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# Alternative Kinship, Marriage, and Reproduction

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## Key Words

family, new reproductive technologies, gay, lesbian

## Abstract

This review examines the implications of new kinship practices for anthropological theory, with a special focus on recent research in gay and lesbian kinship and assisted reproduction. The article begins with an account of the theoretical contexts in which kinship studies have been conducted and a brief survey of some of the older literature on alternative systems of marriage and family formation in preindustrial and modern societies. The emphasis then turns to current discussions of how gay men and lesbian women are creating meaningful networks of kin and families and the ways in which these practices both follow and challenge traditional expectations for family life. The final section surveys the ways in which the new reproductive technologies have been utilized in Euro-American societies and how cultural ideas and values concerning kin relationships have shaped the transfer of these technologies to and their utilization in other societies.

## INTRODUCTION: THEORETICAL CONTEXTS

Anthropology, in its modernist heyday, combined research on exotic, preindustrial societies with a search for what was traditional, normative, and internally concordant. These emphases were especially prominent in studies of kinship systems. The classic kinship studies displayed impeccable detail; they were closely argued and highly abstract and demanded technical knowledge of abstruse theory. Their concerns were systems and structures, integration and stability, and groups and the relationships between groups, conceptualized in terms of paradigms of descent and alliance. Beginning in the 1950s, kinship theory began to be subjected to a series of critiques (Bloch 1973; Goody 1973; Kuper 1982; Leach 1961, 1968; Lewis 1965; Needham 1971; Worsley 1956), of which the most devastating and most productive for future research were published by Schneider (1965, 1972, 1980, 1984).

In his papers and in two influential books, Schneider moved the study of kinship from a focus on function, social structure, rules, and types of societies to a study of culture and meaning, essentially, what kin relationships mean to people (Carsten 2004). His influence, which was felt most strongly in the United States, motivated new ethnographic research and analyses of Euro-American and other societies. Schneider's key arguments were simply stated. For the Americans he surveyed, kinship was based on ideas about "shared bio-genetic substance" and "enduring diffuse solidarity." These elements provided the basis for three categories of kin—relatives by blood, in law, and in nature—which derived from the master symbol of sexual intercourse and linked parents to their children and husbands to their wives. Not surprisingly, as subsequent research has shown, these broad generalizations do not fit Americans of all classes, ethnicities, and sexual identities equally well (Peletz 1995, p. 347; Schneider 1980, p. 122; Smith 1987; Weston 1991; Yanagisako 1978). Schneider (1972) went on to argue that ideas about kinship were part of

two more general categories of American culture: the "order of nature" and the "order of law."

Schneider also contended that Americans' references to biology in their discussions of family and relatives had no necessary relationship to biology as a natural process (1972, p. 45), but rather were cultural constructs and essentially symbolic (1980, p. 116), arguments that were consistent with the emerging theory of culture at the time. Accordingly, he criticized assumptions that kinship is based, in a literal sense, on the facts of biology and human reproduction and that it should be treated as a distinctive domain of social relationships, assumptions that were prevalent among the era's leading kinship theorists (for example, Fortes 1969, pp. 220–29; Fortes 1972, 1978; Gellner 1963; Scheffler 1973, p. 749). Questions about the universality of biological and genealogical reckoning had been raised at the very outset of cross-cultural kinship analyses (Malinowski 1913, 1929; Westermarck 1922) and were still being debated at mid-century, most notably the ideas about procreation held in Australia and the Trobriand Islands (Delaney 1986; Leach 1966; Montague 1971; Spiro 1968; Weiner 1976, pp. 121–23). Schneider contended that the view that "blood was thicker than water" naively reflected Euro-American thinking on kinship and was inapplicable to societies other than our own. He went on to suggest that kinship was a figment of the anthropological imagination and an artifact of a bad theory and that comparative studies of kinship had to be based on "some other, firm ground, or abandoned" (Schneider 1980, p. 119; 1984, p. 177). It is testament to the power of Schneider's arguments, the weight of his accusation of ethnocentrism, and his influence in the field that this critique led to what has been described as a 20-year decline in kinship studies (Peletz 1995; Stone 2001, 2006) and also undermined the classic project of cross-cultural comparison (Carsten 2004, p. 22).

