

Abstracts

A Biogenetic Filiation for Later? Caregivers and Trans People's Experiences of Reproductive Technologies in Switzerland and France

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In France and Switzerland, sterilization is no longer mandatory to obtain an official gender marker change. Preserving one's gametes before starting hormone replacement therapy is emerging as an international standard of care. However, the reproductive rights of trans people remain a contested matter. Based on 59 interviews with various experts engaged in providing access to fertility preservation to trans people and with trans people with first-hand experience, we examine how this medical practice can challenge the cisheteronormativity not only of care infrastructures, but also of relationships and parenthood. The paper focuses on three key tensions that arise in the practice of fertility preservation. First, it considers how trajectories of care involve the articulation of different individual and collective temporalities that are at once legal, political, medical, practical, and biographical. Secondly, it shows how such articulations give rise to potentially unexpected re-envisioned futures of parenthood. Finally, the paper highlights the role of medical practices in supporting these multiple futures and, more broadly, the development of trans reproductive rights.

Reproductive Governance in Spain and Motherhood Postponement

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Spain went from a “baby boom” between 1950 and 1970 to “structural infertility” since 1990. In 2021, it had the lowest fertility rate in Europe (1.19), only behind Malta (1.13), and together with Italy (1.35) are the three European countries with the lowest-low fertility rates (Kohler, 2002), that is TFR lower than 1.3 child per woman.

Reasons for the Spanish fertility decline have been explained as the increase in motherhood age -motherhood postponement- produced by contextual and subjective factors influencing reproductive decisions. Spanish reproductive context has been analysed under four mechanisms of reproductive governance (Morgan & Roberts, 2012): the labour market conditions, gender relations at home, institutional feminist discourses, and the narrative of choice (Alvarez & Marre, 2022), which produce unfriendly conditions to have children. Motherhood postponement produces the need for assisted reproduction, including adoption -where women become mothers of relatively older children than a newborn baby, facilitating work-life balance (Marre et al., 2018)- and the need for assisted reproduction technologies in public and private clinics, appearing an international market in ART (Rivas, 2020). With this option in mind, some women wait for the right time for motherhood (San Roman, 2020), some others choose to be single mothers through ART-D (Frasquet, 2021), and some are not able to become mothers (Bogino Larrambeber, 2023).

Through twenty-three interviews and participant observation in a public ART service in Barcelona, this paper aims to explore the preliminary results of the narratives used by single and lesbian women to explain their experience doing an ART treatment with the public sperm donation health system in Barcelona.

Not of Women Born: Sociotechnical Imaginaries of Gender and Kinship in the Regulation of Transmasculine Reproductive Citizenship in Denmark

Anna Sofie Bach, University of Copenhagen

In 2014, Denmark abolished the castration requirement that had been in place since the 1950s in order to obtain legal gender reassignment. As a self-declaration model was introduced, the law was amended to enable everyone with a uterus to retain access to pregnancy care and assisted reproduction. Combining Science and Technology Studies with critical transgender scholarship, this paper explores how the legal reforms, which sought to separate legal gender status from the healthcare system, have shaped the emergence of reproductive transmasculinities and the institutionalization of reproductive citizenship for trans men. Drawing on the concept of sociotechnical imaginaries (Jasanoff, 2015) I discuss how specific understandings of coherence between bodies, gender and parenthood organize and restrict the reproductive practices of trans men. and with a particular interest in how in which fertility preservation. Through the framework of biomedicalization (Clarke et al., 2010), I extend my discussion of reproductive autonomy to fertility preservation access. I discuss why, in Denmark, sperm can be frozen in relation to gender-affirmative treatment, but eggs/ovarian tissue cannot, and in doing so I highlight how this disparity is not only shaped by normative practices of risk prediction, but also by a political concern around surrogacy.

Traders of gametes, brokers of values: Mediating commercial gamete donations in Delhi

Sandra Bärnreuther, University of Lucerne

Scholarly analyses of transactions of biological material are often focused on either the moral economy of exchange or the political economy of production. In this paper, I highlight the ambiguities that characterize commercial gamete donations in daily clinical life in In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) hospitals in Delhi through agents' practices of valuation. In Delhi's IVF economy, agents occupy a pivotal role in mediating gamete transactions: not only as traders of biological substances but also as brokers of values. Aligning various regimes of value, they let transactions appear as morally meaningful as well as economically profitable to donors. Agents also make use of polyvalences and frame transactions in distinct lights in negotiations with different participants. It is their mediations and practices of valuation, I argue, that make commercial gamete donations viable and sustain Delhi's intimate IVF economy.

