

# **Reproducing Reproduction**

Kinship, Power, and  
Technological Innovation

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## Introduction

Although the analysis of reproduction was central to the origins of anthropology, it has only recently begun to reemerge as an important theoretical focus.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for this historical centrality and later exclusion are significant, as are those informing the recent surge of interest in such classical anthropological topics as kinship, parenthood, procreation, conception, genealogy, and consanguinity. We begin by reviewing both the importance of reproductive models to late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century anthropology and the narrowness of these foundational models. We then consider some of the major influences that have brought about a transformation in the way reproduction is studied by anthropologists. In the third section, we introduce the aims of *Reproducing Reproduction* along with the contributions to this anthology.

### Anthropology and the "Facts of Life"

Anthropology was founded amidst what has been described by some as an "obsessive" interest in matters of kinship, procreation, and succession (Coward 1983). Nineteenth-century accounts of social organization offered by Bachofen (1861), McLennan (1865), and Westermarck (1891) centrally concerned knowledge of and beliefs about procreation, kinship, and conception, or what are colloquially described as "the facts of life." Specifically, accurate knowledge of physical paternity was seen by early anthropologists, and by nineteenth-century theorists such as Engels (1884), Morgan (1871), and Maine (1861), as an index of stages of social development towards civilization. Frazer (1910), Rivers (1910), Van Gennep (1906), and later Malinowski (1913) positioned reproductive arrangements centrally in their accounts of social structure, displaying considerable curiosity towards conception models and procreative knowledge. Even late in his career, Malinowski insisted that the question of physical paternity was no less than "the most exciting and controversial issue in the comparative science of man" (1937: xxiii). The infamous

“virgin birth” debates that swept through anthropology midcentury similarly positioned detailed knowledge of the precise mechanisms of procreation and conception as central to questions of knowledge and belief, primitivism and modernity, and religion and cosmology, as well as issues of theory and method (Leach 1967; Spiro 1968). In sum, an important genealogy of modern anthropology can readily be traced through its relationship to a core set of ideas related to reproduction, or “the facts of life.”

Of course, any such genealogy is both reductive and instrumental. For our purposes here, it is offered by means of illustrating an important paradox within the history of anthropological theory concerning reproduction. For, although anthropology is in some respects quite unusual among the modern human sciences in its “obsessive” attention to the details of human reproductive knowledge in cross-cultural perspective (so that entire volumes were devoted, for example, to accounts of *The Father in Primitive Society* [Malinowski 1927] or *Coming into Being Among the Australian Aborigines* [Montagu 1937]), this interest was remarkably narrowly cast. Reproduced within the better part of the modern anthropological corpus of knowledge concerning reproduction were familiar forms of androcentrism, ethnocentrism, and biological determinism that greatly limited the ways in which reproduction could be analysed or studied.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the nearly exclusive anthropological focus for over a century, from the mid-1800s to the late twentieth century, on *knowledge of physical paternity* indexed the limitations curtailing analysis of “reproduction.” Paradoxically, then, despite its detailed interest and global reach in matters of reproduction, anthropology managed determinedly to preserve and reproduce “physical paternity” as its overriding focus and concern.

Several factors ensured the reproduction of this tunnel vision for over a century within not only anthropology, but much Anglophone and European social theory more generally. Primary among these are the relegation of “reproduction” to a domain of “natural” or biological facts that were (and often continue to be) considered prior to, and separate from, sociality. Compounding this reductivist tendency was the perception of reproduction as a private, domestic activity associated with femininity, maternity, and women, which therefore rendered it of limited importance to anthropological theory. Together, the naturalization, domestication, and feminization of reproduction ensured that it would remain undertheorized within the major paradigms of modern social theory. As Rayna Rapp has suggested, “perhaps because it was considered a ‘woman’s subject,’ reproduction long remained on the margins of anthropological theory” (1994: 1). Supporting the reproduction of this gender bias have been taken-for-granted assumptions about the sexual division of labor, sexual difference, and the reproductive

*telos* necessary to ensure human survival (i.e., Darwinism) that continue to operate as central but unexamined premises in many contemporary models of culture and society. In sum, reproduction could be described as invisibly central (along Darwinian, patriarchal, and biologically determinist lines), while remaining visibly marginalized (for example, in terms of childbirth practices) within anthropology.

