

Institution: University of Oxford		
Unit of Assessment: 26A – Modern Languages		
Title of case study: Birth Through History. Developing Reflective Practitioners		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: Jan 2010–Nov 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Valerie Worth-Stylianou	Professor of French	Sept 2009–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Sept 2015–July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>By adopting a historical lens, Valerie Worth-Stylianou enables healthcare professionals, social scientists, archivists and others to reflect on major debates in women's healthcare and fetal medicine. Her research into early modern scientific and literary French texts about birth provides innovative support for midwives and obstetricians to develop as 'reflective practitioners' – a process promoted by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Worth-Stylianou collaborated with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Midwives, midwifery trainers and research midwives, through workshops, exhibitions and public events. 'Birth Through History' empowered health professionals to develop as reflective practitioners and to communicate in an informed manner with a wide lay audience.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Worth-Stylianou's research is marked by its period-spanning breadth. She draws on information from the time of the earliest printed midwifery manuals in Europe (in the sixteenth century) through to the emergence of men-midwives (i.e. surgeons specialised in childbirth) in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and makes comparisons with contemporary writings. Working with healthcare professionals, archivists and historians, in 'Birth Through History' she has explored the constants and changes, from the early modern period to the present day. Following from an earlier study of obstetric writings in French before 1630 (<i>Les traités d'obstétrique en langue française au seuil de la modernité</i>), her book on pregnancy and birth in early modern France [R1] combined translations and critical editions of treatises by François Rousset, Jean Liebault, Jacques Guillemeau, Jacques Duval and Louis de Serres with a bilingual companion website (http://www.birthingtales.org/) including a glossary, commented text extracts and contextual analysis. The 2013 volume made 'a contribution as welcome as it is well-documented', as the review in <i>French History</i> put it, and was Winner of the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women's 2014 prize for Best Teaching Edition for the 'challenging of conventional views of female subordination and inferiority'.</p> <p>Worth-Stylianou followed up on this research, on the one hand extending her field of enquiry into how the history of birthing is represented in modern French 'autofiction' [R2], which mediates personal experiences and creative writing, and on the other focusing on the historical circulation of information about pregnancy, birth and women's health. She examined printed works, their dissemination, translation, incorporation of images, and readership [R4], and the ways and extent to which these impacted on developments in the practice of birthing care and obstetric medicine. She used this approach in researching and preparing the exhibition featuring materials from the Royal College of Obstetricians' own archives. The booklet accompanying the exhibition, co-authored with the Chair of De Partu, the research group on the history of childbirth, contextualised the written and visual documents, investigating the controversies that surrounded many of these writings and ideas, with attention to the "porous boundaries between translation, interpretation and commentary" (Worth-Stylianou's phrase for a 2018 seminar at Princeton) involved in translating historical medical texts and transposing medical knowledge to a new, sometimes transnational cultural setting. Another focus of her research investigated who</p>		

was present at labour and birth historically [R3], and how this can inform current medical, cultural and anthropological discussions. Since 2018, Worth-Stylianou has been working on the medical and cultural history of 'involuntary childlessness' (historically termed 'infertility'), with the early history of this tracked in a major article discussing the different language and approaches of midwives, surgeons and physicians in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France [R5]. Worth-Stylianou's research foregrounds how shifts and debates in understanding were closely dependent on the evolving use of the French language, notably the frequent recourse to metaphors and comparisons to explain medical and biological observations.

As one of the leading figures in this research area, Worth-Stylianou was invited to author the article 'Midwifery' [R6] for the influential *Oxford Bibliographies* (2017), and her international status is demonstrated by the requests to give keynote addresses at conferences bringing together midwives, obstetricians and historians in the UK, France (Paris 2015, 2017 and Bordeaux 2019) and Austria (Vienna 2019).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

All materials authored by Valerie Worth-Stylianou.