Assisted Troubles: ARTs and the Future of Reproduction

Aditya Bharadwaj, Geneva Graduate Institute

The past and the future are mirrored in the present. In this current moment, where reproduction faces challenges from various quarters - biopolitical, climatic, demographic, to name a few pressure points - it is perhaps timely to contemplate the issues affecting the contemporary moment, which both hinder and assist reproduction. However, even as human reproduction seems to be declining in some contexts, humanity has reached an unprecedented eight billion. This remarkable feat, despite insurmountable biopolitical and ecological challenges, also foreshadows the future itself. Reproduction, like never before, is being celebrated and criticized, stratified and politicized to convey specific meanings. In this contemporary era marked by advanced neoliberal capitalism, where extractive processes have reached an unmatched peak, the very concept of reproduction, as perpetually assisted and increasingly technologically mediated, has become a contentious matter requiring urgent attention. The notion of "assisted troubles" presents an opportunity to queer and reconsider how the present, as it stands, came into being, and what potential reproductive future scenarios may emerge for humanity on our deeply troubled planet.

Navigating Epistemic Uncertainties Related to Infertility Risks in a Context of Egg Freezing

Eléonore Crunchant, University of Geneva

When women start the process of anticipating infertility, they are very often in a context of multiple uncertainties. These may be related for example to the possibility of reaching the desired conditions for having a child before becoming infertile or to ambivalence about the desire for a child and its evolution in the future. Being single and childless in one's thirties can be seen as being in a state of liminality, an in-between state and a transition between two different social statuses. This state is often associated with an affective state, with feelings of anxieties, anger, but also hope related to anticipation, waiting and expectations about one's future reproductive life. In this context, freezing eggs often brings a feeling of relief to women as it is presented as a way of giving them an additional chance to have a child in the future.

At the same time, however, egg freezing has also been presented as producing new uncertainties, as it participates in the production and the circulation of knowledge about infertility risks. Among the various types of uncertainty, epistemic uncertainties about fertility seems to be particularly present, participating in a tension between knowing and not knowing about one's own fertility and infertility risks.

Based on 35 in-depth interviews with women in the process of egg freezing in Switzerland and France, and on the sociological literature on uncertainty in health and medicine, this paper will first analyse how epistemic uncertainty about infertility risks circulates in the context of infertility anticipation. Second, this paper will examine how women navigate epistemic uncertainties to make decisions and orient themselves in the future of their reproductive lives.

From a Biomedical Prohibited Practice to its Legal and Free Implementation: Elective Egg Freezing in France (2011-2023)

Claire Grino, University of Geneva

Egg freezing for non medical reasons has been a contested matter around the globe. France is no exception, and after heated national debates, the practice has been allowed since the revision of the Law of bioethics in 2021. Elective egg freezing turned then from a prohibited practice to an almost full covered one by the public health insurance, leading to a large volume of women's demands.

This talk aims at presenting the implementation of fertility preservation through egg freezing in reproductive medicine services in France. Starting from the use of the technique of oocyte vitrification upon which the provision of this care depends, it focuses on medical practices, and how they deal with the application of the law. Based on interviews with health professionals and different ethnographical observations, three stages in the implementation of egg freezing will be identified: the recourse to oocyte cryopreservation before the law of 2021, the phase of setting up care pathways for elective egg freezing and a phase of current stabilization. In each case, issues of inequalities will be addressed.

Reproductive Justice Beyond the Gender Binary

Sally Hines, University of Sheffield

Increasing numbers of men, trans/masculine and non-binary people are considering and/or under-taking pregnancies. Not only does this problematise dominant understandings of the gendered reproductive body, it raises significant questions about the legal insistence that reproduction is inherently female. The assumption that reproduction is a womanly affair, leaves trans male and non-binary people who become pregnant, give birth and parent without legal rights and recognition. The talk thus addresses the gap between everyday experiences of reproduction and gendered discourse and practice.

Drawing on the first international qualitative research project to explore the experiences of men who become pregnant and or/give birth, this talk considers the narratives of participants as they speak about the impacts of non-recognition at social and cultural and policy and legal levels. The talk highlights how a lack of understanding and recognition impacts on participants everyday lives and reproductive experiences in addressing themes of mis-gendering, cultural exceptionalism, and health care and legal frameworks that fail to protect trans male and non-binary parenting rights. In conclusion, the talk discusses the recommendations for health practitioners that were developed from the research and addresses the potentials for thinking through reproduction beyond the gender binary.

