, especially younger daughters of the

⁹²⁸ EM vol. II. Elizabeth Montagu to Anne Donnellan, 5.12.1742, 60–62.

⁹²⁹ EM vol. II. Elizabeth Montagu to Anne Donnellan, 10.10.1742, 36–40.

⁹³⁰ It has been estimated that widows comprised of 15 per cent of the adult female population and never-married single women 30 per cent. Froide 2005, 17. Other historians suggest that the numbers fluctuated between 27 and 6 per cent. Hunt 1999, 277–278. Lesbianism was also one reason why women never married and sometimes lived together as “old maids.” See Hunt 1999, *passim*.

aristocracy, small portions sometimes forced them to turn down suitors because of their lower social status. Not all wives were willing to adopt the social status of a lower status husband. It is also possible that some simply didn't want to lose their independence if they had even moderate financial means to live unmarried. Mary Pendarves, mentioned above, married for the second time and became Mary Delany, thereafter living her life as respected socialite, but she never had children of her own. In fact, Laura Thomason has suggested that Mary Pendarves/Delany saw motherhood as a prospective loss of control.⁹³¹ On the other hand, some wives certainly felt their childlessness acutely and tried various remedies to produce offspring in their marriages. It was after all the woman who was always blamed for barrenness.⁹³²

So, when did the adulthood of these women start? Language is one answer to this question. Adulthood began when these women, single, married or otherwise, fulfilled their roles in the society, behaved in accordance with their status and showed the responsible behaviour required of adults. In fact, Amy Louise Erickson has shown that in the eighteenth century “mistress” (Mrs.) signified a woman who either “governed subjects” or was “skilled”. The title “Mrs.” came universally to signify a married woman only in the nineteenth century.⁹³³ Additionally, up until the middle of the eighteenth century, “Miss” was applied to girls, but never adult women. Only after that point did “Miss” start to mark an unmarried woman as well. However, the distinction of married status was more important among the gentry than among the lower orders, where it is often indistinct.⁹³⁴ In this sense, when a girl became competent in the skills required for the responsibilities of adult life, she became Mrs., an adult woman. Another way of looking at this transition is provided by Finnish historian Kustaa H.J. Vilkuna. He has suggested that as early modern men and women reached the prime of their lives at different times and usually married at different ages, the wife aged alongside her husband. In marriage the couple became one flesh and, therefore, seen (by themselves and others) as one. And, of course, the husband was the legal representative of his wife in society. When the husband reached respectable adulthood, his wife, even if younger, did so as well.⁹³⁵

Marriage did not, therefore, mark an automatic end to girlhood. There were still stages that had to be fulfilled before a girl truly became an adult. Even the girls were unsure whether anything had changed when they became wives. The duties of the household mistress were certainly something that changed their lifestyle, but older relatives did not automatically assume that the young wife was capable of fulfilling her new role. Motherhood was certainly one sign of an end to girlhood as it fulfilled women's

⁹³¹ Thomason 2013, 100.

⁹³² Simonton 2011, 38; Shoemaker 2013 (1998), 140–144.

⁹³³ Erickson 2014, 39, 46, 52.

⁹³⁴ Erickson 2014, 39, 41–44.

⁹³⁵ Vilkuna 2010, 18.

role in society and their main purpose as women. The girls whose writings I have looked at also acknowledged it as having a fundamentally changing impact.

In this chapter, I have looked at the final stages of girlhood. Just as the sexuality of women was strictly scrutinized in the eighteenth-century, so too was the sexuality of girls. Elite girls were most likely virgins before they married, but virginity was much more than just physical intactness. The ideal girl had to show that she was pure in both her actions and her thoughts. Yet the girls of this study were able to act relatively freely within these parameters. Their reputation was not as easily tarnished as we might think. The subordinate position of girls becomes clear during marriage negotiations, in which the whole family network, parents, siblings and friends, took part. Even so, following the advice of one's elders did not prevent many of the girls of this study from making their own decisions about their future happiness.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Conceptions of stages of the ageing process are neither static nor universal, as they vary according to culture and they change with time. Age is not purely chronological but it also contains. Nor is age purely a measure of chronology, as it has a variety of implications involving perception of social attributes, behaviour and skills. Conceptions of child and adult or young and old have differed according to period and society. The same may be said of gender, of boy, girl, man or woman, although notions of these varied to a lesser extent. In the eighteenth century, and the early modern period in general, categorizations of all these terms were fluid in that there were no strict dichotomies: for example, definitions of terms referring to life stages or status varied according to personal, cultural and gendered factors. Even the seemingly fixed definitions of the law had to be adjusted eventually to respond to social change and changes in attitude.

