

Puerperal insanity: history of postpartum psychosis

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Hugh Diamond's mid-19th-century photograph depicts a woman in stages of recovery from 'puerperal insanity', a disorder lying at the intersection of obstetrics and psychiatry. First conceptualised by obstetrician Robert Gooch in 1820, this disorder was fraught with cultural stereotypes, characterised by behaviours that violated the Victorian idea of 'feminine purity' (i.e. foul language, unkempt appearance, indecent exposure) and the expectation that women should fulfil their role as caretakers. Figure 1 illustrates the woman's clinical improvement correlating with changes in her attire and grooming to better conform to cultural expectations. This series reveals power dynamics infused in the physician–patient relationship and the stigmatisation of female maladies.



Fig. 1 Reproduced engraving. *Medical Times Gazette*, 'puerperal mania in four stages'. Wellcome collection. Public domain mark.

Data availability

Data availability is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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Author contributions

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Declaration of interest

None.

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