Summary

This study focuses on the rules for sexual behaviour in conduct books, published in the Netherlands between 1780 and 1890. The analysis is based on two types of conduct books: the marriage manual and the conduct book for young adults. At the end of the eighteenth century, both types of books are already well established. At this point in time, however, a variation within the last type is developing: the conduct book for young women.

Central to my analysis is the question how the rules for sexual conduct are to be interpreted. This question stems from the juxtaposition of continuity and change in these guidelines. The advice of the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries follows the same pattern as that of the early-modern period: sexual intercourse is reserved for married couples. As far as the content is concerned, the instructions of the later period are similar to the ones of the former period. The way in which the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rules are presented, however, differs considerably from the formulation of the early-modern ones. Whereas the earlier advice is given in a straightforward manner, the later guidelines are formulated in a very complex way. The form is dominated by specific narrative strategies, especially by creating contrasts and through the transformation of these contrasts into moral categories. These strategies leave the reader with the impression that any transgression of the rules constitutes a sin, and will bring misfortune. As a result, the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conduct books are far more compelling than the early-modern ones.

Interestingly, in every type of conduct book the narrative strategies are used differently. In the marriage manuals they appear only in the paragraphs discussing the choice of spouse. This advice is directed at the not-
yet-wedded, that is— in the contemporary *mentalité*— at young adults. In
the conduct books for young adults these strategies are used more widely.
In the books for young women they are present not only in the chapters
concerning mating, but also in the ones on socialising with men. In the
books for young men they can be found in the discussion of every possible
subject. These differences point towards a connection between the use
of narrative strategies and the age of the professed readership, and towards a
relation between style and gender.

So far, the form of the rules for sexual conduct has not been taken into
account in historical research on sexual education. As a result, no allowance
has been made for a specific approach towards youth in the interpreta-
tion of these rules. However, changing perceptions of youth, developed
in the course of the eighteenth century by Rousseau and other Enlighten-
ment pedagogues, warrant such an allowance.

Besides, form provides the key to gender in the conduct books. For it is
the formulation that gives away the presuppositions of the authors con-
cerning the difference between the sexes. The authors, of course, follow
the views that are already held in Dutch society, during the late eighteenth
century.

Because of these considerations, the rules for sexual conduct are ana-
lysed twice. The first analysis focuses on content: what ought to be the sex-
ual behaviour of young adults and married couples? The second one con-
cerns the form: which narrative strategies are used? Do they have a specific
effect on the reader, perhaps even serve a specific, educational purpose?

Sexuality

The marriage manuals only mention sexuality, when discussing the choice
of spouse. As far as content is concerned, the advice runs that the respon-
sibilities of marriage demand more of a couple than mere sexual attraction.
Regarding form, these paragraphs show the use of two specific narra-
tive strategies: contrasting the choice, in which the responsibilities of
marriage are taken into consideration, with one, that is merely motivated
by sexual attraction. Furthermore, they complement this contrast with
references to good and evil. In this way, the authors appeal to the con-
science of the readers.
mentalité – at young adults. In strategies are used more widely present not only in the chapters on socialising with men. In the the discussion of every possible connection between the use of mentalités, and towards a conduct has not been taken into account. As a result, no allowances are made for youth in the interpretation of youth, developed Rousseau and other Enlightenment thinkers in the conduct books. For it is oppositions of the authors concerned. The authors, of course, follow the trends during the late eighteenth rules for sexual conduct are ana
typionage: what ought to be the sexual norms? The second one concerns the use of two specific norms, which the responsibilities of sex, that is merely motivated by the desire for marriage. This strategy runs the risk of more sexual attraction the use of two specific narratives. which the responsibilities of sex, that is merely motivated by the desire for marriage. This strategy runs the risk of more sexual attraction. In conduct books for young women they add other opposites, like financial security or pre-marital pregnancy. In addition,
they accompany these contrasts with references to health and sickness, and to religious teachings and the Bible. By doing so, the authors appeal to the consciences of the readers, and press them into making the given guidelimes their own. Secondly, the authors complement these strategies with a third one: they address the readers as independent, autonomous persons. This suggestion of autonomy leaves them with the impression that they have to force the given rules upon themselves. This strategy engenders a strong sense of responsibility. The combined use of these strategies serves a specific purpose: to compel young adults to behave responsibly, when choosing their partner for life.