Being a girl in the eighteenth-century world was a process. A girl did not suddenly turn into a woman when she reached a certain age or when she married and became a wife, as previous research has repeatedly stated. Instead, she gradually turned into an adult as her age, behaviour and skills developed. In other words, it took more than living out a certain number of years to become an adult woman. Being an adult meant that the female would have to possess a number of skills that enabled her to act properly in society, in the world of adults. Then she would be able to take a place as a fully-fledged member of society.

This is not to say that chronological age had no impact. Legal and medical age boundaries, for example, twenty-one as the majority in England, were important for the girls and in eighteenth-century thinking. They were certain signposts that marked the growing up process. According to the norms of the eighteenth century, 'girls' belonged somewhere between delicate children and delicate females. Girls, as young females, were seen as physically fragile and weak from the medical point of view. Young bodies were not fully developed, and as females, they would never achieve the strength and mental capacity of males. Puberty was a time of turmoil for both sexes, when the young bodies were transformed into their adulthood shapes. Menarche was seen as significant moment in every girl's life as it was the first physical sign of the maturing process. Girlhood

indicated that a female was not completely an adult, but still in a developing stage. It implied both a physical and a mental immaturity that required the guardianship and advice of her elders. Minors did have some legal rights in eighteenth-century England, but on the whole they were dependent on the decisions of their parents or guardians. Contemporary writers recognized girls' immaturity as a reason to protect them from, for instance, too early a sexual initiation or marriage. They were seen not as physically or mentally fit for it. So girls were not seen as mini-adults, but as a group of their own, something that has come to the fore only in recent historical research. Girls were not yet women, but neither were they infants or little children,. This immaturity of girlhood was also represented in the language of everyday life. The attributes that were attached to girlhood represented their youth and carefree stage in life, but also their modest and delicate female nature. When a female behaved in a carefree and giddy manner, she was termed a girl no matter what her age.

Eighteenth-century English elite girls were categorized according to age, gender and class: by their age as young people, by their gender as females and by their status as members of the elite. In eighteenth-century society, where an adult male was the dominant figure and the measure of a human being, girlhood represented double marginality: they were young and they were female. Females were categorically thought weaker than males. They lacked both intellectual and physical capacity. Ideally, all females lived under the patriarchal order from cradle to grave. Of course, as I have shown in this study, this was only an ideal and sometimes far from the reality of the everyday life.

This is not to say that the girls did not share to some extent the general beliefs about females and girlhood: of course they did. They were, as all people have been or still are, children of their time. They shared certain cultural norms of that period in history and the community they lived in. Sometimes these norms were taken at face value and were not discussed at all because they were felt to be self-evident. It is our duty as historians to reveal these hidden social structures. Only then can we fully understand the actions of people in the past. The girls of this study were not always aware of these norms, so for much of the time they just acted accordingly, but sometimes they clearly showed that they were aware of them and made a point of letting people know this, either to emphasize that they followed them or to contravene them. The social norms did not only apply to gender and the patriarchal order of society. As members of the elite, the girls shared elite values and faced certain expectations as to how to behave and lead their lives. It has been said that one was simply born into the eighteenth-century elite; there were special values and rules that were internalized by growing up only in that society. This eighteenth-century elite culture had its European aspects, the strongest influence being French, but the English elite also had its own special features. From my

perspective as a Finnish scholar, there are similarities with the elite culture of the Swedish-Finnish realm, whose elite also very much idealized the French Enlightenment.

The values and expectations of the elite life-style were sometimes in stark contrast with those of the ideal female. Elite females were required be assured socialites who manifested grace and easy elegance in their every action. This was occasionally difficult to combine with the ideal of a female who was chaste and submissive and should avoid attracting attention. Additionally, girls were still learning the rules of adult society because they were young. It was demanded of youngsters that they should learn by example and observation but should also avoid excess shyness, which was regarded as a trait of the female gender. The girls sometimes struggled to fulfill these expectations.

The main intention of this study has been to show that the girls, the Lennox sisters, Fanny Burney, Elizabeth and Sarah Robinson, the Wynne sisters, Mary Granville and several others, were active agents in their own lives. It is true that they had to conform to the rules of their society and proper behaviour, but this did not mean that they were passive and completely controlled by others. They knew what was expected of them, but they also knew what they themselves wanted. Moreover, they were not afraid to act on their own behalf, sometimes in the face of negative consequences. The girls appearing in this study were all individuals and their experiences were unique – up to a point. The family and its dynamics, personal character, social position, and even pure chance all had an influence on how their girlhood years progressed.