Kinship has seen a resurgence in recent years, spurred partly by interest in allied fields,

such as studies of gender, sexuality, demography, social history, and evolutionary theory, and by new research. The classic kinship studies that have fallen into desuetude were based on intensive participant observation conducted in nonwestern preindustrial societies, sometimes described as kin-based societies, where kin statuses were seen as all-encompassing and fixed irrevocably by birth. By contrast, more recent studies have focused on globalizing or developed societies and have stressed the fluid and contingent nature of kin relationships and how they are instituted and nurtured over time through various actions. In place of system and structure, the new analyses stress practice and process (Carsten 1995; Howell 2003; Stone 2006, p. 21; Weismantel 1995). The research considered here has thus been sparked by both paradigmatic and topical shifts: changes in marriage, reproduction, and families in highly developed societies; responses to the new reproductive technologies; and efforts by gays and lesbians to create meaningful networks of kin and independent families.

Thirteen years ago, when Peletz wrote "Kinship Studies in Late Twentieth-Century Anthropology" for the *Annual Review of Anthropology* (1995), he described developments in studying gay and lesbian kinship and assisted reproduction as part of a larger disciplinary shift, which turned the attention of anthropologists to their own societies. He depicted the scholarship at the time as challenging existing preconceptions about the flexibility of concepts of family and kin and destabilizing concepts of relatedness and concluded that these postmodern developments had "profoundly subversive potential" (pp. 362, 365). The more recent literature, however, suggests that the models constructed by gay and lesbian families, parents, and partners and the parents of children born of new technologies draw equally on conventional ideas and radical ones, and often draw on ideas about kinship that reference biogenetic connections.

## ALTERNATIVE KINSHIP, MARRIAGE, AND REPRODUCTION: PRECEDENTS

In her studies of the American family (1996, 1998), Stacey described a revolution in domestic life that was generated by diverse social and economic changes in American society. These changes undid the prototypical modern family, which involved self-contained nuclear household units and complementary male and female roles and which was succeeded by an assortment of alternative family forms. These alternatives, characterized by Stacey as "postmodern," have now become part of the mainstream; they include families headed by never-married or divorced mothers, unmarried couples raising children, families with more gender-egalitarian roles, and gay and lesbian families.

Although the notion of alternative marriages and families may be attracting more attention, and though they may be more common nowadays, alternative kinship practices are found across time and place. The rarity of ethnographic, cross-cultural literature featuring kinship alternatives may be due to earlier pre-occupations with the normative and conventional, with social systems and structure, and with male perspectives. It took Gough's feminist reanalysis of Evans-Pritchard's materials on the Nuer, for example, to draw attention to types of marriage that provided other options to women in that society—including woman-woman marriage, ghost marriage, and women leaving husbands for lovers; this reanalysis also called into question Evans-Pritchard's elegant model of a social structure based on patrilineal descent (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 1951, pp. 107–18; Gough 1971; Hutchinson 1996, pp. 61, 175; Scheffler 2001, p. 92).

Many alternative practices in preindustrial societies are motivated by "strategies of heirship," in Goody's phrasing, meant to ensure heirs for persons who predecease their spouses or who prove infertile or to offer to the childless the promise of old-age security (Goody 1976). Yet other practices attempt to secure preferable

conjugal relationships or enhanced women's status. Woman-woman marriage, which was widespread in Africa, seems to have produced both results. It provided heirs to wealthy childless women and gave them certain advantages that normally accrue to men. It also provided an attractive option for the women who became their wives, who may not have been able to marry otherwise or who preferred the greater sexual and social freedom offered by this kind of marriage (Greene 1998, Oboler 1980). Other instances of alternative kin and marital relationships illustrate how individuals can manipulate the range of options available to them to secure personally desirable marital and familial arrangements. Such examples are offered by the forms of marriage resistance found in the Canton Delta of China a century ago (Stockard 1989) and by marriage avoidance currently in practice among Tibetan pastoralists and farmers (Clarke 1992, Levine 1994). Examples of highly unorthodox conjugal relationships can be found among the *bi-jras* of India and the American Indian *berdache*, who adopt female identities, clothing, and occupations and occasionally take men as sexual partners, who may be described as their husbands (Nanda 1999; Reddy 2005; Weston 1993, pp. 351–52).

