

**UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL BULLETIN
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Abstract

Beyond Honor: Historicizing Sexual Coercion In Late Colonial Lima, 1750-1821
by
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Sexual assault and sexual coercion are intensely emotional crimes that have been the focus of many recent public discussions around the world, including protests and reforms in Latin America. As such, the history of these crimes in countries like Peru provides vital context for reformers and scholars alike. This research aims to incorporate women's emotional experiences of sexual coercion into the legal and cultural context of Peru's capital city between 1750 and 1821, and thus to illustrate that social and political changes also affected individual women's pursuit of justice. Using dozens of court cases from the ecclesiastical and royal secular courts, along with legal codes, nuns' writings, and published newspaper editorials, I connect cultural perceptions of gender to legal decisions and thence to the ways in which women and their families articulated their coercion experiences.

In late colonial Lima, gender biases and stereotypes reflected both traditional religious and modern Enlightenment interpretations of gender, embedding expectations of female inferiority into Lima's culture. These expectations were further reflected in the fact that many coercion cases came to the courts when women's guardians objected to runaway marriages. Nonetheless, some women—including enslaved women—advocated for themselves within a contractual definition of consensual sex, using their verbal agreements and marriage promises as leverage to gain legal protection within Lima's patriarchal system. The courts themselves upheld many of the racial and socioeconomic divisions on which colonial Peruvian society operated, typically supporting litigants who were racially or socially superior to their antagonists. In the early nineteenth century, however, it became increasingly challenging for women and their guardians to obtain convictions for sexual coercion, as changes in administrative structures and priorities restricted the range of acceptable arguments. These structural changes in turn affected the emotions that women could express, indicating a homogenization of emotional expression in sexual coercion cases and thus of the experiences themselves. Together, the emotional, legal, and cultural dynamics of late colonial sexual coercion cases demonstrate that gendered power changed in subtle ways throughout the late colonial period, and thus affected the ways in which women and their guardians defined and sought justice.

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Time: 1:00 pm
Place: MMC, DM 370

Department: History
Major Professor: Dr. Bianca Premo