### Redefining Reproduction

Several developments in recent years have contributed to the contemporary reemergence of an anthropology of reproduction. With the rise of feminist anthropology in the 1970s came a wholesale reevaluation of the exclusion of women’s activities from the ethnographic record and a critical interrogation of the social models responsible for this exclusion. Studies such as Annette Weiner’s influential *Women of Value, Men of Renown* (1976), in which she critiqued Malinowski’s neglect of women’s exchange networks, to which reproductive models were central, opened up new possibilities for appreciating the embeddedness of procreative imagery in the maintenance and renewal of cultural identity and tradition. Such studies contributed to an important critique not only of the exclusion of women and “feminine” activities from the ethnographic record, but also of the enduring structuralist and structural-functionalist dichotomies of nature-culture, jural-domestic, and public-private, all of which had significant constraining effects on the theorization of gender and kinship as well as reproduction. By the early 1980s, feminist scholars had established a significant challenge to many of the reductive biologicistic assumptions structuring much social scientific study. Both physical and cultural anthropology were seen to rely on a false dichotomization of social and natural facts through which, as Weiner described it, reproduction was reduced to “mere biology” while culture was defined as “everything else” (1978).

Nonetheless, assumptions about the biological basis of reproduction have proven difficult to displace. Despite more than two decades of ongoing and determined critical intervention, biologicistic assumptions about reproduction that position it as a universal, timeless, essential, and ahistorical component of human existence remain ubiquitous within anthropology, as they do within the larger culture of which it is part. As Rayna Rapp has noted, “dragging reproduction to the center of social analysis is a relatively recent project for anthropologists” (1994:2). Part of this project involves widening the concept of “reproduction,” as has been possible through analysis of new reproductive and genetic technologies (Helmreich 1995 and in this volume; Rabinow 1996; Strathern 1992, and Hayden in this volume). Through such studies, “re-

production" in its procreative sense is linked to informatics (artificial life), biowealth, and techniques of power-knowledge (e.g., polymerase chain reaction). Consequently, "the politics of reproduction" comprises a broad field linking human procreative activity to issues such as intellectual property, environmental activism, and genetic engineering.

### **"Every Technology Is a Reproductive Technology" (Sofia)**

In their important review article on "The Politics of Reproduction" (1991) and their introduction to the subsequent anthology charting the global reach of this subject area (1995b), Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp describe several trajectories of study through which reproduction has come to be seen as a potent site of political contestation and resistance. The control of reproduction through population policy, global planning, and international development initiatives has been the subject of numerous feminist studies. Similarly, the medicalization of reproduction and the emergence of new reproductive technologies have also attracted increasing scholarly attention. The ethnography of birth, childrearing, and the management of both fertility and infertility through indigenous systems of knowledge has developed into a significant trajectory of anthropological research, largely due to the pioneering work of Brigitte Jordan. Finally, the meanings of reproduction over the course of the life cycle, in relation to gender and kinship definitions and as resources in social movements, have also been chronicled and documented. From all these perspectives, Rapp and Ginsburg argue, reproduction can be seen both as a critical site of local/global interface and as an important site of social stratification.

