

# The Role of Male Friends in Early Modern Romantic Relationships

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It is well established that parents played an important role in their children's marital decisions in early modern England, as they could bless or condemn matches. Acting in an equally significant capacity, a young couple's friends could also bless or condemn a potential romantic match. However, few historians of early modern England have explored the role of male or female friendships during the formation of romantic relationships. This essay will examine the role that male youths played in their friend's romances and will focus on their significance during pre-marital sexual interactions, courtship, rejection, and post-marital difficulties.<sup>1</sup>

The examination of male youth's role in their friends' romantic relationships represents an intersection between the study of courtship and youth history, specifically youth masculinity and friendship. While early modern marriages have been a topic of examination since the 1960s, numerous debates have divided scholarly opinion. Disputes include whether marital relationships were oppressive or affectionate, whether they were constructed around affection or social and economic improvement, and the extent to which individuals could choose their partners. Of special relevance to this essay is the debate regarding individual choice specifically if parents and community members controlled the marriage of their children, or if couples had agency in the decision. Historian Diana O'Hara has addressed this debate with a nuanced approach by suggesting that youth had agency in marital decisions, but the opinions of family and friends were

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this essay the terms male youth, boys, and young men will be used interchangeably.

also an integral part of the process.<sup>2</sup> This paper will apply this theoretical view and expand on it by considering the support that friends provided for males as they navigated romantic relationships.

While the history of male friendship and youth involvement in a friend's romantic relationships is a less-studied area, recent scholarship, such as Elizabeth Foyster's monograph *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honor Sex and Marriage* and Alexandra Shepard's *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, examine masculinity among youth and adults.<sup>3</sup> Naomi Tadmor's monograph, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England*, which examines how people understood the term friendship and the roles of friends, is also a key text in the history of friendship.<sup>4</sup> O'Hara provides the most in-depth examination in her article "Ruled by me friends': aspects of marriage in the diocese of Canterbury c. 1540- c.1570."<sup>5</sup>

A few issues arise when using primary sources to explore the topic of friendship. Firstly, in the early modern era, the term 'friend' was used to describe people who are of blood relation, however, it was also commonly used to describe people who were not related by blood.<sup>6</sup> The definition of friend is further complicated because there are groups of people who could be referred to as friends including neighbors, companions, and those who shared common economic, occupational, or political ties.<sup>7</sup> These groups are not mutually exclusive and often overlap. Finally, because this paper aims to explore the relationship between male youth and their youth companions, it is also important to know the age of the friends. Because the term 'youth' was used to refer to people of various ages, scholars must look for evidence of age by examining other characteristics such as employment or social status. For example, if the friend is said to be an apprentice or servant, or is unmarried, he is likely considered a youth.

Before examining how friends supported each other during romantic relationships it is important to examine who these friends were and what an

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<sup>2</sup> Diana, O'Hara. *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1999), 42-50; Alexander Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003). Other important works about masculinity which highlight youth include: Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), esp. chp 4; for an examination of masculinity in the gentry and aristocracy: Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Diana O'Hara, "Ruled by Me Friends": Aspects of Marriage in the Diocese of Canterbury c. 1540-c.1570," *Continuity and Change* 6 (1991), 9-41.

<sup>6</sup> O'Hara, "Ruled by Me Friends," 9-41.

<sup>7</sup> Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 167.

average friendship may have been like. While living in the parental home, early friendships were generally formed between people those who lived near one another.<sup>8</sup> Most boys or young men left their parent's home before they married. There were numerous reasons for boys to move out such as attending university, learning a trade, taking holy orders, or joining the military.<sup>9</sup> It is likely that their childhood friendships weakened after this separation, as young people moved to new places and made friends with their new neighbors or work acquaintances.<sup>10</sup> For this reason, local friendships became very important and will be the focus of this examination. Male youths tended to help each other to perform and showcase masculinity by drinking and bragging about sexual exploits.<sup>11</sup> These activities were not performed by all male friend groups, as some youths were deeply religious and avoided such activities; however, most young people fell in a middling area embracing the Reformation while also demonstrating their manhood in impious ways.<sup>12</sup> It is fitting that they supported each other's romantic relationships, which were a key marker of masculinity, because male friends played an important role in each other's masculine performance.<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that these friendships were not only based on companionship and the acquisition of manhood, but were also rooted in commitment, as friends had a moral duty to support each other.<sup>14</sup> Male friendships often grew into ties that were not only compassionate but were also important for business and social reputation. Finally, most males lost one or both parents before they started courtship and therefore their friend's role as an advisor and supporter was even more central.<sup>15</sup>

