

15. In Search of a ‘Remedy’

Young Women, their Intimate Partners, and the Challenge of Fertility in Early Modern France

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Abstract

In Old Regime France, specific conventions framed young women's intimate relationships with men. This essay examines fertility as a site of negotiation and contention. It explores practices of licit, age- and stage-appropriate intimacy during the decade-long phase of emerging adulthood when women were single workers. It examines their efforts to manage intimacy and fertility through a range of ‘remedies’ in the context of official and local attitudes and with their intimate partners. Young women's fertility provided a marker, a milestone, and a malleable process integral to the ambiguous and complex transition in youthful intimate relations between walking out and matrimony.

Keywords: France; Old Regime; intimacy; fertility; courtship; youth

In 1722, 25-year-old Leonarde Bergeron, a servant, took up with Antoine Soutel, a gardener who worked just outside the Lyon city walls. Their courtship took all the usual forms, and, as the months passed, he started to promise to marry her. With this expectation, they started to have sex. Soon Leonarde found herself pregnant. When she told Soutel, he said that he would have to talk to his uncle about getting the necessary legal permission to marry. By the time she was six months pregnant, Leonarde began to press him to keep his promise. One evening when he came to visit her, he brought ‘a bottle of Spanish wine’ for them to share, and claimed it was from the cellar of his employer. When she drank it, she noticed it had ‘an unnatural taste’ and seemed to have some sand or salt in it. Soutel gave her some bread to eat with it, perhaps for a snack or perhaps to counter

the taste of the wine. She suspected he had some 'evil plan' and threw the bread away. Soutel left without saying another word. Leonarde examined the bottle closely and noticed it contained 'a liquid similar to wine' with 'some substance that looked like sand, salt or powder'. She gave some of the liquid to a cat, which died a few hours later, and she herself was very ill despite the little she drank. Leonarde left much unsaid in her account to the judicial officials. She avoided any articulation of the negotiation and conflict that must have accompanied Soutel's stalling so that their marital status remained unresolved through many months of pregnancy. Nor do we see anything of any other conversation that preceded his storming off after she declined to partake of more wine.¹

Like Leonarde Bergeron, many young working women in France were sexually active before marriage. They sometimes had to find ways to cope with the consequences of fertility. Pregnancy often led to marriage, and illegitimacy rates were low. Yet some urban couples, unwilling or unable to marry, faced the need to resolve an unwanted pregnancy in other ways. Procuring an abortion through the use of 'remedies' was a serious transgression of religion and law. Even official ideologies, however, could not readily discipline the mysteries of female bodies or young people's desires to control their fertility. Young intimate partners in cities lived in an everyday culture that offered strategies for young, unmarried women – servants and silk workers – and their male partners to manage with varying success the unwelcome results of sexual intimacy. Among the records for the Lyon *sénéchausée*, a royal court of first instance, between 1658 and the mid-eighteenth century, we find rare but telling examples.

These issues intersect with several threads in the early modern historiography of sexuality, medicine, and youth culture. The study of courtship often elides the role of intimacy and sexuality beyond the management of the illicit – for example, brothels where young men could sow their oats, to use an old expression – or illegitimacy as an outcome. Indeed, Kim M. Phillips and Barry Reay have recently highlighted a broader scholarly tendency to ignore the historically specific construction and evolution of heterosexuality for the pre-modern era. Historians have also emphasized the role of midwives and other women in early modern management of fertility.² In the Lyon

1 Archives Départementales du Rhône (hereafter ADR) BP3543 Dossier of Bergeron and Soutel. All translations are my own.

2 Phillips and Reay, *Sex before Sexuality*. For a brief summary of reproduction as a female realm argument, see Toulalan and Fisher, 'Introduction', 8; and for an example, see Gowing, 'Secret Births'. For caveats that do note, if only in passing, the involvement of men in cases that ended in criminal court, see Ferraro, *Nefarious Crimes*, 162; Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 61–62;

judicial narratives, women were very involved in dealing with out-of-wedlock births as landladies, midwives, and wet-nurses, and likely offered advice or assistance during early stages of pregnancies. Strikingly, however, men too were integral to the networks that managed unwanted pregnancies.

