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## PREFACE

*Marcia C. Inhorn*

After decades of scholarly neglect, the last twenty-five years have witnessed a veritable “explosion” of social science research on human reproduction. Largely as a result of the feminist movement and the entrance of greater numbers of women into the academy, few aspects of the human reproductive life cycle, particularly as it pertains to women, have been left unexamined by social scientists working in a wide variety of cultural settings. The introduction to this volume, entitled “Defining Women’s Health: A Dozen Messages from More than 150 Ethnographies,” provides a thematic summary of this vast body of anthropological literature on reproduction and, more generally, women’s health.

In an essay in *Public Culture*, anthropologists Rayna Rapp and Faye Ginsburg note the “cresting wave” of scholarly and activist interest in reproduction (2001). They identify a dozen recent genealogies of social science research on reproduction. Among these genealogies, they highlight work underscoring the dilemmas of “disrupted reproduction,” in which the standard linear narrative of conception, birth, and the progress of the next generation is, in some way, interrupted.

This present volume is devoted to examining the concept of “disrupted reproduction” from a variety of analytic perspectives; the authors ask what happens when reproduction is, for one reason or another, problematized. What do reproductive falterings and failures, miscommunications, and outright battles—or the politically and emotionally charged contestations taking place in the everyday reproductive experiences of women and men around the globe—tell us about the subtleties of culture and power in everyday life? And how is our understanding of so-called “normal” reproduction enhanced

when we take reproductive disruptions such as infertility, pregnancy loss, adoption, and childhood disability into account?

As will be highlighted in this volume, reproductive disruption, broadly conceived, goes beyond reproductive health problems such as infertility to include, among other things, local practices detrimental to safe pregnancy and birth; conflicting reproductive goals between women and men; miscommunications between pregnant women and health care personnel; cultural anxieties over gamete donation and surrogacy; the contested meanings of abortion; the uneven globalization of new genetic, pharmaceutical, and assisted reproductive technologies; and feminist critiques of a variety of untoward reproductive practices.

This breadth—with its explicit move from the “local” to the “global,” from the realm of everyday reproductive practice to international programs and policy making—demonstrates that the notion of reproductive disruption is productive for examining the meanings of “difference,” the workings of power, the tensions between women’s and men’s reproductive goals, and various structural and cultural constraints on reproductive agency. By expanding the arena of reproductive disruption to include topics such as the nurturing of adopted and disabled children, medical communication, male-female reproductive negotiation, and the uses and abuses of reproductive technologies around the globe, this volume is likely to move the social science of human reproduction into new spaces.

To that end, the volume is divided into two major thematic sections. Part I, “Reproduction and Disruption: Redefining the Contours of Normalcy,” suggests that what “normal reproduction” means at any given place and time is always a discursive product of a hegemonic cultural system. Thus, reproductive disruptions are, in some senses, produced and reproduced within particular historical and cultural settings. What is “normal” reproduction in one time or place becomes “abnormal” in another. Ultimately, notions of reproductive disruption are continually being produced, challenged, and then reproduced in new forms.

The four chapters in this section examine the ways in which cultural notions of “reproductive disruption” are envisioned in the United States. These chapters, which focus on childbirth and maternal mortality, pregnancy loss through miscarriage and stillbirth, neonatal care and salvage of low birth-weight children faced with future disabilities, and the creation of “open” adopted families, suggest that reproductive “normalcy” is constantly being redefined and resisted in the US. Dominant ideas of normal reproduction—for example, in the

realm of birth—may create nearly impossible standards for women (as well as men), leading to profound psychological and social suffering over issues of failed identity and reproductive loss. However, the chapters in this section also demonstrate the multiple ways in which individuals in the US retain their agency in the face of hegemonic discourses of normalcy. Indeed, several of the chapters in this section provide concrete recommendations for achieving such redefinitions and for promoting reproductive agency.