One of the ways youth played a role in their friend's romantic relationships was by supporting each other's social interactions prior to courtship. It was common for these social interactions to occur in alehouses which were considered an important space for youth to explore and develop their masculinity. Early modern alehouses were frequented largely by men, but women could also enter either in a group or with a man that they were courting. Contrary to popular belief, the number of women in alehouses could be quite substantial. For example, in

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<sup>8</sup> Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times* (Cambridge: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 110.

<sup>9</sup> Heywood, *A History of Childhood*, 116.

<sup>10</sup> Ben-Amos Ilana Krausman, *Adolescence and Youth: In Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University, 1994), 176-178.

<sup>11</sup> Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, 45.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England 1560-1640* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1996), 179.

<sup>13</sup> Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 213.

<sup>15</sup> Laura Growing, *Gender Relations in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 35.

Essex between 1580-1640 approximately 40% of the guests were women.<sup>16</sup> Young girls could enter the alehouse in groups and flirt with boys, but the threat of sexual harassment and loss of reputation were escalated inside the establishment.<sup>17</sup> Young men interacted with young women for a variety of reasons ranging from genuine fellowship to hiring a prostitute. It is interesting to consider the role male friends may have played in these premarital interactions. They may have encouraged each other to talk to girls or perhaps talk to the girls as a group. Boys also warned each other about prostitutes whom they feared were dangerous. This is exemplified in the case of Robert Cowell, who told his friend to avoid two specific women in the alehouse as they were rumored to have a sexually transmitted disease.<sup>18</sup>

Male youths also became involved with their friend's early romantic relationships as they listened to stories about pre-marital sexual experiences. Although these interactions were not sanctioned by the church, young men and women often engaged in sexual experiences before marriage.<sup>19</sup> These interactions are proven to be prevalent as nearly one third of women were pregnant at the time of marriage.<sup>20</sup> Although pre-marital sex likely alarmed some authority figures, it was largely dismissed as a "harmless sport or a temporary deviation from expected behavior."<sup>21</sup> Although many of the stories boys told were probably based on true encounters, they could also involve exaggerations. John Bennet demonstrated this when he told his friend he would not bother to publish some stories of courtship he had heard from a friend because "some of em should be only Invention."<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, sexual experiences were thought to be an important step in developing a boy's masculinity, and some scholars suggest that friends played an important role by listening to one another brag about their experiences.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Tim Reinke-Williams, "Women, Ale and Company in Early Modern London," *Brewery History* 135 (2010): 91.

<sup>17</sup> Reinke-Williams, "Women, Ale and Company," 100.

<sup>18</sup> *Courtbooks of the Court of London* Bridewell 4, fo. 20 as cited in Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority*, 209.

<sup>19</sup> Julie Hardwick, "Policing Paternity: Historicizing Masculinity and Sexuality in Early-Modern France," *European Review of History* 22 (2015): 643.

<sup>20</sup> Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, 48; Anthony Fletcher, "Manhood, the Male Body, Courtship and the Household in Early Modern England," *History* 84 (1999): 426; Reinke-Williams, "Misogyny, Jest-Books and Male Youth Culture," 328; Jennifer Jordan, "Her-story Untold: The Absence of Women's Agency in Constructing Concepts of Early Modern Manhood," *Cultural and Social History* 4.4 (2007): 579.

<sup>21</sup> Reinke-Williams, "Misogyny, Jest-Books and Male Youth Culture," 328.

<sup>22</sup> John Bennett to Thomas Hearne, 7 Feb 1709. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, <http://emlo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>

<sup>23</sup> Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, 45; Fletcher, "Manhood, the Male Body, Courtship and the Household," 426.

