

## PREFACE

Fetuses currently occupy a very busy intersection in the cultural and political life of the United States. How do the diverse pregnant women who carry fetuses understand these intersections? How do the researchers who ask about those understandings frame their own work? How "American" are our fetuses; that is, are fetuses situated in similarly complicated ways in other places? What are the contexts within which fetuses are discussed (or not discussed) in other societies? How and/or can an analysis of the social construction of fetuses be useful to feminist theory and practice? These are some of the questions addressed by this issue of *Feminist Studies*.

We begin with Monica J. Casper's discussion of her experiences researching the experimental and therapeutic practices of a group of Bay-area physicians who refer to themselves as "fetal invaders." Casper delineates the political and methodological dilemmas she faced in examining fetuses as "work objects," located in an intersection of "Feminist Politics and Fetal Surgery." The personification of the fatally ill fetuses upon which the physicians operate is here in tension with their objectification as devices of intervention and experimental passion. Increasingly seen and seeing themselves as heroic rescuers of ambiguous borderline entities, many of the physicians involved with fetal surgery describe their own practices in a language of paternalism.

Paternalism takes a rather different form in the Dominican Republic, where economic restructuring, nationalist opposition, and Catholic influence on national medicine in general and abortion practices in specific collide in the training of obstetricians. In "'Bare-Handed' Medicine and Its Elusive Patients: The Unstable Construction of Pregnant Women and Fetuses in Dominican Obstetrics Discourse," Ana Teresa Ortiz describes the cynicism, commitment, and pride of young physicians who train with meager supplies, perform emergency cesarean operations by candlelight, and countermand national law to perform late abortions. They operate under a paternalist ethic that permits them to identify with what they construe as the Marian suffering of Dominican women's poverty-induced bad health. Like the famed macho Dominican

baseball heroes who catch hardballs without a glove, these obstetricians-in-training emerge as representatives of national competence and pride despite the enormous obstacles they face. And what of the "suffering mothers" who are the objects of their concern?

Religious imagery is, of course, also deeply culturally embedded in U.S. experiential constructions of fetuses, as Linda L. Layne demonstrates in "Breaking the Silence: An Agenda for a Feminist Discourse of Pregnancy Loss." Here, emergent discourses on miscarriage and other forms of fetal loss are constructed on fertile ground for which biomedical authority, maternal and familial grief, and religious iconography provide diverse building materials. The activism of pregnancy-loss support groups arises at these intersections; Layne invites feminist activists, especially reproductive rights activists, to listen attentively, lest they cede this complex and contradictory problem of the existential standing of fetuses to those who are aligned against reproductive freedom.

Fetuses are not always so coherent or hypervisible as cultural entities in other settings, as Lynn M. Morgan shows us in "Imagining the Unborn in the Ecuadoran Andes." Pregnant women and mothers describe the unborn in a rich, imagistic vocabulary which is fraught with dilemmas: these entities may be spirits, watery babies, unknowable creatures. The Ecuadoran women among whom Morgan worked considered her search for a consistent answer to the question of what a fetus *is* to lack grounding: why and how should anything as central to the mysteries of God and nature be made logically unambiguous? Otherwise said, Morgan's rich interpretation of the complex ways in which Ecuadoran women describe what a pregnancy contains underlines the specificity of the American biomedical, legal, and political case.

In "Feeding the Fetus: On Interrogating the Notion of Maternal-Fetal Conflict," Susan Markens, C.H. Browner, and Nancy Press return our focus to the United States, pointing to the negotiated agency of women whose pregnancies are increasingly medicalized. Under an onslaught of pregnancy advice from health service providers and the popular media which makes them increasingly responsible for producing

"good" babies, working-class and middle-class Los Angelitas react in that most American of ways, by construing an individual "choice" for their pregnancy diets. Balancing junk food and medical disapproval, smoking and busy lives, the women interviewed by Markens, Browner, and Press remind us that medical messages given are not necessarily the ones received. Social contexts richly ground the possible and the probable within which pregnant women care for their fetuses.

Joan Baranow's poetry cycle about in-vitro fertilization poses haunting questions about women's agency and fetal authenticity. Grappling with ambivalence, her creative work takes us deep into the emptiness of "barren bodies" and the hope of "an unusual birth." Questions concerning how the relationship between a woman and her fetus is altered by assisted technology emerge as compellingly complex.

In "Cross-Cultural Cyborgs: Greek and Canadian Women's Discourses on Fetal Ultrasound," Lisa M. Mitchell and Eugenia Georges use an international comparison to analyze the specificity within which the universal claims of biomedical technology are actually locally deployed and interpreted. Canadian women, like U.S. women, increasingly experience the personification of their fetuses in imaging; their pleasure in viewing a technologically produced image as an individual child is encouraged by medical service providers. But in Greece, the story is different: pregnant women are "wild" to see their fetuses on the monitor, but physicians speak a language of national modernity and fecundity, rather than personalized pleasure.

Anne Fausto-Sterling, Patricia Adair Gowaty, and Marlene Zuk enter the conversation on a related scientific front. In a stunningly feminist critique of the field of evolutionary psychology, they discuss three books and two articles that attempt to tell various versions of what our authors consider to be an old story: the dispute between Darwinism and feminism. Although the authors grant that the field has something valuable to offer our understandings of sexual difference affecting mating patterns, fertility, and related concerns, their review reminds us of how deeply embedded the arguments are in male-dominated scientific inquiry. Their review essay

provides a thought-provoking and lively appraisal of a controversial body of scientific work, offering a feminist-Darwinist version of evolutionary theory.

Kathy High's ironic, frightening, fascinating, and deeply unsettling images index the transformation of the fetus-as-cultural imaginary under the shadow of new reproductive and genetic technologies. Older gaming images—of construction toys, word puzzles, "Where's Waldo" books, and kaleidoscopes—here collide with public debates: what is "our" game plan in a world which can imagine picking fetal chromosomes, selecting and constructing our own DNA, choosing transgenic fetuses? Where, indeed, *is* "Waldo" now?

Finally, our "Commentary" by Mariana Valverde and Lorna Weir alerts *Feminist Studies* readers to the substantial Canadian feminist activism surrounding reproductive technologies. "Regulating New Reproductive and Genetic Technologies: A Feminist View of Recent Canadian Government Initiatives" recounts activist attempts to influence the scientific and political debates in Canada by challenging legal and ethical assumptions and pushing the discourse to become more inclusive of the range of diverse women's perspectives and experiences.

This issue of *Feminist Studies* had a unique birth experience for which we are deeply grateful and which we recommend for possible emulation to our readers. In October 1994, Lynn M. Morgan and Monica J. Casper organized a session of the Society for the Social Studies of Science annual meeting entitled "Technoscientific Constructions of Personhood and Subjectivity"; a month later, Lynn M. Morgan organized a session of the American Anthropological Association annual meeting entitled "Conceiving Pregnancy and the Unborn." Lynn recruited a rich array of essays from these two sessions for submission; suggested a first round of revisions to "her" authors; and advocated for the importance of specifically ethnographic, qualitative, and cross-cultural methods in the analysis of the relations among feminists and fetuses in her letter to the *Feminist Studies* board. Intrigued by her idea and the high quality of the submissions, editors also recruited additional essays, creative writing, and art work on this theme.

The result is a thematic issue which has had a successful assisted conception, well-coached labor, and exciting birth. We thank Lynn M. Morgan for her intellectual and organizational vision and for her generous work on behalf of both the authors and the journal.

Rayna Rapp and Beth Richie,  
for the editors