Abortion, Marriage and Adoption

- The decision to terminate a pregnancy is powerfully affected by class, race, and socioeconomic status
- The more successful a young woman is, the more likely she is to obtain an abortion
- Policies that try to limit access to abortion seem to have effects that are small and subtle
  - They can delay abortions, but the later the abortion the riskier it is for the woman’s health and the more troubling it is for people who believe that the fetus gains moral rights as it develops
- Americans of all ages are less likely to get married than ever before, more likely to live together without being married, and more likely to be divorced
  - Blacks in general have lower marriage rates than Whites
- Advocates for adoption as a solution to childbearing among unwed teens ignore a number of inconvenient facts
  - Most infertile couples looking to adopt are Whites and most of them wish to adopt only healthy White newborns
- Abortion rates are very high in the US among women of all ages, considering that it is a country with modern accessible, publicly funded contraception
  - Regarding the rates of out-of-wedlock births, the real questions are what is happening to families, to the relations between men and women, and between parents and their children?
- Americans, in contrast to Europeans, think of having children as a private enterprise, one that will receive little support from the larger society
  - Even the highly regarded Family and Medical Leave Act, hailed by its supporters as a landmark piece of family friendly legislation, grants only unpaid leave for parents of newborn or seriously ill children
- The birth patterns of poor and affluent women in the US have begun to bifurcate, as each group tries to come to terms with the difficulties of having children in a country that provides so little support

Chapter 9: Sex education in the US & whether it works or doesn’t – why that’s not the right question?

Key ideas:

✓ Problematizing the social phenomenon of teenage sex in the US
✓ Debate between the 2 main types of sex education practices and which is more effective
✓ Why the debate has not been helpful for students and parents in making decisions about sex?
✓ What is better?

- Teenage sex in the US – more about marriage and gender:
  - Early 1900s: Forced sterilization – subjugation of the subaltern
  - 1960s: 2\textsuperscript{nd} wave feminism & the pill – normalization of “hook-up” culture and advocating for women’s individual sexuality
  - 1972: unmarried persons gain access to contraceptive articles

- Problem with teenage sex:
  - Degrades the social institution of marriage
  - Spread of STDs – as teens do not really know how to use protection
  - Increased abortion – affects health of women
  - More babies born out of wedlock
What are the implications of Luker’s thesis for teenage pregnancy rates among racial/ethnic groups in Singapore? To what extent is Luker’s thesis applicable?

- Luker’s thesis: poverty \(\rightarrow\) pregnancy
- (Shahrin 2017)
- Socioeconomic conditions underly racial patterns of teenage pregnancy
- To some extent it reflects, also about culture and religion (personal sphere) – woman together with her family decides
- Without understanding the relationship between SES and race, people will stereotype that Malays mostly engage in teenage pregnancy
- Late sex education (so early school dropouts don’t have access to it), contraceptive pills have to be prescribed so girls avoid going to doctors

Internationally, the right to abortion is now part of the reproductive rights and social right to medical services

**Stratified reproduction and abortion**

Stratified reproduction (Colen, 1986):

✓ “By stratified reproduction I mean that physical and social reproductive tasks are accomplished differentially according to inequalities that are based on hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity, gender, place in a global economy and migration status, and that are structured by social, economic and political forces.”

As Ginsburg and Rapp have argued, a central theme of this body of research is its concern with the ‘arrangements by which some reproductive futures are valued while others are despised’ (1995: 3). Such concern, they suggest, is usefully captured using the expression ‘stratified reproduction’ (Colen, 1995; Ginsburg and Rapp, 1995).