A boy's reputation could be harmed if stories about pre-marital sexual relations were talked about in public spaces. Loose talk could cost boys their apprenticeships (as they were supposed to be virgins) or possible marriage opportunities if it was believed they may have contracted a venereal disease.<sup>24</sup> Bragging was largely confined to the alehouse or private avenues such as homes or in letters because of these risks. Friends clearly had an important role as protectors of their friend's stories, they needed to be trusted not to spread or share gossip. This role was expanded when friends defended each other's honor. A male's honor was integral to his marriage opportunities making a friend's protective efforts essential for future romantic relationships. If gossip did spread about the boy or someone accused him a wrong doing friends could attempt to arbitrate and settle the dispute so it would not have to go to court as a defamation case.<sup>25</sup>

As demonstrated, the community accepted some pre-marital sexual exploration, but it was expected that the couple would marry if a child was conceived. Fathering a bastard child could be detrimental to a boy's social standing in cases where the couple could not or would not marry. If an unmarried youth fathered a child and did not want to marry the mother he could pay for the child's upkeep at a children's home.<sup>26</sup> He could also try to deny that the child was his, therefore avoiding both a marriage he did not want and the social stigma of fathering a bastard child. Friends could play an important role by acting as a witness and testifying that they saw the mother with other men or that their friend had never engaged in sexual activity with the mother. In an extreme case, friends bribed the pregnant girl to charge someone else with bastardy by offering her the equivalent of four years' wages.<sup>27</sup> This case demonstrates a unique but interesting way in which male friends could support each other during accusations of fatherhood.

Friends could also serve as advisors, go-betweens, or advocates during the courtship process. Their role could begin very early in the process as they commonly acted as match makers by introducing mutual friends.<sup>28</sup> For example, a friend of Leonard Wheatcroft introduced him to Elizabeth Howley, a young maid who later became his wife.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Wheatcroft introduced his brother to a young woman who he could court.<sup>30</sup> Another bachelor, Thomas Rumney, also

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<sup>24</sup> Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, 43.

<sup>25</sup> Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, 173.

<sup>26</sup> Hardwick, "Policing Paternity," 650.

<sup>27</sup> Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, 112.

<sup>28</sup> David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 199), 243.

<sup>29</sup> Leonard Wheatcroft. *The Courtship Narrative of Leonard Wheatcroft, Derbyshire Yeoman* (Whiteknights Press, 1986), 41.

<sup>30</sup> Wheatcroft. *The Courtship Narrative of Leonard Wheatcroft*, 71.

busied himself trying to find matches for his friends. In 1797 he asked his cousin if she knew any girls in London that he could introduce to his male friends. He also asked if she knew of any women that he could court, and finally he added that his friend and roommate “says that in your looking about for a wife for me he would be glad if you would think of him at the same time.”<sup>31</sup>

Friends also played a key role by advising men about which women they should pursue as possible wives and by trying to find information about any possible suiters. This information was thought to be very important because marriage was a considered lifelong contract and a wife’s behavior was important for establishing her husband’s social reputation. As John Gillis explains, marriages in the early modern period were not just for happiness but also for advancement and stability, therefore, men needed to ensure that the women they courted were not only honorable but also a good social and economic match for them.<sup>32</sup> Young men had a major decision to make when deciding to court a woman and they often relied on their friends for advice.

The role friends played as advisors is exemplified in a letter sent to an unnamed young man advising him to stop courting a specific woman and instead court someone of higher means. The family friend who wrote the letter shared his opinion very bluntly proclaiming: “For Heaven’s Sake, Sir, open your own Eyes, for you are deeply concerned, to what every body else can see for you: Do not be the last to perceive your Ruin, when it is so easy for you to prevent it.”<sup>33</sup> The youth replied to his family friend thanking him for his advice and saying that he had quickly ended the relationship after receiving the letter.<sup>34</sup> The process of asking friends to gather information and listening to their advice was so well established that it appeared in court records. In 1790, Benediction Buck took her husband to court claiming that when they married, he already had wife. During her trial the lawyer asked her: “I believe all your friends have cautioned you against your acquaintance with this man; and told you he certainly was married?” to which she replied “No friend ever could find out; nobody cautioned me...” The judge later reprimanded her for not gaining enough information about the man before marriage telling her “I hope you will be more cautious for the future.”<sup>35</sup> Although

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<sup>31</sup>Thomas Rumney to Miss Mary Clark, August 10, 1797 in *From the Old South-Sea house, Being Thomas Rumney's Letter Book, 1796-1798* 228-229 ed. A. W. Rumney (London: Smith Elder, 1914), 228-229. <https://archive.org/details/fromoldsouthseah00rumn>

<sup>32</sup> John R. Gillis, *For Better, for Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 5.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Hallifax, *Familiar Letters on Various Subjects of Business and Amusement...* (London: Pater-noster-Row, 1754): 209.