- R1. [Edited and Translated Book, available on request] *Pregnancy and Birth in Early Modern France. Treatises by caring physicians and surgeons (1581–1625)*. Series: The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe. (Toronto: Iter Press, University of Toronto, 2013). ISBN 9780772721389 <https://crs.ca/publications/ov23/>
- R2. [Chapter, available on request] 'Birthing tales and collective memory in recent French fiction.' In *Motherhood in Literature and Culture. Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Europe*. Ed. G. Rye, V. Browne, A. Giorgio, E. Jeremiah, A. Lee Six (Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2017), 58–69. ISBN 9781138648173.
- R3. [Chapter, available on request] 'Qui assistait à un accouchement en France entre 1530 et 1630?' In *Enfanter dans la France d'Ancien Régime*. Ed L. Dion, A. Gargam, N. Grande, M.-E. Henneau (Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2017), 32–49. ISBN 9782848322704.
- R4. [Journal Article] 'Concurrent publication of medical works in neo-Latin and French in early modern France' *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 41-4 (2014), 456–476. Available at <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/crcil/index.php/crcil/article/view/25786>.
- R5. [Journal Article] 'Louise Bourgeois: An Early Modern Midwife's Observations on Female Infertility', *Women's Studies*, 49-3 (2020), 281–295. DOI: [10.1080/00497878.2020.1714391](https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2020.1714391).
- R6. [Website Content] 'Midwifery', *Oxford Bibliographies. Renaissance and Reformation* (2017). DOI: [10.1093/OBO/9780195399301-0366](https://doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780195399301-0366).

Prize:

Winner of the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women's 2014 prize for Best Teaching Edition for R1: <https://ssemwg.org/2014-award-winners/>

4. Details of the impact

Shaped public understanding and professional policy on good practice in gynaecology, pregnancy and childbirth

Worth-Stylianou's research focuses on the significance, from 1500 to the present, of clear written publications and sympathetic, nuanced oral communications between healthcare professionals and users. Drawing on her research, she assesses their contribution to contemporary public understanding of good practice in pregnancy and childbirth. This is evidenced by her contributions as a lay member of the Women's Voices panel of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) where she:

- Mediated medical information for lay readers in contributions to the RCOG's patient information leaflet 'A Breech Baby at the End of Pregnancy' (2017—subsequently recorded as a podcast; 2045 listeners). [S1]
- Mediated the presentation of complex medical information addressed to both medically-trained and other parties as one of two invited lay members of the team reviewing RCOG benign gynaecological indicators for UK hospitals (2015-16). The final report informs quality improvement initiatives and enables comparative benchmarking of gynaecological services in NHS Hospitals in England. [S2]
- Was one of 25 lay members selected to contribute to the syllabus review, 'Training Specialists of the Future', which underpinned the new RCOG Curriculum (launched 2019). Worth-Stylianou's contributions at the foundational stage emphasised the importance of shared information between patients and healthcare professionals; support for professionals through traumatic incidents; and the use of sensitive language in the birthing room to respect the diversity of family groupings [S3]. On the syllabus's launch, the Head of Patient Engagement recognised the importance of ensuring that the new framework guarantees specialists of tomorrow have non-technical skills, alongside the technical skills and knowledge to deliver high quality care: 'Many of the themes that emerged through engagement with the public were around the importance of these non-technical skills. Skills around communication; developing equal, trusting partnerships with patients; and the ability to provide tailored care and support so patients feel well informed and in control of their decision making.' [S3]

Strengthened reflective performance of practitioners in delivery of professional services

In collaboration with the RCOG, the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) and De Partu, Worth-Stylianou developed an exhibition in the RCOG'S Learning Centre and a display in the joint RCOG-RCM Library. Comments by midwives after the seminar held to mark the opening of the exhibition included *'Being addressed by academics, the CEO of the RCOG, and the Director of Midwifery, RCM, really made me feel valued as a professional.'* The 2015-2017 exhibition contextualised materials from the College's archives, investigating the controversies and challenges of transposing medical knowledge to a new, sometimes transnational cultural setting. The exhibition's digital version attracted 525 views in the first 6 weeks [S4], and several hundred copies of the accompanying brochure were disseminated within twelve months [S5]. A former RCOG and RCM Archivist commented: *'The posters and booklets helped... [with] engaging visitors who may not otherwise set foot in the library. [... Worth-Stylianou's work] inspired further displays requested by the College President who had been impressed by the increased visibility of the library and heritage collections.'* [S5]

200 Foundation Year 1 and 2 doctors attending a 2015 study day with Worth-Stylianou to decide whether to specialise in obstetrics and gynaecology viewed the exhibition. A female health provider commented that the historical context enabled her to challenge assumptions about health professionals' gender roles. Subsequent study days in London (2015) and Oxford (2016; 2018), for practitioners, archivists, and academics, initiated self-reflection among practitioners and midwifery tutors on history and current debates about:

delayed cord-clamping; parent education for birth and early months; prioritization of post-natal care; and the human dynamics of successful teamwork in operating theatres. The RCM Professor of Midwifery noted: *'the project was especially beneficial for student and newly qualified midwives and subsequent discussions indicated that participants were able to draw on historical perspectives to better understand contemporary challenges'* [S6]. Healthcare professionals recognised the impact on their understanding: *'each presentation gave us a different way of looking at these topics'* [S7]. A Professor of Perinatal Education commented: *'The dialogue between academic researchers and practitioners enabled by these study-days and by the exhibitions modelled a means of linking theory and practice essential for shaping maternity services that best serve the needs of women.'* [S8]