There is no question that girls were important in eighteenth-century family life. They acted out several roles as (step-, half-) daughters, granddaughters, nieces and (step-, half-) sisters. In theory, filial duty determined most of their actions, and for the most part the girls managed to act according to this ideal. But as always, ideal and reality rarely corresponded exactly. Family dynamics played a part in how close or strained relationships with other family members were. Some girls, like Fanny Burney, managed to form a closer and relatively good relationship with their parents. Other girls, like Elizabeth Robinson or Mary Granville, had a less easy relationship with their parents. Especially mother-daughter relationship seemed to have been strained either due to incompatible character or other factors. Eighteenth-century parent-child-relations were often affectionate and playful and not always defined by the power-hierarchy. Love and affection was usually evident. An only daughter living at home, such as Lady Louisa Stuart, might feel care of elderly parents a burden. Some girls, like Lady Mary Pierrepont, openly rebelled against their parents and acted according to their own will, despite the consequences. Girls were, indeed, active agents that could act independently even though in theory they were constantly subject to the male order. In some cases, the

eldest daughter acted as a substitute mistress of the family and accepted heavy responsibility in taking care of the family estate or younger siblings. This indicates that girls were not just subordinate in the age hierarchy, but could act as equals when circumstances required. For most of the girls, death had deprived them of their mothers, so the relationship with their father had to be enhanced. Relationships with stepmothers (some of them had several, like Maria Edgeworth) were mostly cordial, if not especially close.

The relationship between siblings was seen as more equal than between parents and children. Whereas parents were due reverence and obedience, siblings were meant to love each other. They were the ones with whom the girls grew up, and had the longest single relationships in their lifetime. Of course, how close or distant these relationships were depended on age and other circumstances. Families usually had several children, and the age-gap between the eldest and the youngest was sometimes significant. It is only natural that siblings close in age were more intimate with each other. However, sibling-relations were not strictly gendered. Girls might be close to both their sisters and their brothers.

The different lifestyles of males and females naturally influenced how sibling-relations were formed. Boys were sent to school and most girls stayed at home. When siblings grew older, brothers were frequently away from the family home for business or politics or even away on long sea voyages. Even though girls did travel and visited the capital from time to time, their lives were more bound to home. Life-cycle events, such as marriage, changed the relationship between siblings as well. The playmate of the youthful years might suddenly move far away and start a new life. A brother's wife might become a new sister or even the mistress of the family seat.

The most important element in eighteenth-century sibling relations was its reciprocity. Siblings were expected to love and support each other as best they could. Denying their help, or failing to help, was harshly criticized. The help siblings gave to each other was gendered. Brothers were able to help their siblings financially. Especially for their sisters, they provided home and protection when parents were already deceased. Sisters, in turn, provided their siblings with mental support and services. They kept up family connections, disseminated news and nursed the sick.

Problems were of course inevitable. Different characters and situations in life caused tension between the siblings. The age- and gender-hierarchy had an impact on how brothers and sisters interacted with each other. The eldest brother, the male heir to the family title, was supposed to receive his due respect and reverence. In the absence of the father, he was the head of the family. Elder siblings, both sisters and brothers, expected respect from the younger ones. Matters of loyalty and trust seem to have been important issues of dispute. When marriage prospects were on

the table, siblings, both younger and elder, were keen to get involved in the negotiations or at least express their opinion on the matter. After all, marriages changed the family's dynamics and finances.

Earlier research has already firmly established that early modern and eighteenth-century English parents mourned their dead children. Even though death was a frequent visitor in the eighteenth-century family, the loss was not considered insignificant. In this study, I have considered to some extent the emotional life of the children and the young. Most of the girls studied here lost either one or both their parents and usually several siblings. Death was not something unknown to them, and it was not hidden from them when it occurred. If the father died, it could mean financial ruin to the family. Losing a mother meant that a girl lost her primary guide to womanhood. Losing a sibling was no less easy to bear. Any death of a sibling might change the position of a living child in the age sequence of the remaining children, which could have a significant impact on their future prospects. Moreover, losing a playmate naturally left an emotional scar. The absence of religiosity is striking in the records of these experiences. It was not necessarily God's will, but the natural course of life. If the girls consoled themselves in religious contemplation, no evidence has survived.

A family with parents and children was not the only important connections that the girls had. The family network was much wider and both influenced and supported their lives. Grandparents, aunts and uncles were part of their everyday life. Most of the girls lived with them at some point in their lives, especially when they received the finishing touches to their education. Depending on how close the relationship was, these relatives could act as extra-parents, who would help to guide the girl through her youthful years. When deaths deprived a child of both parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles and even older siblings stepped in as substitute parents. In addition they all had considerable influence at a later stage when the girls were in the marriage market looking for a husband. They found out everything there was to know about the possible suitor and were keen to advise the would-be bride. Marriage brought important connections, so everyone in the family circle wanted to make sure the girl made the right decision.