Using, Transferring, Stockpiling, and Storing Eggs in Spanish Fertility Clinics: A Shifting Reproductive Model

Sara Lafuente-Funes, University of Frankfurt

In Spain, eggs play a central role in both defining infertility and offering solutions to it. Even if this might be the case everywhere, since eggs are obviously key for reproduction, I argue that their centrality is even more acute in Spain. This centrality puts great pressure on women, either as reproductive citizens who need to take care of their fertility or as fertility providers who are expected to give their eggs away to help others (in exchange for economic compensation). Indeed, the Spanish reproductive market has grown up around the ability to acquire, transfer and now store and stockpile eggs – mainly within so-called egg donation programs, but increasingly as well within fertility preservation ones. Eggs (and women) are understood, defined and treated differently in these clinics depending on the treatment they are part of. The physical and health features of donors set the value of their eggs, along with their expected reproductive capacity, which is either seen to have been proved by previous donations or is estimated based on their age. This is the case even though their price, in terms of the economic compensation given to donors or the fee for exchange between clinics, is not allowed to change. The main value of eggs stored within fertility preservation treatments is their genetic link to the person freezing them, although that person's reproductive capacity is also measured according to age. In my presentation, I aim to focus on the role of eggs in the Spanish reproductive market, these valuation practices, and how they impact current (shifting) understandings of fertility and reproduction in the country. I will do so drawing on fieldwork undertaken in the last ten years in different research projects in Spain, but focusing on an ongoing research project that looks at the role of reproductive cryopreservation, Cryosocieties.

Capturing the Views and Voices of Trans and Non-binary Young People on Fertility Preservation: A Photovoice Approach

Kévin Lavoie, Laval University

In this talk, we present the results of a qualitative study on fertility preservation among trans and non-binary (TNB) youth in Quebec, Canada. Fifteen young people aged 12 to 23 took part in the research, as did sixteen parents. The photovoice participatory research method was used to gather young people's views, using two data collection tools: photography/drawing and individual interviews. Firstly, young people were invited to represent their point of view on fertility preservation by proposing a "meme", an assembly (often ironic) of four images for each of the following statements: 1) "what I think about it [fertility preservation]"; 2) "what my parents think about it"; 3) "what health professionals think about it" and 4) "what society thinks about it". They were then asked questions in a one-to-one interview to better understand the process that had led to the creation and selection of these images, and thus to identify their representations of gamete preservation as a means of accessing biological parenthood. Rooted in a perspective of transreproductive justice, the meme analysis reveals young people's individual aspirations with regard to fertility preservation, as well as the family, organizational and structural issues they face.

Policy Recommendations for Trans Reproduction in Europe

Doris Leibetseder, University of Basel

Based on the results of the presenter's Marie-Skłodowska Curie project "QTReproART - Towards an Inclusive Common European Framework for Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART): Queer & Transgender Reproduction in the Age of ART", this presentation will address policy recommendations for a more inclusive ART access for trans people.

The data analyses of online-surveys and interviews on experiences of trans people with ART in Austria, Estonia, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK were used to formulate policy recommendations for the EU, together with the results of the first part of my project, which was a comparison of legal regulations of ART for queer and transgender people (consisting of laws on family, kinship and gender recognition (Melhuus 2009) and a comparative national analysis (Jasanoff 2002, 2009)).

Finally, I share some critical afterthoughts on the outcome and experience of my project on the racialization of reproductive practices, forced sterilization, stratified reproduction and internalized negative eugenics.

Where Does it Start and End? (Legal) Gender Misalignment Waiting at the Gate

Alice Margaria, University of Zurich

Over the recent years, the issue of birth registration of trans parents has entered courtrooms in various European jurisdictions. The decades-old conflation of gestation and legal motherhood, and the gendered nature characterising the regulation of legal parenthood more broadly, have often played out against birthing parents who do not identify as mothers, including trans birthing men. With few exceptions, trans birthing men are registered as mothers on their children's birth certificates, in spite of being legally men, because of their reproductive experience. Similarly, trans women who beget their children tend to be assigned the status of legal father.

This presentation sheds light on the regulation of parenthood as a 'new' site of legally-sustained discrimination against trans individuals, and highlights birth registration as a moment and channel through which cis- and heteronormative ideas around care and parenting are legally enforced to the detriment of trans parents, and family diversity more broadly. It will become apparent that, despite the gradual removal of sterilisation requirements for legal gender recognition, legal systems have, to the greatest extent possible, maintained a separation between legal gender recognition and legal parenthood. This deliberate separation has led to a paradoxical situation in which the door to trans procreation has ostensibly been opened, while legal gender alignment is denied, depriving legal gender recognition of any effect.

