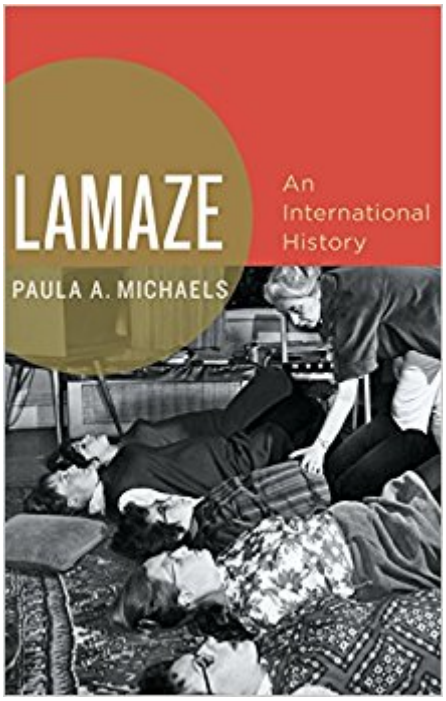
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Lamaze: An International History (Oxford Studies In International History)



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Synopsis

The Lamaze method is virtually synonymous with natural childbirth in America. In the 1970s, taking Lamaze classes was a common rite of passage to parenthood. The conscious relaxation and patterned breathing techniques touted as a natural and empowering path to the alleviation of pain in childbirth resonated with the feminist and countercultural values of the era.In Lamaze, historian Paula Michaels tells the surprising story of the Lamaze method from its origins in the Soviet Union in the 1940s, to its popularization in France in the 1950s, and then to its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s in the US. Michaels shows how, for different reasons, in disparate national contexts, this technique for managing the pain of childbirth without resort to drugs found a following. The Soviet government embraced this method as a panacea to childbirth pain in the face of the material and fiscal shortages that followed World War II. Heated and sometimes ideologically inflected debates surrounded the Lamaze method as it moved from East to West amid the Cold War. Physicians in France sympathetic to the communist cause helped to export it across the Iron Curtain, but politics alone fails to explain why French women embraced this approach. Arriving on American shores around 1960, the Lamaze method took on new meanings. Initially it offered a path to a safer and more satisfying birth experience, but overtly political considerations came to the fore once again as feminists appropriated it as a way to resist the patriarchal authority of male obstetricians. Drawing on a wealth of archival evidence, Michaels pieces together this complex and fascinating story at the crossroads of the history of politics, medicine, and gender.The story of Lamaze illuminates the many contentious issues that swirl around birthing practices in America and Europe. Brimming with insight, Michaels' engaging history offers an instructive intervention in the debate about how to achieve humane, empowering, and safe maternity care for all women.

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Customer Reviews

"Michaels has managed the enviable feat of producing a comprehensive scholarly review that is both accessible and engaging. She draws on the disciplines of sociology, psychology, and political science to situate the startling history of Lamaze within the political imperatives of the postwar Soviet Union, France, and the United States...Lamaze: An International History is an excellent example of interdisciplinary history, situating historical facts within the sociological and political framework of each time and culture in which it became established."--Journal of Interdisciplinary History "Lamaze may be a household word in the United States but few if any of the many pregnant women who have used the technique know its surprising international history. Originating in the Soviet Union during the Cold War, subsequently enjoying a temporary popularity in France, the Lamaze method found an enduring home only in the United States. Paula Michaels explains why. In recognizing that medicine is far from a dispassionate science and that the political, economic, and cultural institutions within countries constantly shape and reshape medical practice, Michaels brings to life the fascinating history of a childbirth preparation method that transformed the attitudes of multiple generations of women toward giving birth."--Jacqueline H. Wolf, author of Deliver Me from Pain: Anesthesia and Birth in America"A compellingly written history of an enormously popular method of childbirth, this narrative takes readers from the city of Kharkov in the 1930s, to Paris in the 1950s, and finally to the United States up into the 1970s. How this method traveled across borders and even the Iron Curtain is remarkable and beautifully conveyed here. Perhaps even more extraordinary is the fact that a process promoted by Stalin and his supporters could come to symbolize American women’s liberation in the 1970s. While a work of history of medicine, this is also clearly a transnational history, a social history, a political history, and an intellectual history."--Wendy Kline, author of Bodies of Knowledge: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Women’s Health in the Second Wave"In her superb history of the Lamaze - or more accurately, the psychoprophylactic - technique, Paula Michaels shows how transformations in the management of childbirth also mediated the international and domestic rivalries of Cold War politics...Michaels has succeeded in producing an innovative, refreshing and insightful book."--Reviews in History