European societies have a long history of alternative marriage arrangements. One example is agreed-upon celibate marriage, sometimes for the duration of the marriage and sometimes after the birth of children, reportedly exercised for ascetic, spiritual purposes. These practices seem to have suspended the gender inequities of traditional marriages (Boswell, 1994, Elliott 1993). Another example is same-sex unions, which were solemnized by the clergy and publicly celebrated. The ceremonies involved some of the same activities found in heterosexual weddings. It is not clear whether these unions were always or sometimes sexual in nature, but they clearly entailed an intended lifelong commitment between two “friends.”

Not unlike our own times, the mid-nineteenth century in the United States pro-

duced a variety of kinship alternatives. These were times of rapid social change involving the transition from a preindustrial to a modern economy. As in the present, economic changes were accompanied by the development of new religions, reconfigured gender relations, and new forms of marriage and family life. The most widely documented cases include the Shakers, who were celibate, the Oneida community, which practiced “complex marriage,” a community-based form of group marriage, and Mormons, who practiced polygyny (Foster 1981, 1991). The Mormon Church abandoned polygyny in response to legal sanctions in 1890; nonetheless, communities of rural, culturally isolated, fundamentalist Mormons remain polygynous to this day. People living on the Arizona-Utah border numbered ~10,000 in the mid-1990s (Altman & Ginat 1996) and are linked to groups in other western states and Canada. All face periodic intense media scrutiny and legal action.

The most far-reaching transformation ever instituted in family organization occurred in the kibbutz movement. This was a collectivist social and economic experiment that was intended to create a new kind of person and a new kind of society, which were to be economically and socially egalitarian and in which the family was a unit of neither production nor child rearing. Instead, the socialization of children was the responsibility of nurses and the peer group rather than of their parents. The more extreme social experiments were short-lived, however. As kibbutzim expanded and became more stable, the family grew stronger and reverted to more traditional Euro-American practices (Spiro 1965, Talmon 1972). No other experiments in communal living have instituted such radical means of handling child socialization. In the groups that have been studied, children sometimes lived with nonfamily members or were schooled apart from their parents, but none of these groups developed programs of collective child rearing (Berger 1981, Daner 1976, Weisner 2001).

## RECONFIGURING FAMILIES AMONG GAY MEN AND LESBIAN WOMEN

The new kinship practices forged by gay men and lesbian women have attracted growing scholarly attention in recent decades. As in many emerging areas of inquiry, this research seems to be motivated more by documentary than by theoretical goals (Weston 1993). This research has also been hampered by logistical problems, such as gaining access to representative samples, given the fact that gay and lesbian individuals may be difficult to identify, reluctant to talk to people they do not know, or reticent about politically and socially charged issues. For these reasons, the subjects of recent research come mostly from the same sorts of class and ethnic backgrounds as the academics who have written about them, and they live mostly in cosmopolitan urban settings that have large self-identified gay and lesbian populations.

