
Books Forum

Making babies in a new old world

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Each year as more babies are born on this planet, the number of social scientific studies about reproductive medicine likewise explodes. *BioSocieties* decided to try out a – at least for us – new format to cover this avalanche of recent publications. Instead of dividing up the Books Forum into three slots, we asked Stephanie Schiavenato and Rayna Rapp to write one comprehensive review article covering nine of the books that have come out since 2015 (and counting!).

Reproduction being as old as life itself, Schiavenato and Rapp asked of these monographs how different authors related the perennial aspects of making babies to the dramatic changes brought about by novel

technologies like in vitro fertilization and prenatal screenings as well as by new global inequalities that incentivize reproductive tourism (or is it a form of exile, as one author ponders?). They largely divided up the literature into books on assisted reproductive technologies and surrogacy, the pretechnological forms of which they trace back to the Bible, as well as selective reproductive technologies. They end on a classical biopolitical note, with a book on so-called anchor babies in Texas. It reminds us that legislation is monumentally entangled with the latest medical technologies.

Situating the newest books against four decades of science studies scholarship on the technopolitics of reproduction, Schiavenato and Rapp find that much of the cultural problematic, especially the hierarchical organization of social transactions in this field, have persisted in a rapidly changing technological landscape. Correspondingly, questions of race, class, and gender continue to drive social scientific engagements with the topic. Will we ever live in a world where these analytic categories no longer impose themselves on social scientists who study human procreation?

Nicolas Langlitz is an Associate Professor at The New School for Social Research in New York. He is the author of *Neuropsychedelia: The Revival of Hallucinogen Research since the Decade of the Brain* and currently studies the intersection of primatology and the human sciences in chimpanzee ethnography.