In Old Regime France, historically specific, popular conventions framed young women's intimate relationships with men. This essay examines the place of fertility in particular as a site of negotiation and contention. It explores practices of licit, age- and stage-appropriate intimacy for young women during the phase, lasting a decade or so, of emerging adulthood when they were single workers. It examines their efforts to manage intimacy and fertility through a range of 'remedies' in the context of official and local attitudes and in collaboration or conflict with their intimate partners. Young women's fertility in all these ways provided a marker, a milestone, and a malleable process integral to the ambiguous and complex transition in youthful intimate relations between walking out and matrimony.

Legal Contexts: Historicizing Intimacy and Fertility for Women

An immensely rich judicial archive dating from the 1660s survives in Lyon, one of the largest and most economically important cities in early modern Europe. These records provide an extraordinary window into young people's heterosocial relationships. As all the plaintiffs were young women, and many others appeared as witnesses, these records foreground female perspectives on the experience of physical intimacy and on the attitudes towards the use of remedies as a response to the challenge of fertility. Like all such documents, they provide us with narratives that are heavily filtered by legal protocols, by the circumstances, and by the stakes and strategies of those testifying.

Even when young couples whose intimacy led to pregnancy did not marry, most resolutions were handled informally and without generating any written record beyond perhaps a baptismal certificate.³ Nevertheless, the usual trajectories of young women's intimate relationships become clear in the timelines of months or years that were embedded in the Lyon

and Rublack, 'The Public Body'. For more direct examination of the role of non-elite men and clergy: for early modern Italy, see Christopoulos, 'Nonelite Male Perspectives'; and Baernstein and Christopoulos, 'Interpreting the Body'; on France, see Choudury, *The Wanton Jesuit*.

3 French historians have used such records since the early 1970s to study illegitimacy; they focused on the legal end point that produced the judicial records, even though it was highly unusual for young couples' relationships to end in court. Hardwick, 'Policing Paternity'.

lawsuits about courtships gone awry. These documents were classified, as in other archives, as 'pregnancy declarations'. In fact, they were petitions filed by young, pregnant women seeking recourse from the alleged fathers of their babies, and often included depositions from witnesses as well as the women's initial complaints. The files provide backstories for the course of intimate relationships between young workers, which could be rough as well as smooth. The records describe common causes for negotiation and contention and the many possible solutions to out-of-wedlock pregnancy besides marriage.

Because the use of 'remedies' – substances to purge a pregnancy – was illegal and sinful, and often not central to the judicial drama, the practice was seldom mentioned. In these particular juridical actions, usually called *plaintes* or complaints, young women sought legal decisions that would lead to financial support or even marriage. The court officials sought to understand the situation by asking a routine set of questions focused on whether they had in fact been a stable couple and likely to marry: what was history of the relationship; had the young woman told her intimate partner that she was pregnant; had she previously had sex and babies with other men? Court officials did not ask about remedies, as it was legally irrelevant, because the pregnancy was the *sine qua non* for these particular cases.

This essay draws on the relatively few instances in which remedies were mentioned, sometimes directly and sometimes elliptically – that is, in fewer than 20 per cent of the hundreds of complaints of this kind brought in the Lyon *sénéchausée*. Because young women and their male partners needed to defend their reputations, they usually saw risk rather than advantage in bringing up the subject of remedies. Young women had to persuade the court that they were respectable because, despite facing out-of-wedlock pregnancy, they had engaged in intercourse only in expectation of marriage. Any mention of remedies fit awkwardly with that project. A young woman who admitted to willingly having considered using remedies would likely have been quickly associated with the kind of behaviour associated with girls who had many partners, and her case would be dismissed. Meanwhile, young men who sought to avoid legal responsibility for a pregnancy had to persuade the court that they were not involved. Consequently, remedies appear in the written record only when pregnant petitioners or other witnesses made either incidental or, occasionally, strategic observations about them.