One of the most influential contributions to the new literature is Weston's *Families We Choose* (1991), a book in which the point of departure is Schneider's model of American kinship. Weston noted that the relationships that lesbian women and gay men recognize fit uneasily into Schneider's typology of relatives related by blood and marriage, by natural substance and code for conduct, and by the core symbol of heterosexual intercourse (Schneider 1980). She stated that gay Americans have contested assumptions that families must be defined on the basis of genetics and procreative sexuality and have created an alternative kinship paradigm and a distinctive family type, that is, chosen families, which are based on friendship, love, and individual choice and a variety of sexual, social, and economic relationships (Weston 1991). From one perspective, chosen families provide surrogate kin ties in that they entail enduring diffuse solidarity (Schneider 1980, p. 50). Thus they are modeled after the conventional meanings that surround kinship in American culture (Lewin 1993, p. 183). From another perspective, they provide a countervailing model to straight kinship and a

critique of the privilege accorded to a biogenetically grounded mode of determining which relationships count as kin.

Weston (1991) described chosen families, not surprisingly, as fluid networks of individuals who are easily replaced as personal choice and circumstances dictate (pp. 108–13). She noted that not all the individuals to whom she spoke considered their lovers and friends as kin. Arguably those that did were utilizing what Scheffler (1976) has described as “metaphoric extensions.” Weston also noted that although the lesbian “baby boom” has provided another way of challenging the centrality of heterosexual intercourse and the two-person, opposite gender model of parenthood, having babies involves a reincorporation of ideas about biological ties and procreation.

Carrington (1999) examined everyday life in households of lesbian, bisexual, and gay families, defined as people who engage in a consistent and reciprocal pattern of loving and caring activities. He noted, however, that many individuals lack the time, money, and personal networks to create alternative families based on choice and that many African American, Asian American, and Latina/o lesbians and gay men in his sample maintained strong connections to their birth relatives, perhaps because they were less mobile and lived nearby. Carrington argued that the sorts of jobs held by the people to whom he spoke can stymie ideals of equality. Many scholars suggest that same-sex couples are egalitarian because of the lack of fixed roadmaps for the division of domestic labor—this roadmap must be negotiated anew for each couple—and because partnerships between persons of the same gender are presumed to transcend conventional, heterosexual power inequities (Hayden 1995; Murray 2000; Short 2007, p. 61; Stacey & Biblarz 2001). However, one partner having a better paid or more demanding job may create inequitable situations. Carrington found these conditions to be so ideologically fraught that people nearly universally asserted splitting domestic work 50/50, even where he found evidence of differentiation and inequality in their domestic lives (1999, p. 217).



## ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF PARENTING: STUDIES OF LESBIAN MOTHERS

In the past, when adoption was not a realistic option and the new reproductive technologies were less advanced and less widely available, most lesbian women and gay men became parents in heterosexual relationships. Lewin (1993) began her research at a time when lesbian women were losing custody of their children in contentious divorce cases; thus her goal was to show that these women were as devoted and competent as heterosexual mothers and that their identities as mothers superseded an identity based on sexual orientation. She found lesbian mothers maintaining ties with birth kin and with the fathers of their children to better their children's circumstances and to provide biological moorings. In more recent years, many lesbian women have used donor insemination to have children. They often do so in ways that maximize biogenetic ties within their families or that approximate such ties. A woman may use the same donor so all her children will be related, choose her partner's brother to be the donor to give both women a genetic link to the child, choose a donor whose physical characteristics resemble those of the partner who is to be the comother of the child, or have her partner actively participate in the process of donor insemination (Hayden 1995, p. 54; Sullivan 2004). Gay men have more limited choices of adoption or the costly and complex process of surrogacy. As Benkov (1994, pp. 160–62) has noted, the families so created both challenge and mimic conservative cultural models of gender and parent-child relationships. Yet, as Hicks (2005, 2006) has argued, these seemingly contradictory views on the family may simply involve divergent responses to different situations. Lesbian women and gay men are, for example, more likely to voice conventional family values when applying to foster or adopt children and to voice more radical views when concerned with new identities and communities of support.

Sullivan (2004), who studied dual-mother lesbian families, found that the women sought equal involvement in their children's lives, and other studies have confirmed success in achieving this goal (Short 2007, Stacey & Biblarz 2001). Dual-mother families also try to tie in the nonbirth mother by second-parent adoptions, which were accorded legal recognition in 11 states when Sullivan's book was written and now are available in 25 states. Many of these women also choose to expand their children's kin networks with members of the sperm donor's family or with other lesbian coparent families who have used the same donor. These ideas demonstrate the resilience of biogenetic thinking about kinship—ideas that stand out even more noticeably in the context of reconfigured family forms and the emphasis on choice in gay kinship (Sullivan 2004, p. 209).

## SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

No discussion of alternative marriage is complete without a critique of Lévi-Strauss's foundational work *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969) and its presumption of male dominance in heterosexual marital exchange, its misrecognition of women's marital strategies, and the distortion it imposes on matrilineal societies, a notable example being the Moso, who have noncontractual, nonexclusive conjugal relationships (Barnes 2006, Blackwood 2005, Butler 2002, Cai 2001, Godelier 2004, Shih 2000). Gay marriage poses challenges not only to certain anthropological theories but also to legal statutes and so-called traditional values, which have led to efforts to prevent it in the United States, including the drafting of a federal law, the Defense of Marriage Act, in 1996. The American Anthropological Association's response to this debate is the "Statement on Marriage and the Family," which declares that viable social orders do not depend on marriage as an exclusively heterosexual institution (Exec. Board Am. Anthropol. Assoc. 2004).

Same-sex civil unions and marriages offer numerous possibilities for future research,

including studies of everyday practices in these marriages and partnerships, their characteristic patterns of interpersonal relationships, and their durability compared with heterosexual unions among people of comparable socioeconomic circumstances and demographic characteristics. These questions remain to be answered, but it is already clear that many gay men and lesbian women are seeking formal recognition of their relationships as marriages, and not only for pragmatic reasons, such as access to employer-paid health care, rights to inheritance, or designations as next of kin in case of an emergency. Hull (2006) argued that same-sex couples do so because marriage is a powerful relationship model in American culture and because of the power of law in American society to validate relationships—and thus to offer recognition and social legitimacy to homosexual relationships. Hull's data are drawn from public documents and interviews with individuals who participated in public commitment ceremonies. What she concluded is that these couples draw heavily from widely shared cultural meanings and often use traditional symbols of marriage to mark their relationships. She found class, gender, and previous marital history to be correlated with the decision to hold a public commitment ritual (2006, p. 109). Among the couples surveyed, some displayed dichotomous and others undifferentiated roles in their relationships (pp. 40–41). These diverse gay relationship models have been described as involving a complex layering of gender signifiers and as having been influenced by shifting fashions in gay identities over the past half century (Carrington 1999, p. 12; Weston 1991, p. 146, 1993, p. 354).

## THE IMPACT OF THE NEW REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

The first child produced by in-vitro fertilization (IVF) was born in the United Kingdom in 1978; this and other advances in the field of human reproduction have prompted the convening of appointed committees and legislative

debates about their social, ethical, and legal implications (Franklin 1993, Rivière 1985, Shore 1992). The introduction of such innovations provides a natural social experiment for discerning what constitutes relatedness for their users, for unpacking the meanings of key kinship concepts and kin terms, and for testing the adequacy of anthropological theories about kinship cross-culturally (Godelier 2004, pp. 569–75; Strathern 1992).

To generalize broadly, there are two strains of writing on the kinship implications of the new reproductive technologies (NRTs). Some scholars argue that they have changed our understandings of relatedness, whereas others show how their utilization is strongly shaped by traditional kinship ideas. Edwards (2000) and Strathern (1995), for example, have taken the former view and have pointed out how the NRTs, despite being used by a small number of individuals, have altered ideas about procreation in the population at large. Strathern (1995) suggested that the sorts of changes that have occurred confirm Schneider's earlier prediction that new scientific findings would lead Americans to revise their understandings of biogenetic relationships (Schneider 1980, p. 23), a change that Franklin (1995) attributed partly to the role of medical professionals in managing these technologies and access to them.

As cultures change, so do regulatory systems. Dolgin (2000) found that the NRTs have had an impact on family law. In place of the view of families as holistic social units that supersede the identities of individual members, we now find a stress on autonomous individuality and discussions of the domestic arena in terms once reserved for life in the marketplace: choice and intention. Intention has been privileged in various recent disputes over children born of complex reproductive technologies involving gamete donation and surrogacy, with custody granted to those individuals who first put into motion the efforts that created the child (Dolgin 2000; Ragoné 1994; Strathern 1995, 2005).

Some scholars have argued that these technologies are conceptualized in terms of

traditional notions of kinship. Modell, for example, noted how women undergoing IVF emphasize their “normal” and “natural” pregnancies, childbirth, and conventional parenthood and how individuals using their own sperm and eggs stress the importance of bilateral blood ties (Modell 1989). Other accounts of how people come to terms with the NRTs have shown that users rationalize the procedures they have initiated by naturalizing them. Women who use egg donation highlight maternity achieved through gestation and downplay the role of genetics, whereas those who use a surrogate for gestation highlight the importance of their genetic contribution (Cussins 1998; Ragoné 2003, p. 217; Teman 2003, pp. 79–80). Individuals using donor insemination conversely stress social, over biological, parenthood (Becker 2002).

In many cultural contexts, egg and even embryo donation raise fewer problems than does sperm donation because of ideas about the experience of birth and maternal bonding during pregnancy (see Rivière 1985 on the United Kingdom). This is the case in certain patrilineal societies, such as Vietnam, where gestation confers relatedness regardless of genetic ties (Pashgian 2008). In China, egg donation is more accepted than sperm donation because of patriarchal values and concerns about patrilineage continuity (Handwerker 2002). Quite the opposite situation prevails in Israel, where Jewish identity is established through the mother. Egg donation there raises genealogical conundrums, whereas sperm donation is unproblematic (Kahn 2000).

Cultural constructions of gender also affect ideas about egg and sperm donation. In Britain and the United States, sperm donation is seen as sexualized—perhaps because the donation crosses gender lines—whereas egg donation is seen as asexual and altruistic (Haimes 1993). For this reason, people planning egg donation may consider a family member an acceptable choice, which is not the case for sperm donation (Becker 2000). Familial relationships notwithstanding, people seek as sperm and egg donors individuals who are physically similar to the so-

cial parent-to-be, following the cultural expectation that children should resemble their parents. Where family members are unavailable as egg donors, friends sometimes are viewed as suitable substitutes because they may have similar ethnicities or similar backgrounds and life experiences and, in one reported instance, because donating an egg was seen to be similar to helping out with the care of an infant (Cussins 1998).

The literature on the NRTs also includes discussions of how women personally experience these procedures, which are arduous and stressful, which often, inexplicably, fail, and to which women respond by trying to exert as much control over the process as possible (Cussins 1996, Franklin 1997, Greil 2002, Modell 1989). The women who donate, by contrast, have been described both as detached from and ambivalent about these procedures, seeing themselves as offering a means for another person to have a child rather than as utilizing their own unique reproductive capacities (Konrad 1998; Ragoné 2003, pp. 222–23; Teman 2003).

## RESPONSES TO SURROGACY

Surrogacy was utilized as far back as Biblical times, when childless Rachel sent her maidservant to her husband. The child born was accounted to Rachel, and similar practices are found in a number of contemporary southern African societies (Fortes 1969, p. 256). Surrogacy, nonetheless, lacks legal recognition in most countries and in many states of the United States and is viewed as a particularly problematic form of assisted reproduction. Perhaps this is because surrogacy, more unambiguously than any other NRT, introduces contractual arrangements into private affairs, fragments motherhood (into genetic, gestational, and social components), and implies an adulterous relationship. It has also raised concerns about women being exploited, reproduction being commodified, and children being trafficked (Blyth & Potter 2003, Cook et al. 2003, Fox 1993, Lacayo 1987, Lane 2003,



Markens 2007, Pashigian 2008, Rothman 1988, Teman 2003).