**Study: Expecting Motherhood? Stratifying Reproduction in the 21st-century Scottish Abortion Practice** – Sian M Beynon-Jones, University of York, UK *Sociology, 47*(3) 509-525

→ Explores contemporary UK health professionals’ accounts of their roles in abortion provision (in the absence of diagnosed foetal impairment)

- Abortion is regulated through the 1967 Abortion Act and amended by the 1990 Human fertilisation and embryology act \(\rightarrow\) it makes abortion’s legality contingent upon 2 doctors’ agreement that it is necessary on the grounds of a pregnant women’s health or that of her fetus
- Critique: by positioning the rationality of doctors as central to abortion decision-making, the law constructs women as irrational and incapable of judging circumstances in which they should become mothers \(\rightarrow\) constructing abortion as a deviant act
- Drawing on 42 semi-structured interviews with healthcare professionals, Beynon-Jones’ study shows how *youth, age, parity and class* are mobilised as criteria through which to distinguish types of patients whose requests for abortion are deemed particularly understandable or particularly problematic
Chapter 9 – The future of the debate on abortion

- 3 factors contributing to recent successes of the pro-life movement – intensity of commitment, new technologies & political activism, single-issue politics

- **Intensity of commitment:**
  - Pro-life: work 10 hours/week for childrearing – mainly only have part-time jobs
  - Pro-choice: work 5 hours/week for childrearing – have full-time jobs

- **New technologies & political activism:**
  - Telephone answering service with a “roll-over” feature
  - Use of “telephone tree” – advantageous for pro-life women as they stay at home more
  - Put mailing lists into small home computers
  - Use of electronic banking

- **Single-issue politics:**
  - Pro-life activists are active voters – commitment = voting
  - Pro-life people’s opinion weighs heavily
  - Pro-life voters as single-issue voters → willing to vote For or Against a candidate based on their stand on abortion

- Public opinions/supports (In the US) – “middle-of-the-road” opinions:
  - Approve “necessary” abortions for “hard” reasons: pregnancy becomes a risk to the women’s life; pregnancy is a product of rape/incest; likely that the embryo would be born with a defect
  - Disapprove “casual” abortions for “soft reasons: not married; don’t want the child; can’t afford to care for one

**Public opinion & pro-life movement:**

- Must persuade that their political goal will eliminate ONLY the abortions that people find disturbing and will respond to the need for the abortions that most Americans support
- When woman’s life is endangered: to accept abortion even when it is undertaken to save the life of the mother implies the acceptance of embryos are different and embryos are persons (accept the pro-choice views)
  - Rarely a need to choose between the life of mothers vs embryo
  - Moral rationale that permits abortion when the life of a woman is at stake – 2 doctrines: “indirect effect” & “unjust aggressors” → it is okay to protect yourself
- When the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest: to accept a law that permits abortion in cases of rape and incest is to concede to:
  - When it is likely that the child will be born with handicaps: humans can be ranked along some scale of perfection → people who fall below a certain arbitrary standard can be excluded
    - This stance is least tolerable: pro-lifers oppose amniocentesis (a diagnostic test performed on pregnant women to see if they have any handicaps)