If the elaborate performances of naivety and innocence by both partners surely reflected the legal context, other factors also shaped the surviving

record of often complex, long-running situations. The decision to go to court was highly unusual for young women who found themselves in this situation, often being a last resort after many months of waiting and pressing, and the shift to a legal action no doubt sharpened for them and spotlights for us contestation between couples. In many similar situations, other young couples who could not or did not want to marry also used remedies, whether consensually or reluctantly, and these solutions sometimes worked, probably as we have seen simply by making the woman so ill that she spontaneously miscarried. These outcomes did not generate any written record. So the cases that we can read today represent a particularly contentious slice of a much wider practice.

Social Contexts: Young Women, Work, and Heterosociability in an Early Modern City

Young women developed intimate relationships with young men that were widely accepted as long as they observed conventions and practices that marked intimacy between them as licit. As emerging adults, they explored heterosocial relationships in full view of their co-workers, friends, and neighbours; and indeed the public aspect of their intimacy was a key safeguard to their reputations and to a perhaps surprisingly wide range of licit intimacy. For communities, this stage provided for young people's normal desire for intimacy, giving them a chance to work out being part of a couple and to find a balance between compatibility and the pragmatic elements of early modern marriage. For young women and men, sexuality was organized around age as well as gender and work.⁴

The transition phase of young adulthood lasted about ten years between the mid-teens when young people began to work and the mid- to late twenties when most people married. Taking work often meant living away from home. A rapidly growing silk industry dominated Lyon's economy from about 1650, and young women as well as young men, many of them migrants from the surrounding countryside, worked in silk production or in the allied trades. In this city, as elsewhere in early modern Europe, domestic service was the most frequent form of work for young women, and a single female servant was a ubiquitous part of most urban households. Being a servant could also mean doing whatever work other household members did. Many Lyon depositions show that young female servants did silk trade

4 Trumbach, 'From Age to Gender'; and Toulalan and Fisher, 'Introduction'.

work for at least some of the time. Young workers lived in rented rooms in the densely populated multi-storey tenements that sprang up, often in the same building where their employer lived. Indeed, the silk guild required masters to provide young female workers with accommodation, a sign of their importance if not their formal status.

Age was a key variable when young people's relationships appropriately progressed to intimacy for them and their communities. The demographics of marriage and reproduction provide contextual clues. The average age of marriage in early modern northwestern Europe was the mid twenties. Registered illegitimacy rates were very low, perhaps 2 or 3 per cent, although premarital conception was very common and indeed not regarded as problematic. In eighteenth-century Lyon, the average age of first marriage for women was 27.5.⁵ This well-established pattern of relatively late marriage suggests that although sex frequently preceded marriage among couples in their mid-twenties who were of feasible marriage age, younger, single people mostly avoided intimacy as far as intercourse. Otherwise, illegitimacy rates would have been higher or marriage ages lower since their inability to control their fertility effectively meant regular intercourse was very likely to be followed quickly by pregnancy.

Among Lyonnais intimate partners who appeared in court, very few women were younger than 20 or older than 25, and only a small number of women were teenagers or older than 30, the latter usually widows. But men had a wider age range. This gendered pattern points to the age-related organization of sexuality. Men's ages were likewise clustered in the early to mid twenties, although middle-aged men were a bit more common. These older men were almost without exception the already married employers of the young women who usually had a clear narrative of unwanted, coerced relationships.⁶ The records also reveal a few cases of what we would clearly identify today as rape even between young people of the same age. The vast majority of young women in these complaints, however, were involved in consensual relationships with men of their own age because this particular legal avenue addressed paternity and its responsibilities in couples who were feasible marriage partners.