Ragoné (1994) studied surrogate motherhood programs in the United States and found all parties in the endeavor—program employees, surrogates, and couples—to highlight those aspects of surrogacy that are consistent with conventional reproduction and American kinship ideology. In genetic, or “traditional,” surrogacy, for example, Ragoné found a stress on social motherhood, which was seen as comprising intentionality, choice, and nurturance and as more important than biological motherhood (pp. 109–10). Nonetheless, some of the mothers reported the lack of a physical tie to their child as creating a sense of exclusion, which echoes the importance of bilateral ties in American kinship (Modell 1989, p. 134).

## THE ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF MEDICALIZED REPRODUCTION

Since public debate on the NRTs began, concerns have been raised about the ways in which these technologies introduce the issue of commerce into what formerly was the private family domain. Thus the NRTs are seen as breaching the divide between acts undertaken for love and those undertaken for money and between the public domain of self-interested commerce and the private domain of generalized reciprocity (Franklin 1993, 1995, p. 336; Markens 2007, pp. 174–76; Rivière 1985). Another difference between conventional reproduction and gamete donation and surrogacy is that third parties are involved in the creation of a child.

Yet one should keep in mind that economic calculations have always been a consideration in childbearing. In premodern conditions, children were valued for their economic contributions to their parents (Arnold et al. 1975, Fawcett 1983, Nag et al. 1978). Microeconomic analyses of fertility describe children in highly developed societies, by contrast, as the ultimate consumption good (Becker 1960, Cochrane 1975). Individuals who utilize NRTs appear to have goals for their families that are no more

consumer-oriented than any other individuals who wish to reproduce. Nor does the way in which children are conceived alter expectations about the emotional relationships that will develop between parents and children. As Kahn (2000) argues for Israel, an infertile couple's or single woman's decision to use the NRTs does not evolve out of a consumerist impulse, but out of the desire to have children and to meet social and religious expectations to be fruitful and multiply. The service providers, however, operate out of commercial motives and act as gatekeepers by controlling access to these procedures and deciding which sorts of individuals are best suited to serve as gamete donors to which sorts of clients (Kahn 2000, pp. 38–39; Schmidt & Moore 1998).

## GLOBALIZATION: TECHNOLOGY TRANSFERS MADE MEANINGFUL

Studies of NRTs around the world provide fascinating illustrations of the power of culture to channel how such technologies are interpreted and selectively utilized, and these findings are of special interest here, given their implications for core kinship concepts and intimate family life. Kahn's (2000) study of the NRTs in Israel is especially strong in this regard. She showed how local attitudes, a proactive medical community, supportive government policies, and rabbinic pronouncements have contributed to a growing trend of single Israeli Jewish women conceiving via anonymous sperm donation. Children born to unmarried women in this society are not considered illegitimate according to Jewish law and suffer none of the stigma associated with Euro-American notions of bastardy. Another rabbinic interpretation of Jewish law designates non-Jewish sperm donors as the best choice for women whose husbands are infertile. Because there is no recognition of non-Jewish paternity in traditional religious law, no trace of relatedness is left and the husband can establish paternity through his intentions. Kahn argued that the ways in which the NRTs are used in Israel are certainly

innovative and may affect ideas about marriage and the nuclear family, but they do not destabilize foundational assumptions about kinship.

Inhorn (2003) described the very different, and far less permissive, accommodations made for the NRTs in Egypt. Egyptians seeking assisted reproduction face multiple constraints, including economic barriers to access, shortages of supplies, and problems of technological competence, in addition to local theories of procreation and religious prohibitions, which have contributed to various legislative restrictions. Third-party donation is disallowed because of ideas about adultery, inadvertent incest among offspring, and a strong emphasis on genealogical connection. Adoption is disapproved for the same reasons. Instead, Egyptians attempt the delicate procedure of intracytoplasmic sperm injection (which involves injecting sperm into the egg) for male infertility. The case of Egypt clearly illustrates how the NRTs are used in conformity with existing cultural and religious values and need not alter ideas about kinship and moral conduct.