**Public opinion & pro-choice movement:**

- Difficult for them to garner mainstream support
- No evidence that the pro-choice movement understands that Americans have mixed feelings about abortion
  - There is a disjuncture between public support of abortion for hard reasons (preserving life of the women) and soft reasons (women don’t want/can’t afford a child)
- 2 kinds of abortion (needs vs. want)
• Millions died at the aspect of colonial history that Europe chooses to forget
• Abolition of slavery: 50-year campaign from 1787 – when it was abolished, there was a sense of triumph
• Dominant perspective: a question of culture and civilization – black people are not equal at that time
• To the Europeans, the Tasmanian aboriginals were cultureless and “left behind” – can be treated almost as animals since they're primitive
• Aboriginals vs. Europeans – constant massacres, rapes, kidnapping
• By end of 1920s, the Aboriginals were at risk of being completely annihilated
• If an Aboriginal killed a Settler, he would be hanged.
• The poster which showed that the Settlers wanted to be amicable with the Aboriginals was pure fiction
• George Augustus Robinson: Leader of a band of aboriginal converts – hired to bring in the rest of the aboriginals
• Aboriginals succumbed to European diseases
• Across the world, indigenous people were being pushed to the brink of extinction – enslaved, massacred
• People found that other races were not becoming “civilized”
• Christianization notion of people of colour began to drain way
• Non-White people rejected the ideologies of the missionaries
• New “Scientific Racism” - Civilization depends on race
• Races, as measured through the skulls, are so different to be recognised as a different species
• Darwin: If evolution changed the species of animals, why didn’t it change humans?
• Darwin’s natural selection theory: Globalisation of the great British race – people are expansive organisms \( \rightarrow \) they are successful because they keep expanding
• Each race survives at another’s expense
• Social Darwinists were right – proving the crimes of imperialism
• Christian dream of benign imperialism was rendered obsolete
• Darwinian “Survival of the Fittest”: People who were unfit would eventually perish
• Useless part of the population: these people are condemned to death by nature
• Race and class are very close to each other
• Maps made of where the criminal races lived
• Lower classes multiplying faster than middle classes
• Eugenics, Scientific Racism, Social Darwinism: came together in the 20th century
• Shark Island: a death camp in Africa – poorer African people slaughtered/starved to death (20th Century’s first genocide)
• Their skulls/bones were sold to museums in Europe to prove the inferiority of the Africans, and pictures of them were even depicted on postcards
• Eugen Fischer (Racial scientist) \( \rightarrow \) Very specific African facial features: show that they become prominent through generations
• Racial mixing is always bad – the African gene is always dominant over the White gene
• Mass immigration would lead to widespread racial mixing
• Marriage laws established – whites could not marry blacks; Indians could not marry whites
• Eugenics was a worldwide movement
• Ethnic minorities and the mentally ill were forcibly sterilized
• They want the disabled, “defected” people out of the equation
• Don’t want to repeat the past
Genetics is receiving much attention - investment and attention given to this, as discourse is always in terms of medical, health and scientific benefits for the society and general population.

- Tempting to be able to filter out and ensure that there won’t be ‘defective’ babies

**Major purpose for molecular genetics**

- Push the responsibility to individuals, to alert them to the fact that they must change their individual lifestyles, habits and work situations to reduce their personal risk of getting illnesses, especially if they are genetically susceptible to it.
- Commercial interests and concerns for profits might cause some private companies to withhold key information.
- It is only a matter of time before eugenic uses are made of these new technologies. It is inevitable. Possible misuses and abuses of data bank (Scotland genetic registry system).

**Prenatal interventions in Georgia**

- Programmes of information dissemination and prenatal education, identifying high-risk factors such as reducing smoking and alcohol consumption, communicating basic information about diet and nutrition to women during their first months of their pregnancies.
- In Georgia: Most important health risk for newborns in US is low birthweight stemming from environmental factors, not genetic defects → prenatal education.
  - High rate of infant mortality was uninsured.

**Mass screening: California Story (1986)**

- In California: nation’s first fully mass screening for prenatal detection of a birth disorder (neural tube defect), enormous social and political implication.
  - Origin: 2/1000 babies are born with neural tube defects.
  - Some women have elevated levels of serum protein (alpha-fetoprotein) (AFP) which lead to neural tube defects.
  - Of the 800 women tested with high level of AFP, 15% had fetuses with neural tube defects.
- Social and political implications:
  - 30 million USD/year to screen half of pregnant women in America → too costly.
  - Researchers discourage screening when the prevalence rate falls under 2.5/1000.
  - Better expenditure of the funds could be made for other medical and health needs.
  - Pursuing profits and academic success is more important.

