

Regendering Childbirth

Regendering Childbirth: Catholicism, Medical Activism, and Birth Preparation in Post-War Poland

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This article examines the work of the gynaecologist Włodzimierz Fijałkowski, the key promoter of preparation for childbirth in communist and early democratic Poland. From the late 1950s until the 1990s, Fijałkowski developed a childbirth preparation training protocol that served as an inspiration for childbirth preparation schools across the country. Through analysis of Fijałkowski's publications in medical journals, books aimed at both professional and lay readers, visual aids for childbirth training, and archival material, we demonstrate that a specific vision of gender roles and relationships lay at the core of Fijałkowski's psychoprophylactic project. This vision represented a re-definition and re-essentialisation of femininity and masculinity, and motherhood and fatherhood, while simultaneously advocating for radical change in the relationship between women in labour and obstetric professionals. Fijałkowski's ideas and advocacy were intimately connected with a humanization of the embryo and foetus from the earliest stages of pregnancy, and we show how his work became an important transmission medium for the gradual mainstreaming of anti-abortion ideas within public discourse in late-communist Poland.

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