

Reproductive Technology in the News: Implications for Clinical Practice in Primary Care.

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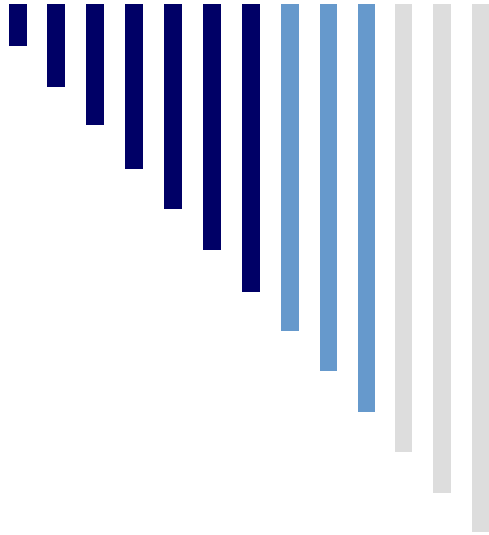
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Published In/Presented At

Baglia, J. Larson, D. (2008, October). *Reproductive Technology in the News: Implications for Clinical Practice in Primary Care.*

Presentation Presented at: Lehigh Valley Health Network, Allentown, PA.

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Reproductive Technology in the News: Implications for Clinical Practice in Primary Care

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Objectives for Today

- Discuss the results of an individual research project and its implications for practice.
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Goals for Today

- 1) Define “discourse analysis” as a critical, systematic method for interpreting messages.
 - 2) Describe themes identified in news stories with “reproductive technology” and “fertility” as the primary search terms.
 - 3) Detect and express the relationship between news stories and possible patient perceptions of reproductive technology.
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Preview for Today's Talk

- Provide context for the topic of reproductive technology within primary care
 - Literature review
 - Explain method and scope of study
 - Themes identified
 - Relationship between media and patient perceptions
 - Questions and comments
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Context

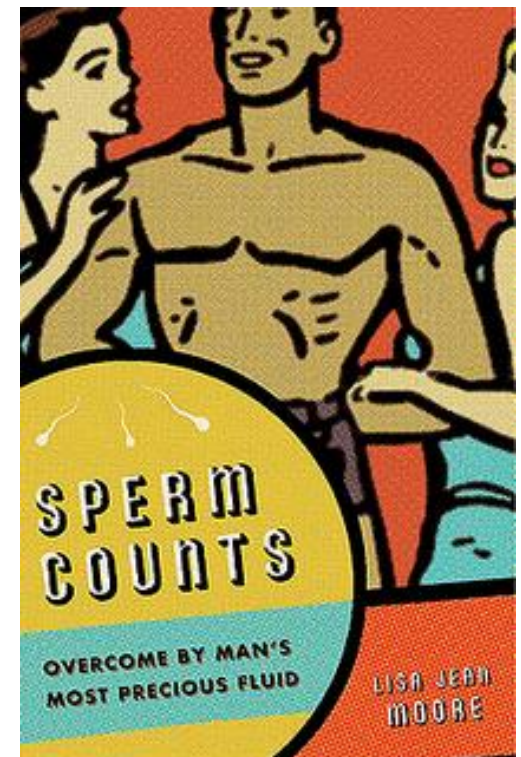
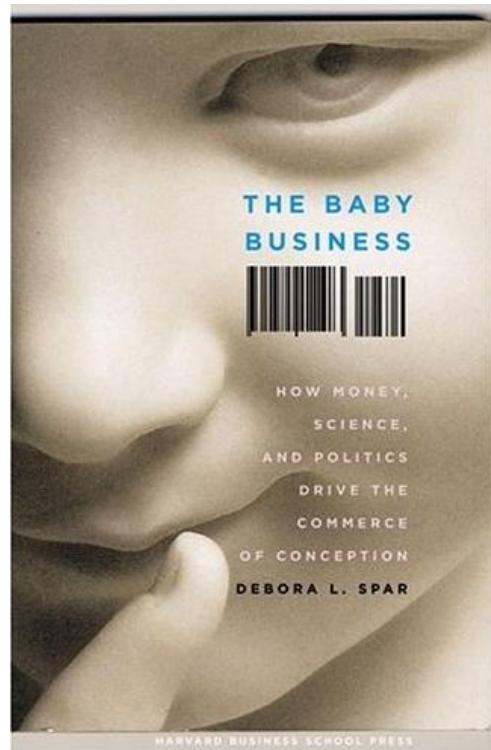
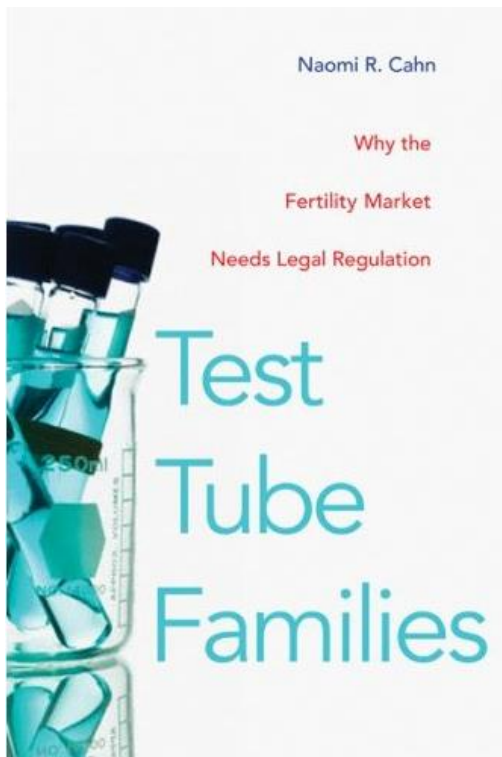
- Thirty years since the birth of Louise Brown
 - Three million babies have been born using I.V.F since 1978
 - “Infertility” has become a treatable, chronic disease: 50% of married, childless American women between 35 and 44 years old have experienced infertility
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Context Continued