Refusing, Reconsidering and Re-entrenching: Exploring Reproduction Narratives During Climate Change

Heather McMullen, Queen Mary University of London

In this paper we explore how reproduction is taken up in relation to the climate crisis in a few different scenarios. We draw on analysis of interviews and textual materials from organisations and forums such as BirthStrike for Climate (based in the United Kingdom, no longer operating), Conceivable Future (based in the United States) and No Future No Children (based in Canada, no longer operating) which gather pledges, declarations and testimonials asserting people's reproductive intentions as statements of concern about the climate crisis. We also explore debates about reproduction in relation to climate change and ecological crisis in academia and the global health and gender development sector. Out of this material we will show the difficulty and complexity of taking on reproductive concerns in the context of environmental crisis. What becomes apparent is how reproductive and eco-anxiety can revive persistent scripts about whose reproduction is valued, and whose is not, presenting new forms of reproductive trouble.

Controlling Access to Reproductive Techniques? Filiation Law in France and Switzerland

Marie Mesnil, Paris Saclay University

Significant developments have taken place in France and Switzerland in recent years: by allowing same-sex couples to marry, the law recognizes their family formed by adoption and/or following medically assisted procreation with third party donor. The possibility of establishing a filiation link between the child and his two parents is thus inseparable from the marriage of the latter, until 2022 in France and, still today in Switzerland, where only couples of married women can benefit from medically assisted procreation with a third party donor.

In Switzerland, access to ART is in fact explicitly reserved for couples who can establish a parentage link with the child while in France, although it is not explicitly a prerequisite for reproductive techniques, this is a constant concern (justifying the refusal of procreation for trans people, post-mortem procreation or even the use of the partner's oocytes within a couple of women). The law of filiation thus resists the extension of the use of reproductive techniques and the recognition of the diversity of families.

Reproductive Markets: Financialisation, Democratisation and Efficiency

Lucy van de Wiel, King's College London

Over the last decade, egg freezing—as clinical practice, cultural phenomenon and investment opportunity—has gained increasing importance in reconstructing the meanings and practices of fertility. Egg freezing has emerged alongside, and has indeed been buoyed by, a trend of growing capital investment in the fertility sector. This has enabled the emergence of the *new fertility ventures*, which are backed by private equity (PE) or venture capital (VC) capital and are introducing a new business model into the sector that is characterised by rapid growth, scaled-up operations, increased automation, labour reorganisation and consolidation.

This talk engages with this financialisation of fertility by analysing how changes in contemporary US IVF—and egg freezing in particular—are driven by a rhetoric of ‘democratisation’ and ‘efficiency.’ In interviews with those at the heart of these developments—investors, medical directors of large PE-backed IVF groups and founders of new fertility start-ups—changes in contemporary IVF were rationalised by an appeal to these concepts. This talk outlines the new logics, technologies and business practices that are introduced in the name of democratisation and efficiency and are setting the course for the next decade of egg freezing.

Reproduction in the Social Sciences

Catherine Waldby, Australian National University

Human reproduction, the biological conception, gestation, birth and nurture of children, is the foundational act of social life, the primary condition in which any social world can exist. If reproduction were curtailed, human extinction would follow, and even a short period of suspension, a year or two's interruption to generational renewal, would have profound consequences for social structure and viability, the welfare state, tax base, education systems, the composition of the labour force and to the population capacity to reproduce in the future. Within the social science disciplines this most essential form of social action is differentially acknowledged. Mainstream economics is systemically blind to household reproduction dynamics. Breast feeding for example is excluded from GDP and national accounts as are all forms of household based reproduction that does not involve transaction. This activity is simply assumed as an externality to the economy, rather than treated as a fundamental site of value.

We can discern a similar withholding of recognition in Political Science, which generally speaking locates human reproduction in the private domain, and hence outside its concerns with public life and its analysis of political power. Other disciplines – Sociology and Demography in particular – have historically engaged with some dimensions of reproduction. Sociology has since its inception been concerned with the organisation of the family and in its 19th Century formation was entwined with eugenic philosophy, which placed reproduction at the centre of racial hygiene and hence social improvement. In its 21st Century form it deals extensively with dimensions of reproductive experience deemed 'private' (sexuality, maternal practise). For demography, reproduction is core business, and in many senses it is the necessary supplement to economics in discerning the ways generational processes contribute to national life. Each of these four disciplines in turn have internal debates generated by feminist scholarship that seeks to engage the various blind spots and systems of value that tend to exclude feminised action from consideration. This paper will present some preliminary ideas towards an analysis of the status of reproduction in the social sciences, and sketch out some possible ways to articulate its centrality.