Are Women as Smart as Men?

Midwives and Medical Men in Seventeenth-Century France

Bridgette Sheridan, PhD
Engraving of Louise Bourgeois from a German edition of her birthing manual, 1644-52
Woodcut of women attending to a pregnant woman from German birthing manual, 1554
CONTEXT

- The Woman Question or the *Querelle des femmes*
  - René Descartes (1596-1650)
  - François Poulain de la Barre (1648-1723)

Scientific Revolution

- Hippocrates (450-370 BCE)
- Galen (129-200 CE)
LOUISE BOURGOEOIS (1563-1636)

√ Royal midwife to Queen Marie de Médicis beginning in 1600.

√ Birthing manual:
Louise Bourgeois, Diverse Observations on Sterility . . . deliveries, and illnesses of women & newly-born infants, treated and happily practiced by L. Bourgeois (Written in French, 1609-1626).

√ Manual was translated into several languages:
1619 - Latin; 1628 - German; 1658 – Dutch; 1659 – English
BOURGEOIS vs. PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS

- 1627 - The Death of the Royal Princess Marie de Bourbon-Montpensier following childbirth (Wife of Gaston d’Orléans, King Louis XIII’s brother)

- Publications:
  - Bourgeois, Louise (Boursier). *Apologia of Louise Bourgeois ... Midwife to the Queen Mother of the King, & to the deceased Madame [Princess]. Contrary to the Report of the Physicians*. Paris: Chez Melchior Mondiere, 1627.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF LOUISE BOURGEOIS’S LIFE & WORKS

- Scientific Revolution

- The Woman Question and the Problem with Difference
Etching of a “Man-midwife” from English Birthing Manual, 1793-5?
Engraving of woman in labor being delivered by a surgeon from Dutch edition of Louise Bourgeois’s Birthing Manual, 1701