This volume takes its cue both from the "local-global lens" proposed by Ginsburg and Rapp and from other recent studies arguing for a renewed appreciation of reproduction in social theory (Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997; Davis-Floyd and Dumit 1997). Though our aim can be most broadly described as contributing to the effort to make reproduction more visibly central to contemporary anthropology, we have organized this volume to emphasize two specific strategies related to this end. The first strategy is to foreground the defamiliarizing impact of new technologies, through which many of the most deeply taken-for-granted assumptions about the "naturalness" of reproduction are displaced. By this we are referring to the many widely publicized dilemmas occasioning the rapid developments in the fields of assisted reproduction and biotechnology. Observing high-profile controversies about, for example, orphaned frozen embryos, transgenic organisms, the human genome project, or artificial life forms, it becomes more difficult to ar-

gue that reproductive acts are private, personal, domestic, and "merely biological" phenomena that have little to do with the more important business of politics, science, commerce, or the law. Quite the reverse—recent reproductive controversies span the gamut of social institutions; comprise global property debates; confound expert jurists, theologians, and ethicists; and challenge the very idea of a "natural fact."

The defamiliarizing perspective provided by technology, however, can be both superficial and dizzying. It is for this reason we have also foregrounded an ethnographic focus, which seeks to situate changing cultural definitions of reproduction in the context of their lived articulation. This traditional form of anthropological empiricism works to ground what can otherwise become overly speculative, abstract, and decontextualized accounts of the "impact" of new technology. Technology is not an agent of social change; people are. Yet the forms of instrumentalism made available through new technology are not insignificant—they shape possibilities and they comprise powerful materializations of human desire and capability. Hence, the contributions to *Reproducing Reproduction* define technology very broadly, while attempting to specify what is meant by its "cultural implications" as precisely as possible. Using technology as a defamiliarizing lens, but wary of the tendency to inflate its determinism or to become enthralled by its dazzling promises, this collection offers a series of studies that seek empirically to ground accounts of reproductive techniques as *cultural practice* within carefully specified interpretive frames.

By acknowledging the importance of culturally grounded accounts, we do not wish to contribute to an overvaluation of ethnographic representation as a uniquely privileged form of anthropological analysis. Following Marcus's elegant discussions in his account of "Ethnography in/of the World System" (1995), we seek *both* to emphasize the cultural specificity of meanings, practices, and techniques as part of lived, contested, and negotiated relations, *and* to transcend the limitations imposed by such a view—for example, its tendencies to overvalorize resistance, "experience," and the "authentic voices" of selected Others. In the context of in vitro fertilization, transnational adoption, surrogacy, and prenatal screening, it is essential to recognize not only the local, regional, or national dimensions that impinge upon a particular case study or field setting, but increasingly *also* to appreciate the international and global formations that exercise a distinctive and distinctively *cultural* influence. As Marcus notes, much as there is reason to defend the time-honored ethnographic practice of situating meanings within whole ways of life in which people resist, accommodate, and alter the messages and mechanisms they encounter, there is also a need to begin to retool ethnographic representation in such a manner that it can better attend

to the character of those meanings, messages, and mechanisms *in their own right*.

Invitations such as those encouraged by Marcus, for anthropology to begin to develop approaches to forms of culture that are not necessarily bounded, locatable, or reducible to the means of their consumption or production, pose important methodological challenges to which this volume seeks to respond. Some of the tools with which to begin expanding traditional anthropological means of ethnographic representation can be drawn from cultural studies, and this interface is a lively, if contested, border within contemporary research on culture. Ginsburg and Rapp (1995b), for example, express what has become a frequently encountered criticism of cultural studies (often synonymous with textual, semiotic, postmodern, or poststructuralist) accounts of representations when they warn that:

*Time* magazine . . . regularly publishes cover stories on everything from new infertility treatments to the search for *in utero* methods of screening for genetic diseases. . . . [T]hose using [cultural studies] methods might view *Time* magazine as an unproblematical stage for the display of scientific hegemony. From an anthropological perspective, this kind of analysis relies on outdated Durkheimian models in which the image and its interpretation are isomorphic. (1995b: 6)

This criticism is often summarized as the “culture-as-text” approach, referring to the increasing influence of textually based models within social science (see Rabinow and Sullivan 1979a, b). In addition to decontextualizing meanings, culture-as-text approaches raise concerns that representations will be read in an overly deterministic manner, described as “textual determinism.” Ginsburg and Rapp, for example, refer to this slippage between textual structures and of social relations as “Durkheimian”—suggesting a rigid, anachronistic model of social action. Such a model could as well be described as “Parsonian” in its evocation of a set of norms, rules, or ideals that can be studied in their own right. David Schneider’s study of American kinship as a *cultural system* (1968) invoked this type of formal analysis, whereby a set of core symbols were extracted (or abstracted) from normative statements concerning the definition of relatives within a kin universe.