These demographic indicators suggest a well-understood, age-appropriate progression of conventional intimate behaviour in consensual relationships before couples engaged in intercourse and had to deal with possible

5 Flinn, *European Demographic System*; Garden, *Lyon et les Lyonnais*, 90–92.

6 These age patterns are based on the information in 204 cases between 1658 and 1722 where ages were given (ADR BP3540–43).

pregnancies. Teenagers knew themselves that early intercourse was unacceptable and impractical because marriage was not economically or socially feasible. Late puberty – probably at around age sixteen for girls – as well as intense pressure to delay marriage seems to have quite effectively staged experiments with physical intimacy. Marriage was closely associated with intercourse, and the phrase 'as husband and wife do' was a common euphemism. Therefore, younger couples likely walked out together, had outings as part of larger groups of their friends and kin, and experimented with many forms of intimacy short of intercourse. Couples approaching customary marriageable age were very likely to agree to premarital intercourse in the wake of discussions about marriage, and usually followed through with marriage if or when pregnancy occurred, if not sooner.⁷

Workplaces were the principal sites where young people formed their social and intimate relationships. Young couples most often said they had met through work even if occasionally they were introduced by friends or at social events. They were co-workers, customer and client, or served different employers in different stages of the production process, and thus met, for example, delivering supplies or goods. These encounters facilitated consensual relationships between young men and women who were peers, similar not only in age and rank but also in shared experiences of work in the silk and allied trades.

Young partners explored youthful desire and physical intimacy while their communities actively policed the boundaries between licit and illicit in a wide range of ways. Couples came to self-identify as a stable, monogamous pair when they started to walk out together, a public performance that women remembered as pivotal and that peers and elders regarded as a distinct social marker. Friends, neighbours, and co-workers observed couples like Françoise Namy and Guillaume Bergeron who walked out most evenings between eight and ten and saw them being 'very friendly' with each other and 'kissing and caressing'. As one observer noted, public intimacy of this kind did not involve any 'inappropriate behaviour'.⁸ Relationships were appropriate when conducted in public spaces, whereas ducking out of view or into rooms with closed doors earned great suspicion.

7 For age of puberty as around sixteen in eighteenth-century France, see Seidel Menchi, 'The Girl and the Hourglass'. For the rarity of 'precocious' marriage under the age of 20, except for elite families, see Bardet, 'Early Marriage'. For expectations of marriage as a prerequisite for intercourse in women's narratives, see Hardwick, 'Policing Paternity'.

8 ADR BP3542 Dossier of Namy and Bergeron, 17 October 1686. On the myriad ways in which young people, their friends, kin, co-workers, neighbours, and other community members energetically marked the line between licit and illicit, see Hardwick, 'Policing Paternity'.

Young couples also experimented with emotional compatibility, if not modern conceptions of romantic love. Young women's narratives typically emphasized the warm feelings that developed between partners. To articulate these, the complaints used varied terms of 'love and affection'. When women spoke of first intercourse, they consistently emphasized that the prospect of marriage was pivotal in the shift from the routine public kissing and touching of walking out couples to the private intimacy of future spouses.

Remedies: Official Attitudes, Local Knowledge, Young Couples' Strategies

When young women and their partners shifted to intercourse in expectation of marriage, a new stage of physical intimacy brought the pressures of fertility. These could lead the couple to negotiation and sometimes conflict. Retrospectively in lawsuits, young women and their witnesses highlighted these fault lines in narratives about premarital conception and indicated the role of men in managing the challenges of fertility. Legal logic meant that women often described themselves as reluctant partners to these efforts and foregrounded the role of male intimate partners and surgeons in efforts to find solutions to an untimely pregnancy. But women themselves often had vested interests in delaying reproduction if they were not going to marry or were not yet ready to do so. Moreover, beyond the couple, the larger community had a stake in the matter. Despite formal religious, medical, and legal prohibitions on terminating pregnancies, a widespread local acceptance of the use of remedies indicates a grey area of practice around fertility. The seeming near inevitability of intercourse and marriage suggests that routine out-of-wedlock pregnancies required some hard decisions.