<sup>34</sup> Hallifax, *Familiar Letters on Various Subjects of Business and Amusement*, 211-213.

<sup>35</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings: Accounts of Criminal Trials, [www.londonlives.org](http://www.londonlives.org), May 26, 1790, Trial of Joseph Web.

this court case involves a woman, it still demonstrates the expectation that youths should act as advisers when their friends make romantic decisions.

Men were also involved in their friend's courtships by simply being present during the interactions between the courting couple. Young courting couples were often together in the presence of friends especially at festivals, night walks, alehouses, or parties. During these times the courters could be very intimate in front of their friends. For example, the couple could kiss and the young man could caress the woman's breasts or put his hand down her skirt without objection from friends as long as the woman consented.<sup>36</sup> Friends would also likely witness intimacy at festivals, especially May Day, which was a celebration of spring fertility during which young people danced and often stayed out in a field all night. Being proximally close to friends when they engaged in intimacy would give friends great insight into each other's relationships.

Friends could also serve as unofficial 'go-betweens' by delivering letters, arranging meetings, and gathering information about the couple's emotions for each other.<sup>37</sup> In higher status relationships, this could be a hired position but it was more commonly a trusted friend of one or both courters.<sup>38</sup> Christopher Blackwater, an adult friend Samuel Jeake and the brother-in-law of Frances Hartridge, provides a clear example of this roll. Blackwater introduced the two youths and acted as a go-between when they began courtship. When problems began to arise in the relationship Blackwater spoke to Frances about her concerns and then relayed them to Samuel.<sup>39</sup>

In other cases, friends carried messages between couples or helped them compose letters. For example, in the novel *William and Charles: or, The Bold Adventurers*, Jack is supported by an unnamed friend that suggests he rewrites his ballad to make it more emotional.<sup>40</sup> Male friends also helped by attempting to convince women to remain in a courtship or accept a proposal.<sup>41</sup> This eagerness to forward a match was recorded by Mary Carleton, who noted that the enthusiasm of her courter's friends was extreme compared to her indifference. Specifically, she wrote that John "and his friends were upon the spur to consummate the match".<sup>42</sup> Another example of the friends' role as enthusiastic allies can be seen in the diary of Samuel Jeake. He was having difficulty gaining approval from his love interests mother so his cousin brought her a letter which

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<sup>36</sup> Julie Hardwick, "Policing Paternity," 648.

<sup>37</sup> O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, 99-103; Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 243.

<sup>38</sup> O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, 99-103.

<sup>39</sup> Christopher Blackwood to Samuel Jeake's, 3 September 1650, East Sussex Record Office, Archive of the Frewen Family, FRE 4223, of 107, <https://annelmurphy.wordpress.com/research/>

<sup>40</sup> *William and Charles: or, The Bold Adventurers* (London: C. Stalker, 1789): 48.

<sup>41</sup> Growing, *Gender Relations*, 151

<sup>42</sup> Mary Carlton, *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth-century Englishwomen*, ed. Elspeth Graham et al. (London: Routledge, 1989), 134.

vouched for Jeake's character.<sup>43</sup> Although a cousin performed this act, it demonstrates the general ways which men could support their friends by vouching for each other's character.