Paula A. Michaels is Senior Lecturer of history and international studies at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia and is the author of Curative Powers: Medicine and Empire in Stalin’s Central Asia.

Since the 1960s many women in Western industrialized countries--one of the most famous being the Duchess of Cambridge, if we are to believe reports--have eschewed anesthesia in favor of the Lamaze method--often confused with "natural childbirth"-- so that they could give birth fully awake and aware. But few women--if any--realized the Soviet origins of the Lamaze method until Paula Michaels discovered them. While based on solid scholarship in Russian, French, American, and British archives and libraries, the book is fast-paced, nicely illustrated, and dramatic. Paula Michaels moves the reader from one geographical location to another, providing vignettes of key players, their milieu and their interaction with each other. She details how shortages of pharmaceuticals and veneration of Pavlov’s psychological theories combined with the need to replenish a population decimated by World War II gave rise to a birthing method in the Soviet Union that focused on exercise, breathing and massage. She recounts how Dr. Lamaze popularized the method in Paris, how it was exported to the United States--scrubbed of its Soviet origins due to the Cold War, how Lamaze advocates clashed with British physician Grantly Dick-Read who had developed "natural childbirth" in the 1930s, how the Pope diplomatically endorsed both Lamaze and Natural childbirth, the sad fates of Lamaze and Dick-Read, and finally, the irony of how the Lamaze method was abandoned in the Soviet Union and lost favor in France while retaining popularity and morphing into a cottage industry in the United States. In addition to shedding light on developments in birthing practices, this book provides insights into unknown aspects of the Cold War and information on medical and pharmaceutical practices min various countries as well as the nuances of national cultures.

Great book

This is a really fun read! Michaels style is engaging and the material fascinating.For moms and moms to be, this book is as much a must as What to Expect When You’re ExpectingWhat to Expect When You’re Expecting, 4th Edition. The pressures about how and where to give birth can be overwhelming, but Michaels’ presentation of the history of these techniques allows for a more informed and less politicized look at options. She researches the evolution of today’s major birthing styles in their historical contexts and really opened my eyes to the political, social, and even

economic origins of each option.The most well-known of these -- Lamaze -- is not at all what I thought. Soviet, male, medical authorities in the 1950s, trained in Pavlovian-reflexology and struggling with shortages of all sorts, believed that women's experience of pain in birth was a result of not the physical experience but women's expectations based on stories and popular depictions. Mothers' pains, they maintained, were all in their heads. With proper education, exercises, and trained, medical practitioners, a women could have a pain-free labor. After Lamaze imported the idea to France, where it became quite popular with left-leaning women, it was then exported to the rest of the world. In the United States, this eventually meant dropping the name "Pavlov" and the substitution of "managed" pain for pain-free labor.More than just information for future mothers, this is a helpful antidote to the feelings of guilt and doubt that can accompany these decisions. Michaels keeps central to the story not just the different practitioners and theorists developing child-birth techniques, but wherever possible she also includes the words and experiences of actual women. Michaels is a balanced and sympathetic voice as she shows not only the ways that "natural" childbirth has changed over time and across national borders, but also illustrates how women's expectations for birth, and themselves, can often create lingering disappointments and self-doubt no matter which style of birth a woman chooses.In the knowledge of how women over the course of the twentieth century struggled with these decisions, as well as seeing the ways that political expectations and social pressures played in the past, there is comfort for mothers in the present.

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