In the seventeenth century, procuring an abortion was a serious offence, both a sin and a crime. Religiously and legally, culpable abortion was defined as intervention after the baby could be felt moving at about four or five months' gestation.⁹ Yet many ambiguities complicated the views of medical and legal authorities. Early modern medicine standardly relied on purging the body as the solution for many health issues, including such threatening female maladies as menstrual blockages. Also, pervasive uncertainties

9 Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 61–62, and 78 for the definition of abortion. For the complexities, ambiguities, and uncertainties around menstruation and reproduction, see McClive, *Menstruation and Procreation*.

troubled the diagnosis of early pregnancies. These contexts meant that when a pregnancy ended prematurely, it was difficult to distinguish what we would call a miscarriage from a deliberate effort to terminate through use of a remedy.

Legal contexts reflected similar ambiguity. For example, in 1677, the mayor of Dijon, a city north of Lyon, acknowledged that 'remedies and potions' were often used to end pregnancies. He was discomforted by this crime and sought to enlist Catholic clergy to help: he requested a special kind of a judicial order (*monitoire*) that required priests to publicize this criminal charge at Masses and to compel witnesses who had information to come forward on pain of excommunication. The Dijon mayor explicitly associated the use of remedies with women of 'libertine ways'.¹⁰ A century later, Jean-François Fournel, a jurist who wrote the definitive late eighteenth-century text on 'seduction', rehearsed the distinction in law and theology between termination of 'the hope of a man' and of 'a man'. However, he acknowledged that only the latter carried criminal punishment in his time, and conceded that abortion 'by drinks, drugs or deadly efforts to prevent the accomplishment of motherhood' was a well-known practice.¹¹ Notably, Fournel, like the mayor of Dijon, focused on the mother as the liable criminal party, an attitude that suggests why young women often sought to distance themselves from court actions for paternity claims.

Nevertheless, the early modern judges in Lyon seemed strikingly unconcerned in everyday practice about references to remedies, or even to damaged fetuses. In paternity cases, court officials did not initiate questions about the use of remedies because the subject was not pertinent to the legal issue at hand. So it was complainants or witnesses who occasionally introduced remedies. Even though judges sometimes voiced scepticism about the truthfulness of testimony that denied all knowledge of and responsibility for them, no evidence indicates any kind of follow-up. Instead, court officials who heard references to remedies apparently shrugged and focused on the issue of financial compensation. Furthermore, in Lyon, as in other cities, prosecution of abortion was rare; there are only three cases between 1720 and 1790.¹² Pragmatism about the pre-term use of remedies seemed to prevail. This wide latitude was perhaps rooted in the consensus regarding young

¹⁰ Farr, *Authority and Sexuality*, 129–30.

¹¹ Fournel, *Traité de la seduction*, 391, and 390–96 on abortion.

¹² For the numbers of abortion cases in the Lyon criminal court records, I thank Dr. Cathy McClive for sharing her in progress work with me. This very low rate of prosecution seems in line with other places. For Dijon, for instance, see Farr, *Authority and Sexuality*, 129–32.

couples that their marriages were not always feasible or even desirable for many reasons.

For example, court officials were dubious about Françoise Blanchet's claim that Gilbert Behal had given her money to buy drugs to abort her pregnancy. If he had seduced her as she said, why would he have given her money to use 'so badly as she has told us'. A midwife recalled that she had chastised him for giving Blanchet money 'to abort her fruit' (the usual term for an unborn baby) and he had not responded.¹³ In court, Behal denied giving money with 'such pernicious advice', and said 'she [Blanchet] had told him she was pregnant and asked for the money to buy remedies that she promised were for a malady'. Yet although the judges remarked that payment for such a purpose was 'a very serious and very punishable action', their commentary seems to have been no more than a marking of the he said/she said quality of the dispute. They released Behal from prison as he requested, and ordered him to pay Blanchet's costs and take charge of the baby as she asked. That was a mundane outcome to such legal claims.