Of course, not every relationship had a successful ending and it was common for women to break off a courtship. This could be a disappointing and humiliating experience for men.<sup>44</sup> In an attempt to mitigate some of this embarrassment, a man might speak badly of a woman in hopes of minimizing his loss.<sup>45</sup> For example, after Charles Brown was rejected by a girl he was courting he wrote his friend telling him that the girl and her sister were "dull and indeed stupid."<sup>46</sup> It seems likely that a man's friends may have provided support in this endeavor by similarly defaming certain women. In other cases, young men like H. Mordaunt, required emotional support from their friends. Mordaunt wrote to his cousin George Mordaunt after delivering a love letter to a girl he hoped to court. He expressed his nervousness when he told George that "the die is cast, and the whole Happiness of my Life hangs on the present moment." He also admitted, "when I laid [the letter] down I trembled."<sup>47</sup> In the next portion of his letter, Mordaunt explained that the girl did not reciprocate his feelings and wished to not see him again. Mordaunt expressed his sadness writing: "I would give worlds to recall that fatal letter... my madness has undone me."<sup>48</sup> This letter suggests that Mordaunt was comfortable sharing his fears and feelings with his friend. The letter also appears to serve as a way for Mordaunt to work through his emotions, as he wrote it while he was nervously and eagerly awaiting a response and finished it shortly after he was rejected.

Friends also helped each other overcome sadness after a rejection. This is demonstrated in a story written by Daniel Defoe in which the main character falls into a depression after the woman he is courting rejects him. Over the next few months his friends "treid many Ways to divert him" however they were largely unsuccessful because they "understood not how to advise him."<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, the boy's aunt also tries to help him by suggesting he "take his thoughts off [her], and turn them another Way" by finding a new lady to court.<sup>50</sup> This example

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<sup>43</sup> Samuel Jeake, *An Astrological Diary of the Seventeenth Century: Samuel Jeake of Rye 1652-1699* ed. Michael Hunter and Annabel Gregory (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988): 138.

<sup>44</sup> Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, 45.

<sup>45</sup> Fletcher, "Manhood, the Male Body, Courtship and the Household", 431.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Brown to Joseph Severn, November 5, 1824, ed. Grant F. Scott and Sue Brown.

<http://www.rc.umd.edu/>

<sup>47</sup> H. Mordaunt to Charles Brown, n.d in *The Accomplished Letter-writer; or, Universal Correspondent* (London: printed for T. Caslon, in Stationers-Court, and J. Ashburner, in Kendal, 1779), 220.

<sup>48</sup> H. Mordaunt to Charles Brown, *The Accomplished Letter-writer*, 223.

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Religious Courtship: Being Historical Discourses on the Necessity of Marrying Religious Husbands and Wives Only* (New York: W. Durell, 1793), 45.

<sup>50</sup> Defoe, *Religious Courtship*, 45.



suggests that the practice of finding a new woman to soften the pain was practiced in the early modern era. In this case it was performed by an aunt instead of a friend, but still suggests that friends may have filled a similar role.

Finally, friends played a powerful role in marriage as they could bless or condemn the marriage and they acted as witnesses during the marriage ceremony.<sup>51</sup> Although most friends could not veto a wedding, their input was valued and considered. Friends gave their blessing simply by attending the wedding and acting as witnesses that the marriage had occurred.<sup>52</sup>

While acknowledging that friends played an important part in youths' romantic relationships before marriage, Foyster argues that after marriage a man's friendships weakened because their "attentions shifted away from their male friends to their wives as they became eager to gain honor by exhibiting sexual prowess and control."<sup>53</sup> Although this claim seems probable, there is also significant evidence to suggest that males maintained their friendships after marriage. For example, many theorists, such as Henry Fielding and Adam Smith, were promoting the importance of adult friendships well into the eighteenth century.<sup>54</sup> Friendships also persisted after men married because they were pertinent to a man's social status and business. As noted earlier, a man's friends were not only his companions but also his clients, creditors, debtors, or co-workers. Therefore, he would continue working and socializing with them after his marriage.<sup>55</sup> Keeping good company also remained important for a married man's social status. This aspect of friendship did shift after marriage, as men began inviting friends home for visits instead of meeting them at the alehouse.<sup>56</sup> As demonstrated by Thomas Rumney, who met with friends at the alehouse and at their homes shortly after his marriage, it was still respectable for married men to go to the alehouse occasionally.<sup>57</sup>

Adult men also supported their friends' marriages although their influence may not always have been welcome. Friends were part of the community which

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<sup>51</sup> Jennifer McNabb, "Ceremony Versus Consent: Courtship, Illegitimacy, and Reputation in Northwest England, 1560-1610," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 37 (2006): 66.