The girlhood years of eighteenth-century elite girls were paved with mixed feelings, happiness, sorrow and anxieties. During those years they learned how to be women; wives, mistresses of houses and mothers. They also learned how to be members of the elite. It must be noted that the girls were individuals and represented a small group in the population of the eighteenth-century Britain. Their experiences cannot be interpreted as representing all girlhood in the period. They lived privileged lives that were far from the world of most of the population. Individual experiences were influenced by the cultural norms of the time and there

were joint, sometimes unconscious expectations and rules that determined what kind of life the girls should live as elite females.

In this study, I have shown that eighteenth-century girls did receive education. The schooling the girls had was extensive and proper in accordance with their social status. They spoke several languages, read extensively, wrote elegant letters, played a musical instrument, danced and spend their days walking, riding or doing needlework. Elite girls of the eighteenth-century were not to suppose to spend their days doing nothing. Idleness would only lead to misbehaviour and moral corruption. By filling their days with useful activities, the girls fulfilled their role as ideal and productive females who devoted themselves to domestic duties. Moreover, they knew themselves what was expected of them and were not afraid to criticize if the education they received did not meet these expectations. The whole purpose of the education of elite girls in the eighteenth-century was to furnish them in their future roles as mothers, wives and elite socialites. Literary skills were important, as well as so-called accomplishments. Most importantly, they needed to learn the rules of politeness, the social skills that were vital to survive in the eighteenth-century social world. They were members of the elite and they had to learn to behave accordingly. It was the parents' duty to bring up their offspring in such a manner that they could fulfill their roles in the adult world. Although criticism towards parents was not usually very open, it was still evident. Reasons for failing to provide their daughters with a sufficient education might be financial, ideological, lack of interest or health issues that prevented it.

It is true that there were contrasting views in this period on how extensive literary education girls should receive, or whether it was necessary at all. Some contemporary authors believed that it was completely unnecessary, or even dangerous, to teach girls too much. An educated girl would only grow haughty and conceited. She would forget her destiny as a wife and a mother. A well-behaving girl should learn domestic skills and spend her time doing needlework or some other useful employment. Above all, she should avoid idleness and empty gossiping. Other commentators believed that a certain level of literary skill was important so that girls could act in their social environment. Fluent and entertaining conversation was the key element in polite interaction in eighteenth-century elite society. Sufficient reading and knowledge of different subjects would enable girls to take part in these conversations. The girls themselves took part in the discussion as to what sort of education they should have. Most of them took the attitude that female education should focus on improving their minds rather than teaching them to adorn their outer forms. Yet, they took great care in their appearances for practical reasons. I would conclude that balance between the two was something they sought after. Moreover, girls like Fanny Burney and Lady Mary Pierrepont extended the limits of proper female education by becoming published authors.

Their literary careers started early and their example shows that more ambitious pursuit in literature was not banned in all families, even from young girls.

The contradictory expectations of the ideal female and well-behaved elite girl were mostly evident in the socializing process. The eighteenth-century ideal of proper female behaviour comprised silence, modesty and reserved bearing. This was thought especially important for young girls, who were still learning the rules of the adult world. They should carefully observe and learn from the example of their elders and not express their own opinions too freely. They should not attract too much attention to themselves before they were officially “out”. Especially with the opposite sex, girls should be extremely careful. However, the elite social world was all about being on show. This manifestation of their wealth, good taste and social position was something that even the youngsters should learn from early on. The best way to socialize the girls to the elite world was to let them participate in it while still very young. From the testimony that the girls have left behind, I can conclude that the girls were fully aware of these contradictory expectations laid at their door. In their autobiographical writings they acknowledged that they should behave in a certain reserved way proper to their age and gender. However, they also felt the pressure of appearing at their best in company. The girls also appeared at the capital’s social events like operas, theatres, assemblies and the court. Although they occasionally claimed that such diversions did not interest them the least, it is clear that they felt the enjoyments of the capital important to their upbringing. Without them, they could not have a thorough knowledge of the elite world.

The demonstration of one’s social position was very open. The girls had to learn how to dress, walk and dance according to their status. Every gesture or word had to be carefully monitored. Good-breeding and inner good qualities were manifested in outer form. An elite girl was to be recognized from her appearance. Lavish dresses and consumption were part of the elite world and the girls participated in it. They had their own allowances to spend and they certainly used them. From early on, they also showed polite sociability by visiting their neighbours and friends either alone or with their mother or hosted at tea-times in their family home. Social events were also good venues for showing off their skills. Entertaining guests with music or dancing at social events provided the proper arena for the girls to find a suitable husband.

