

Childbirth in the United States GWS/MHB/HS 431

Prof. Karen Walloch

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Office: 1143 Medical Sciences Center

Office Hours: 11:30-12:30 M-Th and by appointment

Course Description:

Although certain elements of giving birth remain constant over time, the lived experience of childbirth has changed immensely for women over the course of American history. This course starts with the physiology of birth and then moves on to explore what it signified in women's lives—how power and meaning shifted in childbirth as birthing women struggled to exert control over this big event in their lives. We will ask: What choices did women make to shape their birthing experience and ensure the best result? Why did they make these decisions? How did shifting the location of birth change the experience for women? By analyzing issues of authority and decision-making as they have played out in interactions between birthing women and their attendants from colonial times up to the present, we will find that women have always sought to make their birth experiences safer and better, even if those choices did not always work out the way they hoped.

Course Format:

This is a course that emphasizes discussion of the materials you read, write, see, and hear. We will use visual materials as well as readings from both primary and secondary sources. I will give short lectures designed to prompt discussion, and part of your responsibility will be to contribute verbally in class, both responding to questions and asking questions.

Required Readings: [Available at Room of One's Own]

Ina May Gaskin, *Ina May's Guide to Childbirth* (2003)

Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America, 1750-1950*

Margaret Charles Smith and Linda Janet Holmes, *Listen to Me Good: The Life Story of an Alabama Midwife*

Online: 431 Readings on Learn@UW

Course Requirements:

25%: Attendance/Class participation

25%: Midterm

25%: Oral history paper

25%: Final Exam

[The midterm will take place during class time, but the final is an essay completed at home. Paper is to be about ten pages in length.]

Class Schedule

Sept. 3: Introduction/Expectations
Sept. 5: Attitudes About Childbirth
Sept. 10: Physiology of Normal Birth/Childbirth Stories
Sept. 12: Childbirth & Motherhood Issues
Sept. 17: Traditional Childbirth/Midwifery in 18th Century America
Sept. 19: Martha Ballard's Practice
Sept. 24: The Shadow of Maternity
Sept. 26: Male Midwifery
Oct. 1: Anesthesia in the 19th Century
Oct. 3: Meddlesome Midwifery
Oct. 8: Move to Hospital
Oct. 10: Safe Childbirth Movement
Oct. 15: Childbirth for Theatrical Release on Film: The 1930s
Oct. 17: Twentieth-Century Obstetrics/Hospital Procedures and Routines
Oct. 22: Twentieth-Century Obstetrics, Continued
Oct. 24: MIDTERM EXAM IN CLASS
Oct. 29: Twentieth-Century Hospital Childbirth Experiences
Oct. 31: Natural Childbirth Movement
Nov. 5: Fathers and Childbirth
Nov. 7: Grand Midwives of the South
Nov. 12: Public Health Authority and Black Midwives
Nov. 14: The Persistence and Resurgence of Midwifery
Nov. 19: Midwifery in the 21st Century
Nov. 21: Childbirth in the 21st Century
Nov. 26: Childbirth in the 21st Century, Continued
Nov. 28: THANKSGIVING RECESS
Dec. 3: Reclaiming Home Birth
Dec. 5: Childbirth Issues in the 21st Century--PAPER DUE
Dec. 10: Ina May Gaskin: Pioneer of the Home Birth Movement
Dec. 12: Course Review/Evaluations
Dec. 16: FINAL EXAM DUE

Reading & Film Schedule

Sept. 3: Introduction and Expectations

Film:

Eugene DeClerq lecture, "Birth By the Numbers" (2008). [22 minutes]

Learn@UW Readings:

Robbie E. Davis-Floyd, "Appendix A: Interview Questions Asked of Mothers," and "Appendix B: Interview Questions Asked of Physicians."

Sept. 5: Attitudes about Childbirth

Book:

Gaskin, Part I: Birth Stories, 1-125.

Learn@UW Readings:

Karin Martin, "Giving Birth Like a Girl," *Gender and Society* 17 (February 2003): 54-72.

Film:

Laboring Under an Illusion: Mass Media Childbirth vs. The Real Thing (2009). [50 minutes]

Sept. 10: Childbirth Stories/Physiology of Normal Birth

Book:

Gaskin, Part II: The Essentials of Birth, 127-248

Learn@UW Readings:

Norman Miller, et al, *Human Parturition* (1958) excerpts, 62-82.

Childbirth Illustrations.

Films:

Finish *Laboring Under an Illusion*.

Window Water Baby Moving (1959) [8 minutes].

Birth Day (2008) [11 minutes].

Sept 12: Childbirth & Motherhood Issues

Book:

Gaskin, 248-315.

Learn@UW Readings:

Leslie Reagan, "From Hazard to Blessing to Tragedy: Teachings on Miscarriage in 20th Century America," *Feminist Studies* 29 (Summer 2003): 357-378.

Elaine Tyler May, "Nonmothers as Bad Mothers, in *"Bad" Mothers: The Politics of Blame in 20th Century America*, ed. Molly Ladd Taylor and Lauri Umansky (1998), 198-219.

Sept 17: Traditional Childbirth/Midwifery in Late Eighteenth Century America

Learn@UW Readings:

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "The Living Mother of a Living Child: Midwifery and Mortality in Post-Revolutionary New England," *William and Mary Quarterly* 66 (1989): 27-48.

Martha Ballard, Excerpts from her Diary.

Take some time to visit this website. Look at the original diary on:

<http://www.dohistory.org>

Begin Film:

A Midwife's Tale (1997). [88 minutes]

Sept. 19: Martha Ballard's Practice

Finish Film:

A Midwife's Tale (1997). [88 minutes]

Sept 24: The Shadow of Maternity

Book:

Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, 1-63.

Learn@UW Readings:

Letters from Jane to Elizabeth Gordon, 1846.

Letters from Bessie Hunting Rudd to Edward Payson Rudd, 1860.

Sept. 26: Male Midwifery

Book:

Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, 63-115.

Learn@UW Readings:

H. B. Willard, *Obstetrical Journal*, 1849-1856.

Steven Stowe, "Obstetrics and the Work of Doctoring in the Mid-19th Century American South," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* (1990): 540-566.

Oct 1: Anesthesia in the Nineteenth Century

Book:

Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, 116-141.

Learn@UW Readings:

Fanny Longfellow, *Diary and Letters*, 1844-1856.

Nettie Fowler McCormick-Anita McCormick Blaine Letters, 1890.

Oct. 3: Meddlesome Midwifery

Book:

Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, 142-170.

Learn@UW Readings:

Marie Jenkins Schwartz, "Gynecological Surgery," in *Birth of a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* (2006): 227-256.

S. D. Gross, "Lacerations of the Female Sexual Organs Consequent Upon Parturition: Their Causes and Their Prevention," *JAMA* (1884): 337-345.

Oct. 8: Move to Hospital

Book:

Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, 171-218.

Learn@UW Readings:

Marguerite Tracy and Constance Leupp, "Painless Childbirth," *McClure's Magazine* 43 (June 1914): 37-50.

Carolyn Leonard Carson, "'And the Results Showed Promise'... Physicians, Childbirth, and Southern Black Migrant Women, 1916-1930: Pittsburgh as a Case Study," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 14 (1994).

Oct. 10: Safe Childbirth Movement

Dorothy Reed Mendenhall, "Prenatal and Natal Conditions in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Medical Journal* 15 (March 1917): 353-369.

Charles King, "The New York Maternal Mortality Study: A Conflict of Professionalization," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 65 (1991): 476-502.

Sean Patrick Adams, "Who Guards Our Mothers?" *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 83 (2000): 181-201.

Molly Ladd Taylor, *Raising a Baby the Government Way: Mothers' Letters to the Children's Bureau, 1915-1932* (1986): 47-65.

Oct 15: Childbirth on Film: 1930s

Film:

Birth of a Baby (1937) [68 minutes].

Oct. 17: Twentieth Century Obstetrics/Hospital Procedures & Routines

Learn@UW Readings:

Joseph B. DeLee, "Prophylactic Forceps Operation," *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 1 (1920): 34-44, 77-80.

J. Whitridge Williams, "A Criticism of Certain Tendencies in American Obstetrics," *New York State Journal of Medicine* 22 (1922): 493-99.

Robbie Davis-Floyd, "The Technocratic Model," in her *Birth as an American Rite of Passage*, 44-72.

Film:

Joseph B. DeLee, *Breech Birth* (1930s?) [39 minutes].

Oct. 22: Twentieth Century Obstetrics, continued.

Learn@UW Readings:

Charles Anthony Robinson, "Extern: How the Babies of the Slums are Brought into the World," *Century* 115 (1927?): 551-60.

Film:

The Chicago Maternity Center Story (1970s) [58 minutes].

Oct. 24: MIDTERM EXAM IN CLASS

Oct. 29: Twentieth-Century Hospital Experiences

Learn@UW Readings:

Judy Leavitt, "'Strange Young Women on Errands': Obstetric Nursing Between Two Worlds," *Nursing History Review* 6 (1998): 3-24.

Margaret Nelson, "Working-Class Women, Middle-Class Women, and Models of Childbirth," *Social Problems* 30 (1983): 284-297.

Letter in Response to Author's Query, 1983.

Gladys Denny Shultz, "Journal Mothers Report on Cruelty in Maternity Wards," *Ladies Home Journal* (May 1958): 44-45, 153-154; (December 1958): 58-59, 135, 137-139.

Lenore Pelham Friedrich, "I Had a Baby," *Atlantic Monthly* (April 1939): 461-465, and "I Had a Baby Too: A Symposium," *Atlantic Monthly* (June 1939): 764-772.

Ann Rivington, "Motherhood--Third Class," *American Mercury* 31 (February 1934): 160-165.

Joan Haggerty, "Childbirth Made Difficult," *Ms. Magazine* (January 1973): 16-17.

Oct 31: Natural Childbirth Movement

Learn@UW Readings:

Suzanne Arms, "Moving Toward Normal Childbirth," in *Immaculate Deception II: Myth, Magic & Birth* (1994): 149-171.

Grantly Dick-Read, "The Relief of Pain in Labour," *Western Journal of Surgery, Obstetrics, and Gynecology* 62 (1954): 591-597.

Marjorie Karmel, *Thank You, Dr. Lamaze: A Mother's Experiences in Painless Childbirth* (1959): 69-85, 87-89.

Nov. 5: Fathers and Childbirth

Learn@UW Readings:

Judy Leavitt, "What Do Men Have to Do with It? Fathers and Mid-20th Century Childbirth," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 77 (Summer 2003): 235-262.

Film:

The Steve Allen Show: Henry Fonda & Steve Allen skit (late 1950s) [about 10 minutes].

Nov. 7: Grand Midwives of the South

Book:

Smith and Holmes, *Listen to Me Good: The Life Story of an Alabama Midwife*.

Learn@UW Readings:

Linda Janet Holmes, "African American Midwives in the South," in *American Way of Birth*, ed. Pamela Eakins (1986): 273-291.

Film:

Miss Margaret (2010). [38 minutes]

Nov. 12: Public Health Authority and African American Midwives

Learn@UW Readings:

Susan Smith, "White Nurses, Black Midwives, and Public Health in Mississippi, 1920-1950," *Nursing History Review* 2 (1994): 29-49.

George Stoney, "Mary Frances Hill Coley Biography" and "All My Babies: Research" (1959).

Film:

George Stoney's *All My Babies* (1952). [54 minutes]

Nov 14: The Persistence and Resurgence of Midwifery in the 20th Century

Learn@UW Readings:

Nancy Schrom Dye, "Mary Breckinridge, the Frontier Nursing Service, and the Introduction of Nurse Midwifery in the United States," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 57 (1983): 485-507.

Charlotte Borst, "The Training and Practice of Midwives: A Wisconsin Study," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 62 (1988): 606-627.

Wendy Kline, "Choices in Childbirth: A Modern Midwife's Tale," in Kline, *Bodies of Knowledge: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Women's Health in the Second Wave* (2010): 127-156.

Byllie Avery, "Bearing Witness to Birth," *Women's Studies Quarterly* (2008): 221-226.

Peggy Vincent, *Baby Catcher: Chronicles of a Modern Midwife* (2002): 233-259, 284-288, 304-306, 311-314.

Nov. 19: Twenty-First Century Midwifery

Film:

With Woman: A Documentary About Women, Midwives and Birth (2006). [56 minutes]

Nov. 21: Childbirth in the 21st Century

Learn@UW Readings:

Amy Gilliland, "Beyond Holding Hands: The Modern Role of the Professional Doula," *JOGNN* 31 (2002): 547-554.

Katherine Beckett, "Choosing Cesarean: Feminism and the Politics of Childbirth in the United States," *Feminist Theory* (2006): 251-275.

Jennifer Block, "The Short Cut," in *Pushed: The Painful Truth About Childbirth and Modern Maternity Care* (2007): 45-72.

Naomi Wolf, "Giving Birth," in *Misconceptions: Truths, Lies, and Journey to Motherhood* (2001): 135-143.

Sarah A. Leavitt, "'A Private Little Revolution': The Home Pregnancy Test in American Culture," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 80 (2006): 317-345.

Nov. 26: Birth in the 21st Century

Film:

The Business of Being Born (2007). [84 minutes]

Nov 28: THANKSGIVING RECESS

Dec. 3: Reclaiming Home Birth

Learn@UW Readings:

"Baby You're Home!" *New York Times*, 13 November 2008.

Andrew Goldman, "Extreme Birth: The Fearless--Some Say Too Fearless--New Leader of the Home-Birth Movement," *New York Magazine* (22 March 2009).

Film:

Orgasmic Birth: The Best Kept Secret (2008). [85 minutes]

Dec. 5: Childbirth Issues

Films:

Finish *Orgasmic Birth*

A Healthy Baby Girl (

PAPER DUE!!!!

Dec. 10: Ina May Gaskin: A Pioneer of the Home Birth Movement

Learn@UW Readings:

Samantha Shapiro, "Mommy Wars: The Prequel," *New York Times*, 23 May 2012.

Film:

Birth Story: Ina May Gaskin and the Farm Midwives (2012). [95 minutes]

Dec. 12: Course Review/Evaluations

Finish *Birth Story: Ina May Gaskin and the Farm Midwives* (2012). [95 minutes]

Explanation of Grading—Participation

Your grade for participation is based on an accumulation of points for attendance, involvement in class discussion, and completion of the course readings.

Attendance is crucial: I structure this course around *active* participation. This means that I expect you to attend *every* class session fully prepared to engage with the readings and my lectures. You can't participate if you don't come to class. If you don't come to class, you get an automatic 0 for that day from me unless you have a valid excuse. Then and only then, a written response *might* suffice as a substitution for verbal participation.

Participation points: Each meeting, you will assign your own participation grade on a 10-point scale (although I reserve the right to alter that grade if I disagree with your evaluation). Participation points gauge several aspects of course involvement: attendance, preparation, and contributions to discussion. They reflect whether you understood the basic issues, engaged with the material, volunteered your opinions, and listened to your classmates.

Each class, you can earn up to 10 points.

YOU assign your own grade—I expect scrupulous honesty.

This is how it works: Take notes as you read, watch films, listen. They don't have to be fancy--just enough to help you respond to the material and organize your thoughts for each day. At the end of each class, assign yourself points in the three areas described below, along with any comments about that day's class, and post them in the Learn@UW dropbox for that day. If you watched a film and we did not have a discussion, then include some comments about the film. Please do not wait more than a day to post! It gets too confusing otherwise. If you have an excused absence for that day, please post a note to that effect in the dropbox. You may write a one-page reaction essay to one of the readings for that day in order to get some points. If there are no readings for that day, select a reading from the previous day for your short essay.

Attendance: up to 3 points

- Add 3 points, if you show up on time, pay attention, and stay the whole class period.
- Deduct 1 point if you are more than five minutes late.
- Deduct 1 point if you daydream, fall asleep, text, etc.

Reading: up to 4 points

- Add 4 points if you read all the assignments. Deduct accordingly if you haven't.

Contributions to discussion: 3 points

- Add 3 points if you asked or answered a question, offered analysis or summary, or responded to a comment.
- Deduct 1 point if you verbally contributed, but only minimally.
- Additionally, if you wanted to speak, but didn't get a chance to get into the conversation, or if someone else made the same point that you wanted to make, then give yourself 1 point for nonverbal engagement with the discussion. Make a note of it on your reading/class notes in order to get credit though.

Explanation of Grading--Written Assignments

In-Class Midterm Exam

- This is a blue-book exam of your basic knowledge of terms, persons, procedures, and concepts. The format will be identification, definition, or short answer. It is possible to write it up on a laptop or tablet in class, and then post it to the dropbox on Learn@UW.

Oral History Project

- Write a 10 page paper based on birth stories from selected relatives, friends, willing subjects. This paper is not just a transcription of their birth stories, but your attempt to add historical dimension and meaning to the stories. You will use the interviews as a historical document from which to refer, but then you will also use your readings as a touchstone of historical facts and analysis to include in your paper. I expect to see proper documentation in the form of footnotes or endnotes.

Take-Home Final

- Write a 10 page essay prompted by a question that I will provide sometime during the last week of class.
- This paper also should be properly documented by references to specific historical events and persons, giving names, dates, places in the body of your text and providing footnotes or endnotes for the sources of your quotations or facts.

