Traditionally, women’s experiences formed the basis of respected mothering practices which were seen as either part of a woman’s innate knowledge, or taught her by her own mother and other female relatives and friends. As scientific and technical expertise gained in prominence throughout the 19th century, increasingly women were told that they required scientific and medical knowledge in order to raise their children appropriately and healthfully. The ideal model now became the “scientific mother.” This paper analyzes the evolution of scientific motherhood from its earliest manifest in which women were expected to learn from modern scientific and medical knowledge, through the middle decades of the 20th century during which mothers were viewed as incapable of such learning and were expected to follow the directions of their physicians, through the end of the century when women demanded recognition of their capabilities. This paper traces out a number of the historically shifting power and gender relationships as women embraced, resisted, and redefined scientific motherhood.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

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Rima D. Apple, Ph.D., is Professor Emerita at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA. She has published extensively in women’s history, the history of medicine and nursing, and the history of nutrition. Among her eight books are Perfect motherhood: Science and childrearing in America (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2006) and Vitamania: Vitamins in American culture (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996) which received the Kremers Award, 1998, from the American Institute of the History of Pharmacy. In 2011 she received the Mary Adelaide Nutting Award for Exemplary Historical Research and Writing, from the American Association for the History of Nursing. In 2018 she received the Genevieve Miller Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Association for the History of Medicine. She has lectured extensively both in the United States and internationally and has been named “Professor Extraordinarius” by the Institute for Gender Studies, University of South Africa. She is the recipient of grants and awards from the National Science Foundation, the National Library of Medicine, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the Wellcome Trust.