The elite life-style and constant being on show were not the only pressures that influenced the lives of the girls. Sexuality embraced incongruent values and potential threats for girls and women in the eighteenth-century. The ideal female in eighteenth-century thinking was modest and chaste. It was even said that these qualities were “natural” to females. Especially unmarried girls, virgins, should excel in these qualities. Virginity had a dual nature, implying both physical and

mental purity. It was not only necessary that girls were physically intact, but also mentally pure. Lewd and indecent thoughts and acts could easily lead a young girl to ruin. Yet, as the representatives of the “weaker sex”, girls were thought to be more prone to act on their feelings and emotions. In the eighteenth century, love especially was seen as a powerful feeling that could lead to devastating consequences if not kept in check. In the worst case scenario, a young girl would throw herself into the arms of the first man that showed any interest in her. Moreover, contemporary authors were worried about what young girls in their turmoil of puberty might come up with. Awakening sexuality posed a problem, as it made the young uncontrollable. How could parents ensure that their daughters remained sexually innocent, when their sexual urges might encourage them to masturbate or worse? Youth did permit certain indiscretions, but there were limits that could not be crossed. Reputation was everything, and with females, it was easily violated. But therein lay an irony: the ideal of the chaste and innocent young girl was the most appealing image in the sexual imagination of the eighteenth-century. Even didactical authors encouraged girls to behave modestly, chastely and innocently to attract and please potential husbands. So the very behaviour that should protect their reputation and virginity was also encouraging its violations.

The girls of this study were fully aware of these double standards. In their autobiographical writings they represented themselves as well-behaved and modest girls, or at least showed an awareness of how they should act. However, in everyday life they might behave differently. In their speech and acts the girls were not such innocent maids as the didactic authors wanted them to be. Sexually coloured talk, albeit often veiled, was not unusual to the girls. They did talk about sexual matters in both female and male company. They were also aware of the matters of procreation. Previous research has glossed over such things or even claimed that unmarried girls knew nothing about sexual matters, let alone talked about them. This study, however, has shown quite the opposite. The girls also felt acutely the double standards of the time. They struggled to maintain the ideal of a modest and chaste young girl, yet criticized the ideal and even mocked those who tried to keep it up. The eighteenth-century gallantry that allowed men to take liberties in the name of politeness did not go unnoticed by the girls either. Although they acknowledged that insinuating talk was part of contemporary gallantry, they did not take it as something that had to be tolerated. There are hints that the girls also faced outright sexual harassment, but the evidence is insufficient to allow us to say anything conclusive. Although the girls were aware that female reputations were easily destroyed, they did not condemn each other on minor issues. Youth allowed much freedom and playfulness. Flirting with young men was not dangerous, as long as certain rules of decorum were maintained. But, the

condemnation of one's peers was evident when a girl forgot her social position and showed, for instance, romantic interest in a social inferior.

This leads us to the final stages of the maturing process. Marriage was a matter of great importance and the girls therefore took it seriously. Ideally, marriage brought with it financial wealth and social connections that were important to the whole of the girl's family. Not all the girls married, but most of them did. Some contemplated more explicitly than others their views on married life and wifehood. It is clear from these contemplations that the girls took their future and probable marriage seriously. They acknowledged the pros and cons that related to it. Marriage would, ideally, bring financial security, enhancement of social status and emotional companionship. At worst, it would mean financial and legal dependence that could not easily be broken. Therefore, the girls did not hurry to tie the knot for the rest of their lives. They wanted to wait and make the right decision to secure their future happiness. Love was important, but so were other qualities, such as sufficient wealth to lead a comfortable life and compatible character.

The path to the altar was paved with mixed feelings and anxieties, and involved family members and friends and long and complicated negotiations. It has been said that elite girls did not have much influence on their future or choice of spouse - that the interests of the family played a more crucial role than personal feelings. The sources I have used in this research give a slightly different picture. It is true that family members and friends did get involved in the marriage negotiations, or in finding a suitable husband candidate for their sisters, daughters and nieces. Some of them involved themselves more than others, but on the whole the girls had a great deal of freedom to make their own choice. Even if the offer of marriage was accepted by the family, if the girl did not consent she was allowed to have her way. The family very rarely forced a girl to accept an offer of marriage against her own inclination.