In different ways, male and female intimate partners tried in court to disclaim responsibility for the use of remedies. Young women's judicial narratives always emphasized that they were shocked and dismayed at these suggestions of their male partners. Or they expressed surprise that what their partners proffered was a 'remedy' or that the men tried to dupe them. Young women spoke of remedies or purges, of drinks, powder, or drugs, or of bleeding, usually in the foot if specified. The narrators usually framed their reproductive intentions ambiguously. In part because of the general understanding of interventions to restore women's periods as routine health measures, the relationship between a possible pregnancy and the remedy might be left unarticulated, perhaps between partners as well as in the legal record. For example, Anne Julliard said her partner had given her 'remedies to prevent dropsy', a common malady involving water retention that was frequently offered as an alternative explanation to abortion.¹⁴ Meanwhile, young men typically denied intent to do anything other than restore health, and often rejected any role in the provision of remedies. Given the multiple legal filters, this disclaiming rhetoric used by women and men must be regarded with scepticism. Local knowledge about

13 ADR BP3552 Dossier of Blanchet and Behal, 2 October 1753.

14 ADR BP3555 Dossier of Julliard and Page, 13 June 1755. For the common resort to explanations of dropsy as a response to allegations of abortion, see Christopoulos, 'Nonelite Male Perspectives', 161-62.

such remedies was widespread and their use broadly accepted. Despite the legally strategic repackaging of what had happened, intimate partners clearly saw the use of 'remedies' as feasible and legitimate, especially in early pregnancy.

Young couples sometimes persisted in their efforts to resolve the problem of a suspected pregnancy, even at the risk of notable discomfort. François Page, a surgeon and the son of a master surgeon, gave his partner Anne Juilliard a series of remedies, bled her himself in the foot three times, and dosed her repeatedly on the same day. Some weeks later, however, she 'felt something move in her stomach' and told François that she thought she was pregnant. They recommenced the remedies that still did not seem effective, and finally he sought to give her 'a dose of white liquid' that would 'injure' her.¹⁵ Another woman, Antoinette Berthaud, recalled that Louis Poulet, a 'billiard player', often gave her remedies and had had a surgeon come to bleed her eight or nine times. She remembered having 'two losses of blood'. She did not know, she said, if these bleedings and other remedies had 'drained' her of pregnancies or if she had never been pregnant.¹⁶ Her narrative indicates that the couple frequently resorted over nearly three years to remedies of different sorts. This account questions the efficacy of available remedies yet illustrates how familiar and accessible they were. These same young women also recalled how sick the remedies made them. Antoinette Berthaud claimed that she sometimes vomited blood, and Anne Juilliard said that she fainted repeatedly. A neighbour also noticed that Izabeau Marquet stayed in her room for two weeks after taking remedies while pregnant, an observation that both hinted at suspicion about intent and suggested the high level of discomfort endured by young women who took remedies.¹⁷

Young women often claimed ignorance about the culpable aims of their actions. Some perhaps did understand the procedures as restoration for their health; others were gullible. Since some, no doubt, edited their recollections to suit the context of a court action, many probably did understand that the intention was to terminate their pregnancies. Marie Antoine Faure reported that her intimate partner gave her 'powder' after she told him she was feeling ill, which presumably they both took to be a possible symptom of pregnancy. When she got pregnant a second time, she declined to take

15 ADR BP3555 Dossier of Juilliard and Page, 13 June 1753.

16 ADR BP3541 Dossier of Berthaud and Poulet, 15 June 1685.

17 ADR BP3541 Dossier of Berthaud and Poulet, 15 June 1685; BP3555 Dossier of Juilliard and Page, 13 June 1753; BP3542 Dossier of Marquet and Bernard, 16 February, 1689.

what the man offered her as she now recognized what had happened the first time. Antoinette Berthaud claimed that she only realized the remedies were tied to possible pregnancies when the couple ceased having intercourse for five months. Louise Charvet claimed that Jean De Juif, though he denied it, had advised her several times to 'take remedies that would damage the baby in her'.¹⁸

