



DEPARTMENT OF
GENDER STUDIES



GENDER STUDIES COLLOQUIUM



DEAD MOTHERS, LIVE BIRTHS

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25 | WYLIE HALL 015 | 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

A Discussion with Lindsey Breitwieser

ABSTRACT:

With advancements in resuscitative and reproductive technologies, it is now possible to sustain a pregnancy in a brain-dead body for weeks or months at a time. Legal and theoretical reflections on these "postmortem pregnancies" have so far recognized their alignment with discourses of sacrificial motherhood, pronatalism, and fetal personhood. However, this has led to an incongruity in ethical debates across science and cultural theory, because healthcare workers in this area feel that the brain death of the woman and medicine's obligation to "preserve life" necessitate saving the fetus, even before the age of viability or legal personhood. Using insights from feminist science studies, this paper addresses how the fetishization of biological life provides moral cover for physicians who reify women's role as fetal incubators and who legitimize their actions through appeals to "physiology not philosophy." I suggest that a cultural and scientific remediation of what constitute biological life and death may be a new avenue for feminist intervention in this area of medical policy and practice.

BIOGRAPHY:

LINDSEY BREITWIESER is a doctoral candidate in Gender Studies at Indiana University. Her research uses the continued gestation of a fetus within a brain-dead woman to illustrate the use of scientific knowledge and medical technology as a means of social control. Her work has been supported by the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and the IU College of Arts and Sciences.