Another example of how cultural models of kinship affect the utilization of the NRTs can be found in Sri Lanka. Infertile couples regularly ask to use the sperm of a close relative, usually the husband's brother, to achieve pregnancy. An infertile man requesting to use his brother's sperm is antithetical to Euro-American thinking (Haimes 1993) but is socially accepted in Sri Lanka in light of attitudes persisting from traditions of polyandrous marriage (Simpson 2004). In China, where an array of NRTs is available, positive attitudes toward technology and modernity have contributed to the view that technologically assisted conceptions can create superior offspring (Handwerker 2002).

A final illustration of how reproductive technologies are used in conformity with existing cultural values concerns the handling of embryos. In the United States and in coastal Ecuador, embryos are considered by some to be human life and to be autonomous entities that may be stored or donated to other individuals. By contrast, in highland Ecuador, practitioners and patients prefer that embryos stay

within the family and not be given over to an unknown fate, leading them to avoid cryopreservation (Roberts 2007). Muslim Egyptians prefer to destroy extra embryos rather than to donate them to other couples, which risks mixing genealogical relations and incest (Inhorn 2003, pp. 86, 112).

## PRACTICES OF DISCLOSURE

Parents availing themselves of high-tech reproduction commonly conceal this fact, both from members of their extended families and from the children born through these procedures. Concealment even has been reported for less controversial technologies, such as IVF, which uses the parents' own genetic contributions, because it is considered unorthodox and could stigmatize the child (Modell 1989). Such concerns may have decreased by now, given the widespread use of IVF. Donor insemination, nonetheless, remains problematic because it runs up against expectations of biogenetic connections between parents and their children and because of the shame attached to male infertility, which calls into question a man's virility and masculinity. For these reasons, disclosure has been a pressing concern for heterosexual parents planning to use donor insemination. Those intending to hide this fact justified their decision out of fear that such a revelation would distress their child and that the child would love his/her father less. Those intending to reveal this information spoke of the value of open communication or their concern about their child later inadvertently learning how he or she was conceived (Becker 2002). Needless to say, lesbian and single mothers, who invariably reported planning to disclose to their children how they had been conceived, do not share these concerns (Golombok 2006). There have been longstanding debates about the advisability of disclosure and policies concerning the release of donor identities (Haimes 1992), and even today, after the move toward more openness in adoption, debates continue about whether these facts should be revealed to children. Although the policies and

recommendations of regulatory agencies vary dramatically around the world, the overall trend is moving toward open disclosure, and some evidence indicates that telling children how they were conceived makes a positive contribution to family relationships (Lycett et al. 2004, MacDougall et al. 2007, Snowden et al. 1983).

The same trends are affecting policies of donor anonymity (Frith 2001). In Great Britain, donor offspring had, for many years, the right to access genetic information about their donors when they reached age 18, but they could not access the donor's identity. This policy changed in 2005, and children born after that date now have the right to access an egg or sperm donor's identity upon reaching age 18, although donors do not have the reciprocal right to find a child. There was concern that the new policy would result in reluctance to donate, but in fact the numbers of men registering to be donors increased (BBC News 2005, 2007). Clearly, these trends reflect the notion

that personal genetic information is intrinsically valuable in enhancing knowledge about oneself as an individual (Strathern 1995). They also reflect beliefs about biogenetic connection automatically conferring relatedness and the importance of acting on this information. Some Internet sites aid individuals seeking their donors, offspring, or any half-siblings who may exist, and they facilitate "reunions" with kin, as have been sought by children given up for adoption (Modell 1994). As they come of age, individuals conceived through donor procedures are beginning to speak out on these issues (for example, Clark 2006). Efforts of this kind show the persisting cultural emphasis on biogenetic connection in Euro-American and other societies, as providing a basis for common identity, as conferring irrevocable kinship, and as offering relationships that anthropologists have described as entailing enduring solidarity (Schneider 1980) and prescriptive altruism (Fortes 1972).

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author is not aware of any biases that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

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