As Ginsburg and Rapp go on to note, cultural studies models of reception theory (Ang 1991, Radway 1988) and media studies (Hall 1988) can also be highly attentive to the processes whereby “imagery is produced and consumed by a broad range of people who may resist, negotiate, or accommodate encoded meanings” (1995b: 6).<sup>3</sup> In addition, sociologists of culture who study the “culture industries,” such as the media, advertising, and entertainment industries, have developed models of

*consumption* and *consumerism* that have much to offer anthropologists researching visual, public, or mass culture (Lury 1993).

Theorists such as Donna Haraway, Marilyn Strathern, Lila Abu-Lughod, Emily Martin, and many others have been instrumental in developing methods of cultural research that can work across texts, practices, and contexts, uniting several layers or sites of cultural production within coherent, empirically based analytical models. Haraway, for example, uses the model of “materialized figurations” to describe the agentic character of representations in and of themselves as they work to constitute the worlds actors inhabit (1992). Representations for Haraway have “world-building” consequences, identifiable at the level of narrative, discursive, or figurative mechanisms. These can be traced, specified, exemplified, and documented at every level of social practice. In addition, and of particular importance for the anthropology of reproduction (and thus for this volume), Haraway makes the point that representations, such as the anthropological account of the human as a species and of species as evolutionary entities, are themselves (discursive) “technologies” and are reproductive in the sense that they are *generative* of actual and possible worlds (1997).

Marilyn Strathern similarly describes culture in terms of specific types of effects that can be documented, analyzed, and defined. The effects of substitution, displacement, and literalization, for example, comprise for Strathern ethnographic documentation of how culture is enacted by individual social agents. Such accounts neither reduce the cultural to the social vs. the individual nor inflate its agency along formal, determinist lines. Instead, as Abu-Lughod notes (1991), such innovative accounts of culture respond to important criticisms of traditional culture models in anthropology.<sup>4</sup>

Emily Martin’s important contributions to a refashioned ethnographic engagement with contemporary cultural forms, or what Marcus describes as “multi-sited ethnography,” emphasize the movement of cultural forms across a range of sites and locations. Hence, idioms of immunity as a system travel from corporate boardrooms to clinical settings to “lay” understandings of health and illness (Martin 1994). The means of “tracking” such idioms, as Martin describes them, remain underspecified at present. A challenge for anthropology, therefore, is to balance what is gained and what is lost by moving away from traditional models of culture, ethnography, “fieldwork,” and agency. Central to the question of what a more flexible ethnographic empiricism will entail is the question of evidence—if there are to be new rules of anthropological method, the question of what counts as a cultural fact is sure to figure prominently among them.

Such questions emerge with particular prominence in relation to the “new” forms of culture with which anthropology has begun to seek more effective scholarly engagement, such as global, virtual, public, transnational, popular, and professional cultures. Without underestimating the degree to which there are, as ever, numerous important precedents for such forms of cultural analysis, and without overestimating the novelty or distinctiveness of these “new” cultural domains, it remains clear that, as stated earlier, a certain degree of retooling is not out of place. New forms of technology, as well as new methods for the analysis of culture as a set of representations, are central concerns for this effort to refashion anthropology’s ability to engage with both the plurality of cultural forms available to it and the consequences of the culture explosion—summed up by Strathern as the fact that “culture has become all too utterable” (1992).<sup>5</sup>

Our interest in technology, then, is somewhat overdetermined. In the same way that new technology may be useful as a defamiliarizing lens from which to “make strange” the familiar, the often invisible assumptions through which we understand social and cultural change, so too it has the potential to effect a respatialization and retemporalization of both “culture” and “society.” It is for this reason that this volume examines the cultural dimensions of reproduction not only from the traditional standpoint of participant observation as part of a community or local group, but also from the point of view of reproduction within global culture, virtual culture, popular media, and transnational capitalist exchange. In addition, therefore, to foregrounding the importance of ethnographic analysis, we seek also to challenge the traditional “sited-ness” of this enterprise by expanding what can be considered as an anthropological, or cultural, field.