I have claimed in this study that marriage was not the automatic end of girlhood. Throughout I have stressed that the end of girlhood was a slow process from youthful years to adulthood. However, marriage did not magically transform a girl into a woman. Even the girls themselves wondered whether anything had changed after the wedding night (apart from losing their virginity). Some were less certain whether they really were ready to marry after all. Older siblings might still treat their younger sister as a girl, despite her new title. Being an adult woman meant that she should also be able to conduct her duties as mistress of the house and a wife. If she did not, she was not completely an adult.

Motherhood was the ideal role that every eighteenth-century female should seek. Initially, the purpose of every marriage was meant to be procreation. This, yet again, shows the development of girlhood from one stage to another. Ideally, only in marriage could a woman have children. In her maternal role, a woman

fulfilled the expectations of adult society by producing and taking care of the future of the nation. Most of the girls had several children after they married and thus duly fulfilled these expectations. Their attitudes towards motherhood changed when they grew older. It is only natural that, for instance, fourteen-year-old Betsey Wynne found the young children of her neighbour irritating, but when she gave birth to her first son as a nineteen-year-old, she became a devoted mother. The anxiety of the first birth is clearly to be seen from the contemplations of the girls. They knew full well that giving birth could turn out to be fatal. After a safe delivery, being a mother certainly changed the views of the girls. Most of them expressed that, along with motherhood, they had found a new role and goals in their lives. Whether or not this change of life had any negative aspects, they did not express them in their letters or diaries. The first reaction was the pure amazement of the safe arrival of the little one. Their life as adult women had begun.

A married lady was not an adult, if she could not act like a mistress of the house or a society matron. Moreover, an increasing number of women never married at all, but that does not mean they still had the position of a juvenile. In fact, even she was married personal and family dynamics had a strong influence on whether and when she was treated as mature. This is also the case with motherhood. Even then personal experiences varied. Not all these ladies found that their new role as wives and mothers automatically brought them prestige among their elders. Eighteenth-century elite girlhood cannot, therefore, be looked at uniform experience lasting a given number of years and ending with the same event for all girls.

The journey has come to an end. The little girl has finally grown into an adult woman. This study has shown that even people that seem invisible in the pages of history can have a voice. One of cultural historian's main duties is to bring the multiple voices of the past to the fore and make them heard. Girls have been in the margins both in historical research and in the societies they lived in, even if they were members of the elite.

With this study, I hope to raise the profile of age as a concept of analysis in historical research. By applying concepts that have been used for studies of other periods but rarely for the period at hand, and taking nothing for granted or self-evident, we can acquire a much more vibrant and multidimensional image of the past. The people of eighteenth-century appear in a very different light when we take into consideration their ages and the gender or social status they represented. I have not brought to the fore any new material for this study, as my sources have been used in historical research several times before. However, I have suggested a new way of reading them. The cultural historical viewpoint shows that things are rarely "natural" or absolute. Rather, it shows that human societies are, and have

always been, constructed through human cultural rules and norms, and as such are mutable. For me, the essential meaning and importance of cultural history is to enhance the self-understanding of being a human.

ABBREVIATIONS

AT	Anne Tracy, Diary 1723–1725
CEL	Correspondence of Emily Duchess of Leinster
DR	A Duke and His Friends. The Life and Letters of the second Duke of Richmond
EM	The Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu
FB1	The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney vol. I. 1768–1773
FB2	The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney vol. II. 1774–1777
HP	Letters of Harriet Eliot
LS1	Gleanings from an Old Portfolio. Correspondence between Lady Louisa Stuart and her sister Caroline, Countess of Portarlington vol.I
LS2	Letters of Lady Louisa Stuart to Miss Louisa Clinton vol. I.
LSL	Life and Letters of Lady Sarah Lennox
MB	Extracts from the Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry vol. I
MD	The autobiography and correspondence of Mary Granville
ME	A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth, with a selection from her letters
MH	The Girlhood of Maria Josepha Holroyd
MS	The Early Married Life of Maria Josepha Lady Stanley
MWM	The Complete letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu
NLI	National Library of Ireland
SL	Correspondence of Sarah Spencer, Lady Lyttelton
SS	The Letters of Sarah Scott vol. I
WD	The Wynne Diaries

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APPENDIX. TABLES OF FAMILIES

The information is derived from the primary sources, biographies and research. See Bibliography. I was not able to construct all family tables due to the lack of detailed information.

TABLE I.

Lady Harriet Pitt (1758–1786). Place of birth unknown

Also lived in: London

Parents: William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham (1708–1778) Hester Grenville, Baroness of Chatham (1720–1803)

Both her father and brother were PMs.