Contribution to continuing personal and professional development

Day conferences on Pregnancy and Birth, and Worth-Stylianou's presentations for over 100 student midwives (2018) at Oxford Brookes and some 30 Oxfordshire research midwives (2019), reached audiences, including practitioners, educators and educational publishers. They empowered attendees to develop their own competences as self-reflective practitioners and embed this in their professional settings. The 2018 study day, attended by midwives, publishers and historians, specifically reflected Worth-Stylianou's expertise in the history and transnational circulation of midwifery textbooks. Uniquely, it brought medical educational publishers (including the Senior Content Strategist, Nursing and Midwifery, Elsevier) into dialogue with midwifery tutors, midwives and historians, in particular exploring how two best-selling textbooks—Mayes and Myles—might be merged [S9]. The research forum *'has benefitted my work as an editor for the next edition of Mayes Midwifery, one of the leading midwifery textbooks in the UK. This already has a large historical chapter included, and [the revised edition] will be informed by this [workshop]'* (midwifery educator and author) [S9].

Worth-Stylianou has addressed research events for midwives from student status to advanced research midwives. At the 2018 Oxford Brookes conference, attended by over 100 students, tutors and other specialists, Worth-Stylianou gave the first talk, setting the theme—'The team around the [birthing] woman'—in its historical and transnational context, and proposing subjects for debate, which speakers and delegates used to reflect on their own approaches. The organising Senior Midwifery Lecturer at Oxford Brookes notes that Worth-Stylianou's *'talks have been instrumental in helping students situate midwifery care historically and [to] understand how it has been shaped by prevailing cultures and social conventions. Valerie's knowledge and enthusiasm have helped inspire students to think about how midwifery care can be developed.'* [S10] In 2019 at the 7th 'Colloque de la Société de la Naissance' (Bordeaux), Worth-Stylianou's opening keynote (attended by some 70 French practitioners) examined the history of the sense of smell in midwifery, and enabled comparisons with present-day deliveries. Midwives attending commented that Worth-Stylianou's historical research was particularly valuable in validating their goal of patient-focused individual care, in which attention to all five senses is crucial. [S11]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- S1.** RCOG, 'A Breech Baby at the End of Pregnancy', patient information leaflet (July 2017). Available at <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/patient-leaflets/breech-baby-at-the-end-of-pregnancy/> (Accessed 12 February 2021)
- S2.** RCOG, *Report on Benign Gynaecology Services in English NHS Hospital Trusts 2015-16*, cf. p. 58 for Worth-Stylianou's contribution to the RCOG Women's Voices. Available at <https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/guidelines/research--audit/benign-gynae-indicators-report-2015-16.pdf> (Accessed 12 February 2021)
- S3.** RCOG, *The new RCOG Curriculum* (2019). Available at <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/careers-training/specialty-training-curriculum/curriculum-2019/documents-resources> (Accessed 12 February 2021),

	followed by an email of thanks from RCOG Head of Patient & Public Involvement, 9 August 2019.
S4.	RCOG Heritage Collections, 'Celebrating 500 Years of Pregnancy and Birth', 7 September 2015. https://rcogheritage.wordpress.com/2015/09/07/celebrating-500-years-of-pregnancy-and-birth (Accessed 12 February 2021)
S5.	Letter from the former Archivist for the RCOG and the RCM, 27 July 2020.
S6.	Letter from the RCM Professor of Midwifery, Cardiff University, 29 July 2020.
S7.	Anonymised feedback from survey following Oxford study day, 2016.
S8.	Letter from the Professor of Perinatal Education, University of Worcester, 26 July 2020.
S9.	Letter from the Chair and Curator Midwifery Festival Conferences & MM Hour, 27 August 2020 with qualitative and quantitative feedback from attendees at 2018 study day on the history of education for practitioners and prospective parents. Event details at: https://birth.mml.ox.ac.uk/events/study-day-history-education-practitioners-and-prospective-parents (Accessed 12 February 2021)
S10.	Statement email from the Senior Lecturer in Midwifery, Oxford Brookes University, 21 July 2020.
S11.	Report (in French) on the Keynote Lecture at the Colloque de la Société d'histoire de la Naissance, Bordeaux 2019.