**Hidden arguments and multifactorial disorders**

- Genetic factors play an important role in determining age at onset and severity.
  - Smoking is a dominant factor and contributes as much as 50% of known excess risk (e.g. lung cancer, heart diseases).
  - Lappe’s argument: Through screening, people who are at high risk should be informed so that they can change their lifestyle and behaviour to lower possibility of disease.
Readings:

Killing the Black Body (Introduction) – (Roberts 1997)

- How reproductive rights have been shaped by racist assumptions about black procreation.
- In the US, there have been policies (like the coerced sterilization of black women in the 1970s), that degrade black women’s reproductive decisions.
  - Poor black mothers are blamed for perpetuating social problems through procreation because whites believe that they transmit defective genes and deviant lifestyle to their children, so they thought that blacks should be sterilised.
- From this we can see that reproductive freedom is about social justice. It’s not an individual choice, it’s affected by inequalities in wealth and power.

Bearers of ‘incurable immortality’

- White people see unregulated black reproduction as dangerous, which is why they have strict measures in place to monitor and restrain black reproduction.
- To justify these restrictions, they use:
  - Stereotypes, myths & derogatory icons
  - Scientific racism, which claims that blacks were biologically destined to be slaves = biologically inferior to the whites.
- Whites also believe that black mothers corrupt every stage of reproduction. Like what i mentioned just now, they believe black mothers transmit defective genes and deviant lifestyle to their children.
- This kind of damaging behavior on their part is the reason behind black poverty & marginality, not because of the arrangements of power.
- By blaming black mothers, whites are subjugating the black race, and devaluing black motherhood.
- Due to these reasons, Black women are seen as bearers of ‘incurable immorality’.
- The depraved, self-perpetuating character of blacks therefore lead to their inferior social status.
- Black mothers corrupt every stage of reproduction
  - Conception - Believe black others pass down to their offspring the traits that marked them as inferior to white people
  - Damage their babies in the womb through their bad habits during pregnancy
  - Transfer a deviant lifestyle to their children that dooms each generation to poverty, delinquency, despair through their example.
- The damaging behaviour of black mothers, not the arrangements of power, explains the persistence of black poverty and marginality. (pushing blame to black mothers)
- That’s why need strict measures to control black women’s childbearing.
- Blaming black mothers is a way of subjugating the black race as a whole, & devaluing black motherhood.

The New Bio-Underclass

- Media played a large role in perpetuating these black stereotypes, and they also increasingly portray black children as incapable of contributing to society.
- More and more white people started believing that black children were predisposed to corruption.
- They started panicking over crack babies. These are babies whose mothers were using crack during pregnancy. This led to neurological injuries which impacted their emotional development.
  - These black babies were disadvantaged even before they were born.
Linked together by racial solidarity instead
Focus on cultural unity reflected in Black opposition to transracial adoptions
The social and legal meaning of the genetic tie helped maintain White supremacy
Preservation of White racial purity – racially-mixed children of a White woman and a Black man = corruption of the White race

Creating White babies

The high value placed on the White genetic tie is the reason why new reproductive technologies are so popular in the US, and it is obvious that they are so willing to fork out billions of dollars towards the creation of White babies.
In contrast, Black babies are seen as “the object of welfare reform measures designed to discourage poor women’s procreation”, and this undeniably depicts the inferiority and worthlessness of the Black race.
The American media, films and TV shows highlighted the reality of the use of reproductive technologies. One example that the author mentioned was the first surrogacy adoption in 1978 which was widely televised, and it was of a White child and this captivated the viewing public, but if this was a Black child, would it garner the same amount of attention? And the question was, did the creation of Black babies deserve billions of dollars as well? Another example of the importance placed on producing White babies is also highlighted in the case of the woman who sued her fertility clinic because instead of receiving the sperm of her deceased White husband, her sperm donor was Black. Similar to her case, couples who received “damaged goods” (from botched inseminations or adoptions) were able to make claims against the agencies because the American society, where social status and economic positioning is based on a racial hierarchy, values genetic ties.