Adolescence

In the formulation of the rules for sexual conduct, the authors refer to certain qualities of young adults. They confront readers, for instance, on their inclination to excessive behaviour, and warn them not give in to this inclination. The fact that specific qualities in young adults are singled out, constitutes a breach in the tradition. Conduct books of the early-modern period never mentioned specific tendencies in youth. Instead, authors warned youthful readers against a lack of control over their feelings in general.

This change in the genre points towards a changing vision of youth. The references to specific qualities suggest that the authors hold a specific, psychologically oriented view on young adults. If this is the case, the authors are influenced by the concept of adolescence as formulated by Rousseau. The comparison between the utterances on specific tendencies in youth, and Rousseau’s description of adolescent males in *Émile ou l’éducation* (1767), indeed shows a remarkable similarity. In the conduct books two tendencies are mentioned over and over, namely honour and sensualism. The first one induces young men to compete, while the second lures them into feasting, drinking and womanising. These are similar to the inclinations singled out by Rousseau: competitiveness and lust. Moreover, both the authors and Rousseau speak about these qualities as passions.

However, interesting differences between the authors and Rousseau exist as well. The authors and Rousseau hold divergent views on the cause of the development of passions in youth. Where most authors attribute the emotions to the process of development of passions in youth. Regarding the development of sexuality, by as the ones forming the basis for sexuality in the conduct books, the differences only emerge in the materials dealt with in their conduct books. Young men play a sexual roles in their lives, and are taught to pre-marital experience. Young men and diet to control their desire. Young women show a greater need for control over their feelings, and are more opposed to pre-marital experience.

Although the differences in the descriptions of the male roles in the conduct books and the conduct books, the authors and Rousseau show a remarkable similarity. In the conduct books two tendencies are mentioned over and over, namely honour and sensualism. The first one induces young men to compete, while the second lures them into feasting, drinking and womanising. These are similar to the inclinations singled out by Rousseau: competitiveness and lust. Moreover, both the authors and Rousseau speak about these qualities as passions.

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the emotions to a sequence of physical and mental changes. Rousseau only mentions the development of sexuality. Also, a difference in the application of the concept of adolescence can be discerned. The authors see the process of adolescence occurring in females as well as in males, since they refer to specific inclinations in both sexes. Instead, Rousseau reserves the concept of adolescence for males.

**Gender**

The twofold analysis of the rules for sexual conduct shows that the sexual education of young women follows the same pattern as that of young men. Regarding the content, the guidelines for women address the same themes as the ones for men: the general attitude towards the other sex, the role of sexuality in the choice of spouse and sexual abstinence until marriage. Differences only come to the fore when authors become very practical and detailed in their advice. These differences are consistent with the traditional sexual roles in mating. For instance, women are warned not to be seduced to pre-marital intercourse, while men are given advice concerning drink and diet to curtail their desire. In the formulation, the guidelines for women show the same narrative strategies as the ones for men: contrasts, moral categories and the suggestion of autonomy.

Although the conduct books for women hardly differ from those for men in the discussion of sexuality and mating, they show considerable differences in the discussion of all other aspects of life. While the books for men prepare readers for their future responsibilities as husbands and breadwinners, the books for women lack any sense of purpose. Where the guides for males share one distinctive style, those for females don’t share a particular style. Instead, the authors use all sorts of stylistic devices, from sketching the life of an exemplary woman, to abundantly using metaphors and metonyms – as if to wrap the advice in.

In this hodge-podge of stylistics, only one common feature comes to the fore: every book shows a division between the way in which sexuality and mating are discussed and the way the rest of the book is written. The first shows the use of contrasts, moralisms and the suggestion of autonomy. The latter is characterised by the use of metaphors and metonyms, almost always referring to virtue and happiness.
This division in the presentation of the advice points to a twofold educational aim: the first style instills a sense of responsibility, the second one invites readers to become caring and responsive to the needs of others. This division coincides with a division of power: women are educated to responsible behaviour in mating, because of their freedom of choice. They are simply taught to be good girls in all other matters of life, where they are supposed to obey to the authority of the father, or of the husband. Because of this, the division of styles is proof of the partial application of the Enlightenment concept of youth, just so that the application doesn’t interfere with the existing order of society.

This division in the conduct books for women is not in keeping with the picture both historians and literary critics have painted of nineteenth century bourgeois femininity. Although the image of the angel in the house is present in the advice literature, it is more elusive than could be expected. Hopefully, the diffusive character of the conduct books will inspire new research on representations of femininity among the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie.