Lamaze: The Surprising Cold War History of Natural Childbirth

Friday, November 15
WLH 309 (100 Wall St.)
12:30 pm

The Lamaze method, also known as psychoprophylaxis, used patterned breathing and conscious relaxation to help women manage the pain of labor without reliance on drugs. Its popularity peaked in the United States in the 1970s, but few know that the method’s roots lay in the Soviet Union, where, in 1951, French obstetrician Fernand Lamaze witnessed a birth using psychoprophylaxis. Against a backdrop of Cold War politics, shifting norms in gender roles, and an evolving understanding of the mind-body dynamic, Paula Michaels reconstructs the surprising story of the Lamaze method from its origins in the USSR, to its transmission to France and then to its popularization in the US.

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