<sup>52</sup> O'Hara, "Ruled by Me Friends," 22.

<sup>53</sup> Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, 126-127.

<sup>54</sup> Dawn A. Nawrot, "Nothing but Violent Methods Will Do: Heterosexual Rape and the Violation of Female Friendship" in *Interpreting Sexual Violence, 1660-1800* ed. Anne Leah Greenfield (Oxon: Routledge, 2015): 123.

<sup>55</sup> Alan Bray and Michel Rey, "The Body of the Friend: Continuity and Change in Masculine Friendship in the Seventeenth Century," in *English Masculinities, 1660-1800: Women and Men in History*, ed Tim Hitchcock, Michelle Cohen, 63-130, (London: Routledge, 2014), 63.

<sup>56</sup> Karl Westhauser, "Friendship and Family in Early Modern England: The Sociability of Adam Eyre and Samuel Pepys," *Journal of Social History* 27 (1994): 519.

<sup>57</sup> Rumney celebrated his marriage with friends at the alehouse on January 10, 1806 then went over to a friend's house to play cards on January 24. Rumney, *From the Old South-Sea*: 320-321, going to the alehouse: 320-321.

strictly often condemned couples for breaking martial norms like excessive domestic abuse, adultery, or disobedience in wives.<sup>58</sup> Community members enforced these standards by using gossip and humiliation. Youths also played an important role in this enforcement, especially when they united in groups.<sup>59</sup>

Friends also served an integral role by helping couples when they experienced difficulty in their marriage. Official divorces were seldom granted for couples and only in cases of adultery or desertion. This left couples with the option of working through their problems or getting an unofficial separation, however most couples chose or were forced to work through their problems.<sup>60</sup> During these negotiations, friends and family often played a crucial role. Although few primary sources discuss these negotiations, Joanne Bailey has suggested that the interactions were “common and wide ranging.”<sup>61</sup> Friends commonly mediated argument and likely fulfilled this role more often than family members.<sup>62</sup> Mediation is demonstrated in the court record of Griffin Jones v. Marion Jones in which two different friends, on two separate occasions, invited the couple into their home to talk through their difficulties.<sup>63</sup>

While, a friend’s mediation in domestic conflict was sometimes desired, it could also be contested. After a statistical analysis of 136 court cases in which people other than the marital couple were involved in a marital dispute, Bailey found that 10% claimed the community members involved made the situation worse. This was often because one partner believed that the interfering friend or family member convinced the other to seek legal action or heightened the bitterness in the relationship.<sup>64</sup> This bitterness is exemplified when Richard Lytton’s friend told him he should not separate from his wife. Richard was very angry when he received this unwanted advice and his friend later apologized for interfering.<sup>65</sup>

The role males played in their friend’s romantic relationships has been largely overlooked by historians of courtship and friendship. This paper attempts to fill this gap by examining not only their role in courtship but also pre-marital

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<sup>58</sup> Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 2.

<sup>59</sup> Julius Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 161.

<sup>60</sup> Time Stretton, “Marriage, Separation and the Common Law,” in *The Family in Early Modern England*, ed. Hellen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 136-137.

<sup>61</sup> Joanne Baily, *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England, 1660–1800* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 32.

<sup>62</sup> Baily, *Unquiet Lives*, 34; Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Griffin Jones v. Marion Jones et al., The National Archives: Public Records Office, REQ 2/229/25, m. 16 as cited in Stretton, “Marriage, Separation and the Common Law in England,” 22.

<sup>64</sup> Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, 35.

<sup>65</sup> Lytton and Lytton (1774), Herts RO, 574, 83 B as cited in Stone, *The Road to Divorce*, 4.

sexual relation, rejection, and life after marriage. This broad approach helps to show the substantial and long lasting role that youth played in their friend's romantic relationships. There are still many questions that can be answered by examining this topic in more depth. For instance, if a young man dedicated a lot of time to helping his friend in courtship, but that courtship later failed would their friendship be affected? And what type of advice did boys give to each other about courtship? Examining these questions and others about friend's roles in romantic relationships can provide further insight into courtship and marriage in the early modern era and enlighten us to the intricacies of male friendship.

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