### Reproducing Reproduction

This book emerges out of a panel organized at the 1993 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association. Since that time, we have added new contributors and expanded our original aims to develop this volume. In our original conference abstract, we emphasized both topical and methodological concerns related to what we perceived as the rapidly expanding corpus of ethnographic study related to changing definitions of reproduction and the “facts of life.”

Reproduction, we suggested, is increasingly subject to a wide range of professional and technological forms of intervention, many of which have aroused public concern. In addition to the so-called “new” reproductive technologies, such as assisted conception and prenatal screening, there are also a number of emergent reproductive service indus-

tries, such as surrogacy, through which “traditional” reproductive activities have become both professionalized and commercialized. It is this convergence of professional, technological, and commercial “management” of conception, procreation, and pregnancy that has been the subject of widespread public debate. In turn, the intensification of reproductive intervention has contributed to the increasing visibility of a significant site of late-twentieth-century cultural contestation, namely the foundational meanings connected to reproduction. At stake are not only traditional definitions of family, disability, parenting, kin connection, and inheritance, but the conventional understandings of nature, life, humanity, morality, and the future.

Through the panel, we sought to examine the cultural dimensions of contemporary forms of reproductive intervention, professionalization, and contestation by using several different sites as contexts for one another. We thus aimed to provide an exercise in comparison, using a growing number of ethnographic and cultural studies that might be brought together for the first time. Hence, the main focus of our initial panel was the theme of how gender, kinship, disability, race, and personhood are reworked and reconstituted through “new” procreative practices that variously instrumentalize the “management” of reproduction. In turn, we sought to investigate the renegotiation of a wide range of other foundational meanings and values seen to be at stake in this process.

The means, for example, by which the transgressive potential of new techniques (e.g., professional surrogacy) is offset by their incorporation into established idioms, such as the naturalness of the desire to procreate, provided instances of the kind of cultural process we sought to make explicit. Likewise, the remobilization of traditional understandings of reproduction, or reproductive control (e.g., abortion) in the context of contemporary contestations over new transnational identities (e.g., “European” citizenship) offered a reverse example of a related process. In turn, such exemplifications raise both theoretical and methodological questions concerning the analysis of reproduction, kinship, and gender as well as race, nationality, and disability.

The contributions to this volume build on our original aims. The first two chapters introduce a recurrent theme of *Reproducing Reproduction*: the normalizing influence of new reproductive screening technologies. In both Janelle Taylor’s chapter on ultrasound and that by Nancy Press, Carole H. Browner, Diem Tran, Christine Morton, and Barbara Le Master concerning a range of prenatal tests, the establishment of clinical norms to guide reproductive intervention and management is described. At the same time, these chapters also emphasize the uneven and contradictory dimensions of this process of “normalization,” docu-

menting the ways it is resisted, negotiated, ascribed to, and redefined by both practitioners and their patients. Thus new technology emerges as both determining of and determined by complex social relations.