These testimonies drew a fine line between early and late interventions in pregnancy, between restoration of health and termination. They also played on a trope of female naivety and gullibility. Anne Julliard said that she was 'horrificed' when her intimate partner gave her a white liquid that would 'injure' her. Françoise Blanchet claimed that Behal made 'black propositions' that she would buy drugs to end her pregnancy with money he gave her, and that he wanted to 'abort her fruit'. Antoinette Berthaud said the realization that the remedies were designed to damage her fruit 'caused her great grief'.¹⁹

In these women's tellings, the providers of reproductive health remedies were always male, often intimate partners, and sometimes explicitly surgeons who had provided the remedy or come to do the bleeding. Although historians often highlight women, above all midwives, these were noticeably absent in these accounts either as providers or as witnesses. Here instead young men were apparently able to source remedies either from surgeons or apothecaries under the cover of purchasing purgatives to restore health. Perhaps a kind of informal vernacular knowledge about effective powders and liquids circulated among men too. Male intimate partners were closely involved with potential remedies, providing potions or even performing bleedings that 'restored' menstrual cycles.

The young couples appear as the key actors in efforts to terminate pregnancies. While friends and co-workers often recounted discussions with one or the other of the young partners about their behaviour and plans, talk of remedies seldom figured in court testimony. Since male elites associated female users with criminal remedies, young women had cause to spotlight the role of their male partners in wrongdoing in order to protect their own reputations. Discussions with other people were of no relevance to the legal action and could be elided in testimony. Young couples may have felt that this particular aspect of extramarital pregnancy should be handled

18 ADR BP3541 Dossier of Berthaud and Poulet, 15 June 1685; BP3552 Dossier of Blanchet and Behal, 2 October 1743; BP3542 Dossier of Charvet and De Juif, 23 July 1687.

19 ADR BP3555 Dossier of Julliard and Page, 13 June 1753; BP3552 Dossier of Blanchet and Behal, 2 October 1743; 3541 Dossier of Berthaud and Poulet, 15 June 1685.

between them, and perhaps their kin and co-workers likewise preferred a knowing silence.

Young couples, their communities, and even legal professionals saw the use of remedies as familiar and frequent. On the whole, everyone seemed ambivalent at worst and accepting or supportive at best. Witnesses had no legal prompt to recount more general discussions, but in a rare example where they did, the kin and neighbours of Anne Julliard had often seen her partner, François Page, visit her. They knew that she had been 'ill', and had observed him twice bring 'remedies' and instruct her grandmother to have her take them. This became talk of the neighbourhood. Her uncle told a woman neighbour that Julliard was pregnant and that Page was the father. A neighbour then enquired if Page's remedies were not meant to 'injure' his niece. The uncle said no, because they had kept company with the intention of marriage; if he had thought the remedies were for that end, he would not have put up with it. Another female neighbour saw similar events, and even watched Page try to bleed Julliard in the foot. She did not know why, but when she later learned that Juilliard was pregnant, she asked if that was why she had taken the remedies. Julliard replied that she did not know why he had given them to her.²⁰

Such discussions show a widespread awareness of the circulation of remedies, and some ambiguity in responses. However, many kinfolk and neighbours watched Julliard and Page negotiate their fertility, and most seem to have chosen to take the treatments as restorative purgatives rather than object to them as a serious offence. Such efforts were likely successful for other couples, even if not spoken in court. Their rhetoric suggests a popular as well as elite awareness of the medical and legal divide between restoring menstrual health and termination. In practice, however, pragmatism and the need for social peace led to overlooking such distinctions in local communities and by the judiciary.

20 ADR BP3555 Dossier of Julliard and Page, 13 June 1753. Statements of disapproval were rare. For example, Claudine Larandon, a 'female journeyman', claimed that her intimate partner, Louis Antoine Petremont, had suggested she get bled and take 'purgative' remedies when she told him she was pregnant. He denied he had given her 'such bad advice'. Their case was overlaid with a register of community and legal disapproval as he was her employer, and the court and local jurisprudence regarded employers as in serious breach of their responsibilities when they got their employees pregnant, so Petremont had multiple motivations to deny such a suggestion. ADR BP3547, 22 September 1727.