Part II, “Reproduction, Gender, and Biopolitics: Local-Global Intersections and Contestations,” demonstrates the importance of history and politics in defining the parameters of normal reproduction and the ways in which women and men within various global sites and diasporic settings sometimes struggle to redefine those parameters. These chapters examine how political and medical discourses on reproductive rights, liberty, autonomy, services, technologies, and professions are likely to change over time and often take place in complex cultural, legal, and moral settings where specific outcomes are difficult to predict. Thus, the chapters in this section demonstrate that reproduction across the human life cycle—from birth to menopause—is inherently “biopolitical,” involving complex power struggles enacted through the medium of women’s bodies. However, as in the previous section, these chapters also highlight how women (and sometimes men) are actively involved in revising or resisting local biopolitics, thereby challenging the influence of political, economic, and social forces over their reproduction.

The focus of this volume on “reproductive disruptions” emerged from a University of Michigan conference by that title, held from 19–22 May 2005, in Ann Arbor. The conference brought together more than 225 social and behavioral scientists from thirty-one countries on six continents. The conference represented the third international effort to convene social and behavioral scientists, as well as scholars in the humanities who study childlessness, adoption, and other forms of reproductive complexity. The first conference, organized in 1999 by Trudie Gerrits and Frank van Balen at the University of Amsterdam, brought together about forty infertility scholars. In 2002, nearly sixty reproductive researchers and clinicians met in Goa, India, in a conference organized by Veena Mulgaonkar.

The convergence of these scholars in Ann Arbor bespeaks the growing importance of reproductive disruption as a field of scholarly inquiry. Indeed, the presence at this third international conference of the “next generation” of young scholars signifies the “cutting-edge” nature of this field of study. The intellectual momentum generated

at the conference certainly gives weight to the argument put forward by Ginsburg and Rapp in their seminal volume *Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction* (1995), that reproduction, in both its biological and social interpretations, must be placed "at the center of social theory" as the very "entry point to the study of social life" (1). Furthermore, Ginsburg and Rapp insist that "reproduction also provides a terrain for imagining new cultural futures and transformations," often involving "transnational processes that link local and global interests" (2).

The theoretical sophistication and global scope of the newest work on reproductive disruption was clearly evident at the conference. There, twenty-four paper panels and a number of new films were presented. This volume represents the outcome of three conference plenary sessions; eight of the plenary speakers, most of them prominent anthropologists of reproduction, contributed their papers in order to form this edited collection.<sup>1</sup> Berghahn Books was a prominent supporter of the conference, and thus we are pleased to be publishing our volume in Berghahn's path-breaking *Fertility, Reproduction and Sexuality* series.

The University of Michigan deserves a great deal of credit for making possible this conference and the resulting book. More than thirty units on campus contributed their support, including travel fellowships to scholars from resource-poor countries.<sup>2</sup> Particular thanks are owed to the major sponsors of the conference, including the Institute for Research on Women and Gender (IRWG); the Life Sciences, Values, and Society Program; the International Institute; the Office of the Vice President for Research; the School of Public Health; the Horace Rackham Graduate School Dean's Office; and the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. I am especially grateful to the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies (CMENAS) for helping to bring nearly a dozen scholars from the Middle Eastern region. The staff of both CMENAS and IRWG provided invaluable support for the conference and this edited volume.

My conference co-organizers were also my wonderful intellectual compatriots in IRWG's adoption, infertility, and gender study group. This reading group helped plan and organize the conference, in part by selecting the plenary speakers whose papers appear in this volume. Special thanks go to Drs. Nicole Berry and Jessa Leina-weaver, advanced graduate students at the time who also proved to be skilled conference planners. I also want to thank Alissa Surges, my CMENAS editor, who has carefully put the finishing touches on this edited volume.

The conference and this edited volume represent high points in my own twenty-year career as a scholar of infertility and assisted reproductive technologies in the Middle East. It is my personal hope that this book will bring the topic of reproduction disruptions to the center of social analysis. Additionally, this book may help us to react, as individuals and as societies, with greater sensitivity to the reproductive disruptions in our midst.

## Notes

1. Only one author, Harold Grotevant, is not a professor of anthropology. However, his undergraduate anthropology training is evident in his sophisticated qualitative study of adoption practices in the US.
2. Thanks also go to the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, which provided travel support for seven such scholars. The conference also received generous corporate support from Serono USA, Organon USA, and Ferring Pharmaceuticals, all manufacturers of infertility medications.

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