The next three chapters address new methods of assisted conception, including both in vitro fertilization (IVF) and surrogacy. In chapters based on fieldwork in IVF clinics in Britain and the United States, Charis Cussins and Sarah Franklin explore the experience of *achieving* conception. In this context, as Cussins notes, processes of normalization include those of naturalization and routinization. In both chapters, the naturalized narrative of the "facts of life" takes on new dimensions in the context of increasing technological assistance. In turn, assisting conception creates specific dilemmas for women seeking to exercise agency in the face of uncertain diagnostic information and the stratified relations of the clinic. Again, the ethnographic focus allows for several layers of these processes to be documented and discussed. Both Cussins and Franklin outline interpretive frameworks linking the analysis of reproduction to wider questions concerning the cultural dimensions of science. Continuing these themes, Ragoné addresses the complex formation of identities and motivations in the context of commercial surrogacy arrangements. In particular, her focus foregrounds the shifting significance of race, class, gender, and nationality in the process of establishing connections and disconnections between surrogates and commissioning couples. This chapter also provides a preliminary discussion of the links between different reproductive techniques, including IVF and artificial insemination (AI) in the context of surrogacy.

Reproductive disputes in the context of national and global identity formation is the theme of the next two chapters, in which both abortion and adoption are depicted as sites of intense and ongoing contestation. Recounting her fieldwork experience on the abortion controversy in the midst of Ireland's decision whether to join the European community, Laury Oaks demonstrates how deeply intertwined are issues of the control of reproduction and the maintenance of cultural identity. Likewise, Judith Modell explores the conflicts between local, indigenous customs and the formal, legal apparatus of the state concerning child custody, fosterage, and adoption in Hawai'i. In both settings, reproductive continuity emerges as a potent symbol of the maintenance of cultural traditions and identity.

The final two chapters also address new forms of relatedness as part of both global and virtual culture. Analyzing the emergent cultural value of "biodiversity," Cori Hayden discusses both the Human Genome Diversity project and related disputes over intellectual property rights in living organisms. Here, reproduction emerges as a key issue in the defi-

nition not only of nationality but of property, patrimony, and patenting rights. Similarly, Stefan Helmreich presents material from his ethnographic study of paternity claims by the inventors of artificial life systems. Examining models of conception, origin, and "begetting" as part of the male world of artificial life creation, he provides an unexpected perspective on some of the most traditional anthropological concerns about paternity and kinship.

Together these chapters comprise both analytical and ethnographic perspectives on reproduction in a range of settings. They demonstrate in a variety of contexts the centrality of reproduction to both social structure and social theory. Most important, these chapters document the changing meanings of "reproduction" itself, as it is transformed, reproduced, and redefined in the present as it has been in the past. A potent symbol of the future, as well as of tradition and continuity with the past, reproduction is increasingly visible as one of the most contested sites of contemporary cultural change. *Reproducing Reproduction* argues for the value of the ethnographic lens in analyzing the multiple and contradictory dimensions of these changes. In contributing to the emergence of the anthropology of reproduction, this book offers specific examples of the kinds of innovative and essential studies in which reproduction is no longer a structuring absence, but a definitive presence.

## Notes

1. Recent and forthcoming anthologies addressing the anthropology of reproduction include Ginsburg and Rapp (1995a), Davis-Floyd and Sargent (1997), Davis-Floyd and Dumit (1997), Morgan and Michaels (forthcoming), Lock and Kaufert (forthcoming), and Inhorn (1996). See also Delaney (1991), Yanagisako and Delaney (1995), Inhorn (1994), Ragoné (1994), Sandelowski (1993), Edwards et al. (1993), Franklin (1997), Rapp (forthcoming), and Layne (forthcoming).

2. A more radical argument would be that many exemplary forms of androcentrism and ethnocentrism, in particular those that derive from biological determinism, *are* reproductive models—for instance, Darwinian natural selection.

3. Because the field of cultural studies comprises a diverse and disunified set of approaches to the study of contemporary culture, it includes within its broad parameters many useful critical discussions of textual determinism and culture-as-text (e.g., Stacey 1994, Chapter 2).

4. These criticisms would include the reduction of culture to place and the overemphasis of holism, boundedness, authenticity, and the "romance of resistance" (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1991, Clifford 1988, and Gupta and Ferguson 1992).

5. See also, for example, Annette Weiner's presidential address to the American Anthropological Association, "Culture and Our Discontents" (1995).

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