Conclusion

Leonarde Bergeron's retelling, in our opening example, of her intimate partner's 'evil plan' to solve their fertility problem, complete with adulterated Spanish wine and a dead cat, was unusual in these records for its detail and drama. Yet it spotlighted fertility as a recurrent concern for young women. The shift to penetrative sex was typically a marker of a commitment to marriage, and often launched young women quickly into a new regime of experiences with fertility. The resulting pregnancies might indeed dictate matrimonial timing, or they might force the couple to explore ways of handling the reproductive consequences outside of marriage. Relying on demographic findings of low illegitimacy and various authoritative prescriptions against the termination of pregnancies, historians have linked premarital pregnancies tightly to marriage. They have examined the availability of remedies and their place in the religious, legal, and medical lexicons of early modern vernacular and learned science, and have positioned midwives as influential actors in a predominantly female world.

Less easily visible but significant were the cases of young couples who found themselves pregnant but who could not or would not marry. These young single women's efforts to manage their fertility called on local knowledge about remedies and the pragmatic attitudes of their male intimate partners as well as of neighbours, kin, friends, and even authorities. The resort to these familiar remedies appears as a sidebar in stories told by young women who sought judicial aid in holding their intimate partners responsible for paternity. While only a few young people's relationships ended up in court, the female plaintiffs and witnesses allow us to historicize young women's sexuality and to see their participation in intimacy as conventional and quotidian.

As emerging adults, young women calibrated phases of intimacy with their partners in response to community expectations of youthful desire and heterosociability. These stages might extend over a span of years from the girls' mid to late teens to what was regarded as appropriate marriageable ages in their mid twenties. Older teenagers could start to hang out together, as we would say, in public places. These encounters safeguarded their reputations and calibrated their initial experiments with intimacy in ways that usually stayed short of intercourse.²¹ In their early twenties,

21 For the use of public spaces as keys to reputable intimacy, see Hardwick, 'Sex and the (Seventeenth-Century) City'.

young women became part of stable couples who walked out together for extended periods as the prospect of marriage became more feasible. With a clearly expressed and frequently reiterated sequence in which intercourse followed promises to marry, many young women came to engage in potentially reproductive sex.

Young intimate partners viewed the use of remedies as a recognized, if not always welcome, practice in consensual relationships. Although judicial records highlight conflict, negotiation around the problems of unwanted pregnancy was surely very common, especially among the far larger cohort of couples who resolved their untimely pregnancies outside of marriage and without resort to the legal system. Young men were important collaborators in resolving these dilemmas of out-of-wedlock pregnancy.²² Couples discussed using remedies, male partners procured them (as young women may well also have done, although these efforts go unrecorded in court documents), and they both observed the results to determine whether subsequent rounds of intervention were required.

Furthermore, the attitudes of their peers, communities, and the authorities were more complex and ambivalent than legislation or prescriptive discourse suggests. Even if the Lyon judges occasionally embellished their questions with a rhetorical flourish about how wrong abortion was, they seemed remarkably unconcerned in practice about the use of remedies, as long as the intervention was pre-term.²³ Among working people, knowledge about remedies was widespread and accepted, tacitly at least, under cover of the broad uncertainties about the status of pregnancies and the acceptance of therapeutic purging as the cure for many amorphous ills. An ambiguous medical and legal regime gave young intimate partners some flexibility in the time after the cessation of menses. 'Remedies' to 'restore' young women's health were permissible not only to couples, but also to their wider communities.

22 For the ways in which young men who did not marry their pregnant partners were expected to help resolve the situation rather than just walk away, see Hardwick, 'Policing Paternity'.

23 Nor were Lyon judges alone. Baernstein and Christopoulos, in 'Interpreting the Body', for example, demonstrate the seemingly pragmatic attitudes of authorities even in cases of elite families in early modern Italy.

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