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SYMPOSIUM: MAKING FAMILIES

Queer reproductive justice?

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Judith Stacey is Professor Emerita of Sociology and of Social and Cultural Analysis at New York University. Her publications include *Unhitched: Love, Marriage and Family Values from West Hollywood to Western China* (New York University Press, 2011); *In the Name of The Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age* (Beacon Press, 1996); *Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America* (Basic Books 1990, University of California Press 1998) and, "(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?" co-authored with Timothy Biblarz, American Sociological Review - How Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter? co-authored with Timothy Biblarz, American Sociological Review (2001). She served as an expert witness in the Canadian same-sex marriage case and in lesbian adoption and gay family rights cases in the U.S.

Abstract In the past half-century, there have been some notable shifts in English language feminist and queer scholarship and activism about procreation, marriage and family. In particular, there has been a striking increase in emphasis on genetic and biological family creation in queer and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender kinship practices, in contradistinction to earlier emphases on escape from the norms and demands of heteronormative patriarchy. During the gay liberation movement, older concepts of 'families we choose' were not defined by (nor meant necessarily to include) the creation of children as kin. The contemporary shift transpires amidst racial, national and economic disparities around the ability of people to 'couple' or to access reproductive technology. In line with early feminist and queer studies, this commentary calls for a broadening of the view of reproduction, and for more direct engagement between the primarily critical discourse on reproductive justice and the frequently celebratory discourse on queer families.

KEYWORDS: queer families, surrogacy, reproductive justice, feminism

Editors' note

This is an edited version of a spontaneous commentary delivered by Judith Stacey at the Making Families symposium held at UC Berkeley on 19 February 2016 on papers presented during the symposium. The recent history of feminist and queer studies and politics in the USA, considered in the first part of the commentary, involved a critique of mainstream family institutions. This early feminist and queer perspective provides a lens for analysing contemporary queer families and surrogacy, discussed in further sections of the commentary and in dialogue with some of the papers presented at the symposium.

Commentary

Looking back, I realize that I have been involved in a type of queer family discourse from before there was such an animal. I was part of the first generation of self-identified feminist scholars, the generation who created women's studies programmes that have morphed in so many ways

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since the early 1970s. By the end of my career, I came to present myself to my students as a sort of living diorama of the sedimented layers of feminism and queer studies over the decades since gender and sexuality studies brashly entered the academy.

The early stage of second-wave feminism, which was then called 'women's lib', and the gay liberation movement of the Stonewall era were popularly perceived as anti-family and anti-natalist. The public viewed us as threats to the family, because a radical feminist critique of conventional family life framed our family politics and scholarship. This included a critique of 'heteronormativity', a word that did not exist at that time. Almost immediately, a vehement backlash against feminism and gay liberation incited the reactionary politics of a 'family values' crusade that is still with us. The late arch anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly, who founded the successful STOP ERA crusade in 1972, described feminism as the 'anti-family, anti-children, and pro-abortion' agenda of 'women's libbers who view the home as a prison and the wife and mother as a slave' (quoted in Courtwright 2010, p. 124).

Some 1970s feminist activists did join struggles for reproductive justice to an anti-racist and anti-homophobic feminist imagining of parenthood. For example, a group called CARASA (Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse) grew out of a New Left feminist politics kindled during the social movements of the 1960s – civil rights, black power and the anti-war movement. Some of us, myself included, actually entered the academy in the early 1970s because New Left movements and grassroots feminism sparked a desire to understand the roots of male domination and how it related to race and class oppression. I had been a junior high and high school teacher before feminist consciousness-raising inspired me to enter a doctoral programme in sociology to pursue this feminist passion.

Listening to the fascinating, sophisticated papers at this symposium made me ruminate on the subsequent mind-bending shifts in feminist and gay discourse on families. I thought back to Shulamith Firestone' (1970), one of the foundational radical feminist books of my consciousness-raising period, which imagined that a reproductive future of test-tube babies would liberate women from the constraints of our biology. Texts like these led feminists to be branded as anti-natalist and anti-maternal. So I loved the title of Kim TallBear's symposium paper, calling us to 'Make Kin, Not Babies'. It resurrects the queer family promise that some of us had long cherished, but has mainly gone by the wayside.

Firestone turned out to be an anomaly. Very few feminists after Firestone embraced technology as a route to liberation from women's bodies. Quite the opposite vision began to dominate – an anti-technology celebration of women's bodies and maternal power, such as in Adrienne Rich' (1976), Susan Griffin' (1978) and Sarah Ruddick' (1980). Feminism rapidly swerved into what might even be called a 'pronatalist groove'.

There were always academic critics of this romantic, anti-technology credo. Donna Haraway's name was appropriately mentioned during the Making Families symposium. 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (Haraway, 1984) provocatively challenged the type of celebratory feminist embrace of women's differences and of women's biological capacity and procreative abilities that was flourishing in the 1980s – the Reagan era. Haraway's manifesto began to imagine a world in which you could not quite define the borders of the human. Runners with prosthetic legs, for example, as well as reproductive technology represented a melding of technology and biology. Feminists could embrace some technology without forfeiting critique. Much of the work presented in this symposium, including by its co-convener Charis Thompson (2005, 2013), takes up some of those ideas in ways that I find thrilling.

On the other hand, the utterly dramatic gains in public acceptance that gay sexuality and family life have since achieved in so many contemporary societies also represent a retreat from queer family visions. I have written elsewhere (Stacey, 2004) about how ambivalent I felt when I participated as a public intellectual in the staggeringly successful campaign for same-sex marriage and parenting rights. In fact, two articles about the gender and sexual orientation of parents that I co-authored with Tim Biblarz (Biblarz and Stacey, 2010; Stacey and Biblarz, 2001) remain far more politically influential than my much more critical or 'queer' publications. They contributed tangibly to major court decisions that legalized same-sex marriage and parenting rights. They therefore helped to normalize a form of gay marriage and family life that, as Marcin Smietana (2016, 2017) points out from his work on surrogacy, is decreasingly queer, and increasingly normative and exclusionary.

Some gay male subjects of my ethnographic research in Los Angeles (Stacey, 2011) were queer family pioneers who feel wistful about this change. Several complained to me in 2011 that they did not see younger gay men making the more communitarian and innovative family choices that they had made earlier. They had been early members of the Pop Luck Club in Los Angeles, a gay father support group that started in 1999, grew exponentially and still exists, although it is scarcely needed nowadays. Pop Luck started with nine gay men trying to figure out how they could become out gay parents. They soon began to become dads through a wide range of means – adoption, surrogacy, foster care and co-parenting in various creative arrangements, as well as from prior heterosexual relationships.

The Pop Luck Club did address some of the questions that Charis Thompson and Marcin Smietana posed with this symposium. Initially, it promoted gay male parenthood in a community context. This first generation of out gay fathers was trying to raise their kids in a gay community because they felt great need for such support. Increasing social acceptance of gay parenthood since this time has diminished this need, and seems to have reduced more creative, collaborative forms of families as well. The drive for inclusion in normal family life marginalized queer conversations such as Michael Warner's (1999) once popular critique of normal or David Halperin's (2007) provocative considerations of risky sex, 'What Do Gay Men Want?'

I think it is worth asking how to place a conversation about intentionally queer families into one on reproductive justice. This Making Families symposium represents a great start on such a project, but I did not find much intersection between the two conversations. Maybe that is because reproductive justice discourse is primarily critical of the stratification of assisted reproductive technology. Scholars focus on exposing the exploitative relationships involved in mixing technology and biology amidst structurally unequal relationships among generally female 'donors' or 'labourers' and their 'recipients' or 'clients', many of whom are