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IHS Book Talk: "Sex in an Old Regime City: Young Workers and Intimacy in France, 1660-1789," by Julie Hardwick

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The History Faculty New Book Series presents:
Sex in an Old Regime City Young Workers and Intimacy in France, 1660-1789

A conversation with

JULIE HARDWICK

John E. Green Regents Professor of History, and UT Distinguished Teaching Professor
 University of Texas at Austin
<https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/history/faculty/jholwell>

and

KARIN WULF

Professor of History, College of William & Mary, and
 Director, Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture
https://www.wm.edu/as/history/faculty/wulf_k.php



Our ideas about the long histories of young couples' relationships and women's efforts to manage their reproductive health are often premised on the notion of a powerful sexual double standard.

In *Sex in an Old Regime City* (Oxford University Press, 2020), Julie Hardwick offers a major reframing of the history of young people's intimacy. Based on legal records from the city of Lyon, Hardwick uncovers the relationships of young workers before marriage and after pregnancy occurred, even if marriage did not follow, and finds that communities treated these occurrences without stigmatizing or moralizing. She finds a hidden world of strategies young couples enacted when they faced an untimely pregnancy. If they could not or would not marry, they sometimes tried to terminate pregnancies, to make the newborn go away by a variety of measures, or to charge the infant to local welfare institutions. Far from being isolated, couples drew on the resources of local communities and networks. Clerics, midwives, wet nurses, landladies, lawyers, parents, and male partners in and outside the city offered pragmatic, sympathetic ways to help young, unmarried pregnant women deal with their situations and hold young men responsible for the reproductive consequences of their sexual activity. This was not merely emotional work; those involved were financially compensated. These support systems ensured that the women could resume their jobs and usually marry later, without long-term costs. In doing so, communities managed and minimized the disruptions and consequences even of cases of abandonment and unprosecuted infanticide.

This richly textured study re-thinks the ways in which fundamental issues of intimacy and gendered power were entwined with families, communities, and religious and secular institutions at all levels from households to neighborhoods to the state.

- "A superb reconstruction of a lost world of intimacy and power. Julie Hardwick's absorbing, enriching work reveals the common language of love; the balance of force and caresses in courtship; the pragmatic concerns of marriage; and the solutions to unplanned pregnancies, showing the capacity of young women and men to shape their own circumstances and tell their stories."
— Laura Gowing, King's College London
- "*Sex in an Old Regime City* explores a topic that seems well beyond the reach of historians: sexual intimacy between urban adolescents at a quarter of a millennium remove. Julie Hardwick's remarkable study is based on the 'archive of reproduction' accumulated around the biological and emotional consequences of that intimacy — ranging from pregnancy declarations, paternity suits, notarial documents, doctors' prescriptions, religious injunctions, infant autopsies and hospital archives through to *billet-doux* and foundlings' tokens. Hardwick's humane and sympathetic eye reveals a richly delineated world that has poignant continuities as well as contrasts with our own."
— Colin Jones, Queen Mary University of London
- "A boldly written and brilliantly researched tour-de-force. Drawing upon meticulous archival work, Julie Hardwick explodes our understanding of what we thought we knew about pregnancy declarations, licit intimacy, and patriarchal discipline and reveals a far more complex system of communal complicity. *Sex in an Old Regime City* is a must-read for all scholars of the early modern world, especially those interested in legal, social, and gender history."
— Meghan Roberts, Bowdoin College
- "This well-written and impressively researched book sheds important new light on sexual intimacy, reproduction, and marriage among young adults in eighteenth-



century France. Stories of the lives and loves of ordinary working people bring their previously inaccessible intimate world to life.”

— Clare Crowston, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Dr. Hardwick works at the intersections of legal, economic, social and family/gender history in early modern France. She grew up in the U.K, and earned her Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins University. In addition to *Sex in an Old Regime City* she is the author of *The Practice of Patriarchy: gender and the politics of household authority in early modern France* (Penn State University Press, 1998) and *Family Business: litigation and the political economy of daily life in early modern France* (Oxford University Press, 2009). She has many essays in edited collections, and her articles have appeared in *The American Historical Review*, *The Journal of Social History*, *The Journal of Modern History*, *The William & Mary Quarterly*, *The Journal of Women’s History*, *European History Review*, *History Compass*, and *French Historical Studies*. She has held two N.E.H year long research fellowships and was the distinguished invited research scholar at the Gender and Work Project at the University of Uppsala in 2014. She is currently an IHS Fellow, and was the founding director of the Institute for Historical Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Her next book project is in progress: *Hanging Bankrupts: Credit, Crime and the Transition to Capitalism*. Follow her work on Twitter [@DrJulieHardwick](#).

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