Transracial Adoptions

Infertile White couples face difficulties when it comes to adoption due to the race-matching policies, so they mostly resort to reproductive technologies and adoption is usually their last option.
When it comes to adoption there is a predominant preference for White children over Black children. Most White adoptive couples are only willing to adopt White children, and Black children would be their last choice.
The shortage of White children makes adopting White children cost twice as much as Black children, but they are ultimately the first choice of most White adoptive couples.
However in transracial adoptions, a Black child raised by a White family is seen as an improvement to the Black child’s social status and lifestyle, and conversely, a White child raised by a Black family is seen as a threat to the livelihood of the White child. So here we can see a disparity in the merits assigned to growing up in a White or Black household.
Elizabeth Bartholet who was quoted in this book. She opined that a “no-preference” policy was necessary to prohibit adoption agencies from promoting same-race adoption. There were laws enacted to prohibit adoption agencies from placing children according to race, but that did not prevent the agencies from still taking race into account. Although this policy would eliminate the preference for Black parents in the adoption of Black children, it does not eliminate White parents’ preference in adopting White children. This essentially goes to show that the adoption system would always favour the Whites.

Race and surrogacy

Surrogacy is mostly appealing to women of a lower-income, because it pays better than most other work. On the surface, surrogacy is deemed as harmless as a woman’s decision to enter into a surrogacy contract means that she found it preferable compared to other types of paid labour. However, legal theorists and philosophers have argued that
**Discussion: Gender and reproductive justice in relation to the sperm bank**

→ Pros and cons of having a sperm bank for the purpose of reproducing human beings

**Pros and cons for men**

→ Pros:
  - Old guy, sperm less healthy – so get sperm from younger guy
  - Infertile but really wants kids
  - Help infertile men feel like a father
  - If male has genetic disorders can use sperm bank (sperm of a guy who is healthy)
  - Weak sperms die during the freezing and thawing process

→ Cons:
  - Commercialising it, commodification of sperms → reducing men to a biological entity
  - Sperm bank excludes men from the social relationship with women
  - Stigma associated with using sperm bank
  - Social hierarchy and negative eugenics – only some men can donate sperm (some are encouraged to donate, some are discouraged)
  - Since nuclear families are still the norm in society, only nuclear families that fit the mould will be allowed to use sperm banks (mostly for conservative societies like SG)
  - Don’t know who your kids are (because you won’t know the names of your donor due to confidentiality)
  - Class implications and sexuality implications

**Pros and cons for women**

→ Pros:
  - For women who really want kids
  - Reduces women’s needs to depend on men
  - Designer babies – replacing sex which is the natural method to make babies
  - Appealing when intelligence is used to establish who can donate on the men’s side
  - Women can now be self-sufficient when it comes to reproduction

→ Cons:
  - Stigma associated with using sperm bank
  - Poor social relationship between men and women

With egg donation and sperm bank, then is traditional method of childbearing reduced?

Qualities for a partner:

- Kind and nurturance for the child - Equal role in child rearing
- Stable income
- Emotional satisfaction – love you for who you are
- Emotional maturity – when things go wrong in the relationship, handle the problems with maturity
- **Intelligence** – emotional and intellectual
  - Academic intelligence does not always translate to good emotional intelligence
  - Intelligence is always multidimensional
  - The way we measure intelligence is a cultural product
Greater safety precautions possible: more reliable testing for infectious diseases like AIDS, hepatitis

For the industry:
- Possibility of storing thousands of specimens in a single location to be preserved indefinitely
- Production could be centralised in corporate banks, to be marketed nationally or internationally

Implications of sperm banking industry practices:
- The marketing and promotion of semen kept alive eugenic ideals by promoting certain traits
- Obscures from public understanding the function of genetics and meaning of heritability
- Sperm and manhood are now “cheapened” as a commercially marketed product

The search for the ‘perfect male’

