

Review of: "Biological Parenthood and Reproductive Technologies"

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I was invited to review this article, most likely because of my sociological work on surrogacy. My expertise is not in the field of normative scholarship; I work with empirical data. Thus, I only wish to point out some of the concepts in the article (which is, after all, about assisted reproduction, an empirical phenomenon) that I, as a sociologist, would wish to see clearly defined as well as question some assertions that run counter to empirical evidence. "Biological Parenthood and Assisted Technologies" argues that assisted reproduction (as all reproduction, it seems) reproduces, reinforces, and entrenches patriarchy when it preferences biological parenthood, and hence it's evil. "Patriarchy has hijacked biology", the argument goes, to keep girls and women down. "Patriarchy" is not used to mean a historical form of government (in which women cannot own property, cannot represent themselves in a court of law, and cannot vote, etc.), rather, it is characterized as "evil" and seems to mean the "oppression of girls and women", and breastfeeding is part of the oppression. It is also hard to understand how "patriarchy" can act (specifically, how it can "hijack biology"); after all, it is a concept, even if it isn't defined in this article. In terms of empirical data, statistical facts tell us that in many developed countries women increasingly can and do choose not to have children or not to breastfeed, that fathers do more parenting than in the past, and that mothers are by no means excluded from educational and career opportunities, although there is room for improvement, but these are just small empirical points, as is the fact that many people use donated genetic material in pursuit of (sometimes non-biological) parenthood. I'm also not convinced that the inability to have children is a question of social injustice that needs to be "urgently" remedied, as the author claims; not all biological differences qualify as "disadvantage", let alone as social injustice. Overall, the author argues that remedying social injustice notwithstanding, providing more access to parenthood to more people equals "access to oppression to more people". In my research over the years, I have not encountered mothers who thought of finally having children as a form of oppression. Given that this article is not based on research and data and the concepts used are not defined, we need to read it as the author's opinion, and people are entitled to their opinions. Mine is that having data and carefully analyzing it helps us understand the social world better than some other types of undertaking.