Siblings: Lady Hester Pitt (1755–1780), Hon. William Pitt (1759–1806), General John Pitt, 2nd Earl of Chatham (1785–1835)

Married: 24.9.1785 Hon. Edward James Eliot (1758–1797).
1 child.

TABLE II.

Lady Sarah Spencer (1787–1870), Althorp (Brington, Northamptonshire)

Also lived in: London

Parents: George John Spencer, 2nd Earl Spencer (1758–1834), Lady Lavinia Bingham (1762–1831)

Her father's sister was Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire (1757–1806).

Siblings: John Charles Spencer, 3rd Earl Spencer (1782–1845), Hon. Richard Spencer (1789–1791), Captain Hon. Sir Robert Cavendish Spencer (1791–1830), Hon. William Spencer (b. 1792), Lady Harriet Spencer (1793), Lady Georgiana Charlotte Spencer (1794–1823, Quin), Vice-Admiral Frederick Spencer, 4th Earl Spencer (1789–1857), Hon. George Spencer (1799–1864)

Married: 4.3.1813 William Henry Lyttelton, 3rd Lord Lyttelton, Baron of Frankley (1782–1837).

5 children.

TABLE III.

Elizabeth Robinson (1720–1800), Yorkshire

Also lived in: Cambridge, York, London, Sandelford (Berkshire), Northumberland, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Sarah Robinson (1723–1795) Yorkshire

Also lived in: Cambridge, Bath, Buckinghamshire, Catton (Norwich)

Parents: Matthew Robinson (1694–1778), Elizabeth Morris (d.1745)

Siblings: Matthew (1713–1800) afterwards 2nd Baron Rokeby, Thomas (1714–1746/7), Morris (1715–1777), Robert (d.1756), William (1726–1803), John, Charles (1733–1807)

Married (Elizabeth): 1742 Edward Montagu (1691–1776), grandson of Edward Montagu, 1st Earl of Sandwich.

1 child.

Married (Sarah): 1751 George Lewis Scott (1708–1780), mathematician

No children.

TABLE IV.

Maria Edgeworth (1768–1849). Black Bourton (Oxfordshire)

Also lived in: Edgeworthstown Estate (Country Longford, Ireland), Derby, London

Parents: Richard Lovell Edgeworth, politician, writer (1744–1817), Anna Maria Elers (1743–1773)

Siblings: Richard (1765–1796), Emmeline, Anna Maria, infant (d. 1773?)

Half-siblings by Honora Sneyd (1751–1780): Lovell (1775–1842), Honora (1774–1790). Half-siblings by Elizabeth Sneyd (1753–1797): Charles Sneyd (d. 1864), William. Half-siblings by Frances Ann Beufort: Michael Pakenham, Francis Ysidro, Francis Beufort, Lucy Jane

Unmarried. No children.

TABLE V.

Frances, “Fanny” Burney (1752–1840), King’s Lynn

Also lived in: London, Bath, France

Parents: Charles Burney, musician (1726–1814), Esther Sleepe (1725–1762)

Siblings: Esther (Hetty) (1749–1832), James (1750–1821), Charles (1751–1752), Charles (1753–54), Susan Elizabeth (1753/5–1800), Charles (1757–1817), Henry Edward (d. inf. 1760), Charlotte Ann (1761–1838). Step- and half-siblings by Elizabeth Allen (1728–96): Maria Allen (1751–1820), Stephen Allen (1755–1847), Elizabeth (Bess) Allen (1761–c.1826), Richard Thomas Burney (1768–1808), Sarah Harriet Burney (29.8.1772–1844)

Married: 1793 General Alexandre-Jean-Baptiste Piochard d’Arblay (1754–1818)

1 child.

TABLE VI.

Lady Mary Pierrepont (1689–1762), Covent Garden (London)

Also lived in: Thoresby Hall, Constantinople, Vienna, Adrianople, Venice, Avignon, Brescia, Lovere

Parents: Evelyn Pierrepont, 5th Earl and 1st Duke of Kingston (c.1665–1726), Lady Mary Fielding (c.1665–1692)

Siblings: Lady Frances (1690–1761), Lady Evelyn (1691–1727), William (1692–1713). Half-siblings by Lady Isabella Bentinck: Lady Caroline, Lady Anne

Married: Edward Wortley Montagu, Esq. (1678–1761).
2 children.

TABLE VII.

Lady Louisa Stuart (1757–1851). Place of birth unknown.
Also lived in: Luton Hoo Estate (Bedfordshire), London

Parents: John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute (1713–1792) Edinburg, Scotland, Mary Wortley Montagu jr., Baroness Mount Stuart of Wortley (1718–1794)

Her grandmother was Lady Mary Wortley-Montagu (see above).