On top of their health and virility, donors are also screened for their ability to match particular physical and social profiles of masculinity
- “Desirable donors are those who match not just abstract idealized human traits, but abstract ideals of Western masculinity” → e.g. tall, straight, well-educated, athletic
  - Donor catalogues include donors’ religious affiliations, hobbies etc.
- Upward selection process reflects and perpetuates the stratification of certain masculine traits
  - Exclusion of males who fail to meet norms of idealized masculinity, in other words, not “marketable” enough → e.g. gay men, men with piercings or tattoos

Paradoxes of reproductive masculinity
- Donor catalogues promote masculinity, virility, yet at the same time unveils the infertility of men who must purchase the seed of other men to fill the ideal role as “father”
- Male infertility seen as source of personal shame
  - Most heterosexual couples seek to mimic traits of the husband to keep his reproductive “disability” a secret
- Commodification of sperm and sperm donors → profoundly changed reproductive relations
- Sperm banks sell images of ideal masculinity

Sperm banking in Singapore
- Before 2010, only 8 men donated their sperm at SGH, NUH received only 1 or 2
- SGH, NUH and KKH have sperm banks
- Due to low supply, many couples source from overseas banks
- Unlike in the US, sperm donors do not receive compensation for donation and are only reimbursed for transport costs
• Store the embryos in the lowest temperature possible (-120 degrees Celsius) – in liquid nitrogen
• 1st stage is to choose egg donor – bought online
• Majority of donors are Caucasian, but there’s a great selection of Chinese, Hispanic, Jewish etc. donors
• 1st retrieval, get $5,000, 2nd retrieval is $8,000, 3rd retrieval over $10,000
• Premier donor: tall, great athletics, model-looking, very successful
• Plane tickets need to be paid for, lost wages, childcare
• Money made for egg donation is used for the donors’ house remodelling or whatever they want to use it for
• Implantation is done in India, but embryos are done in the US, frozen and shipped to India
• Embryos tracked when being shipped over by FedEx
• Medications (in the form of injections) taken by egg donors to help their eggs grow – keep ovulating so that they can retrieve the eggs
• Risks of the injections: not known – one of the chances you take with modern medicine → may get cancer from this?
• Conditions: Surrogate mother must not tell anyone about the surrogacy
• 1 case: Surrogate mother had a miscarriage after 5 months of pregnancy – the contracting parents still had to pay a certain amount
• 1 case: Implanting 2 embryos into the surrogate at once – it’s okay if there’s twins (2 simultaneous pregnancies). But may have to do selective abortion if the 2 embryos happen to produce more than 3 fetuses as it can get overwhelming and risky to the surrogate mother’s health
• Even if you use an Indian surrogate mother, the baby is a White European

Documentary discussion (issues and concerns):

• The guy who started the egg donation company: Talked about women in an objectifying manner – reduced them to their body parts. Commercialising egg donation – disregarding surrogate mother’s comfort, miscarriage and death that happen to surrogates
  o Don’t care about the comfort of the women – treating women’s body as just a means of labour
  o Money is a factor, they are paid to do this
  o Women who engage in surrogacy, are not very privileged, like they lack education and finances
• Capitalising on the Indian women’s need for survival (Capitalism) – if they were paid more like US surrogates, then would this technology be more acceptable?
  o Having financial difficulties – plays a role?
  o Giving life in exchange for money
  o People donating eggs and are surrogates are motivated by money
  o Kind of like a factory process
• Need to have more sterile rooms, ensure cleanliness
• Genetic aspect: want their babies to have certain desirable traits
  o Warm and friendly disposition with children – “catalogue shopping for desirable traits” – very unrealistic choosing of egg donors (e.g. like there was a donor with a crooked nose then the men immediately rejected her, or like they said a woman was having a bad hair day)
• Gender aspect: women become the breadwinner for the family
  o Role of men: thinks surrogacy is such an easy job, exploiting → taking the women for granted (male privilege)
  o Lack of job opportunities – while society expects men to make earnings to support the family, sometimes the men are unable to do that. So then the men rely on their wives to support their families (through the surrogacy jobs).