Siblings: Lady Mary (1738–1824, Lowther), Edward (1740–1742), Lady Jane (1742–1828 Macartney), John, 1st Marquess of Bute (1744–1814), Lady Anne (1746–1818, Percy), James Archibald (1747–1818), Lady Augusta (1749–1778), Charles (1753–1801), Frederick (1751–1802), William (1755–1822), Lady Caroline (1750–1813, Dawson)

Unmarried. No children.

TABLE VIII.

Elizabeth (Betsey) Wynne (1778–1857) Folkingham (Linconshire)
Eugenia Wynne (b.1780)
Also lived in: Germany, Italy, Corsica, Swanbourne (Buckinghamshire)
Faith: Catholic

Parents: Richard Wynne (1744–1799), Camille de Royer (d.1799)

Siblings: Mary (Montalbano), Harriet (b. 1784, Hamilton), Justina (b. 1786, Finlay)

Married (Elizabeth): Captain Thomas Fremantle (1765–1819)

5 children

Married (Eugenia): Robert Campbell

TABLE IX.

Anne Tracy (1705–1763), Lower Swell (Gloucestershire)

Also lived in: Stanway House (Gloucestershire), Swerford House (Oxfordshire)

Parents: John Tracy (1682–1735), Anne Atkyns (1683–1761)

Siblings: John (1703–1704) Robert (1706–1767), John (1706–1773),
Ferdinando (1707–1729), Catherine (1710–1763), Anthony (1712–1767),
Martha (1713–1792), Thomas (1716–1770), Elizabeth (1718–1792)
William (1721–1729), Edward (1723–1723), Charles Richard (1724–1726),
Frances (1729–1809)

Married: John Travell (1699–1762)

13 children.

TABLE X.

Lady Caroline Lennox (1723–1774)

Lady Emily Lennox (1731–1814)

Lady Louisa Lennox (1743–1821)

Lady Sarah Lennox (1745–1826)

Also lived in: Dublin, London, Goodwood House (Sussex), County Kildare
(Ireland), Suffolk

Parents: Charles, 2nd Duke of Richmond (1701–1750), Sarah Cadogan (d.
1751).

Descendants of King Charles II (with Louisa de Keroualle, Duchess of
Portsmouth)

Siblings: Charles, 3rd Duke of Richmond (1735–1806), George (1737–1805),
Lady Cecilia (1750–1769)

Married (Caroline): Henry Fox, 1st Baron Holland (1705–1774).

4 children.

Married (Emily): James Fitzgerald, 20th Earl of Kildare, 1st Duke of Leinster (1722–1773), William Ogilvie (1740–1832).

21 children.

Married (Louisa): Thomas Conolly (1738–1803).

No children.

Married (Sarah): Sir Charles Bunbury (1740–1821), George Napier (1753–1804).

9 children.

TABLE XI.

Lady Maria Josepha Holroyd (1771–1862). Place of birth unknown.

Also lived in: London, Sheffield Place (Sussex)

Parents: John Baker Holroyd, 1st Earl of Sheffield (1735–1821), Abigail Way (d.1793)

Siblings: Lady Louisa Dorothea (d. 1854, Clinton), John William. Half-siblings by Lady Anne North (d.1832): George Augustus, 2nd Earl of Sheffield (1802–1876), Lady Anne Frederica (d.1829)

Married: Sir John T. Stanley, 1st Lord Stanley of Alderley (1766–1850).

9 children.

TABLE XII.

Mary Granville (1700–1788), Coultston, Wiltshire

Also lived in: Roscrow Castle (Cornwall), London, Bath, Dublin (Ireland)

Parents: Colonel Bernard Granville, Mary Westcombe

Siblings: Bernard (b.1699), Bevil (b.1702–1706), Anne (b. 1707, Dewes)

Uncle: George Granville, 1st Baron Lansdowne

Married: 1718 Alexander Pendarves MP (1662–1725), 1743 Dr Patrick Delany,
dean (1686–1768)

No children.

TABLE XIII.

Mary Berry (1763–1852), Kirkbridge, Yorkshire

Also lived in: Italy, France

Parents: Robert Berry, Miss Seaton (d. 1767)

Siblings: Anne (1764–1752)

Unmarried. No children.

Eliza Dawson (1770–1858), Oxton, Yorkshire

Also lived in: York, Edinburg

Parents: Miles Dawson, land surveyor, Miss Hill

No siblings.

Married: 1791 Archibald Fletcher, advocate (1746–1828)

6 children.



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