- An explosion in reproductive technology industry including cryobanks, fertility treatment centers, egg donor services, and financial “assistance”
 - The concomitant absence of regulation and oversight within this industry
 - The relatively contemporary phenomenon of postponed motherhood
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Literature review



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Scope and Method

- 76 news articles from two dozen national U.S. newspapers from 2004 to 2006
 - Each article is at least 700 words long ensuring a narrative quality complete with characters, plot development, and testimony
 - Articles were representative of multiple sections (lifestyle, science, business) and published each day of the week
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Scope and Method Continued

□ Discourse analysis

- “In discourse analysis, one seeks to uncover the codes, constructions, cultural assumptions, connotations, values, and beliefs embedded in the text.”

Cramer, Janet (1998) *Journalism and Mass Communication Monographs* 165, 13.



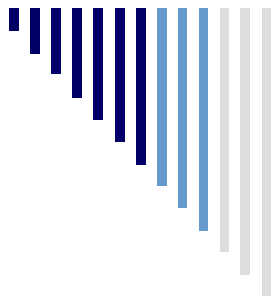
Method Continued

- Identified each instance of testimony, both lay and expert
 - Lay testimony refers specifically to clients and families of reproductive technology
 - Expert testimony refers specifically to individuals granted legitimate, authority, and referent power by virtue of titles
 - Over 600 instances of testimony revealing 6 dominant themes
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Previous media analyses

- Stone, Jennifer (1991) “Contextualizing Biogenetic and Reproductive Technologies,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 8.
 - Condit, Celeste (1996) “Media Bias for Reproductive Technologies,” *Evaluating Women’s Health Messages*. Sage.
 - Dwight, Kirsten (1997). “Sperm Stories: Romantic, Entrepreneurial, and Environmental Narratives about Treating Male Infertility,” *Science as Culture*, 6.
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Themes

- Emotions**
 - Biological Destiny**
 - Metaphors of Chance**
 - Brave New World**
 - Economics**
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Emotions: Shock and Awe

- Infertility as “a devastating nightmare” (lay)
 - Success as producing “a huge wave of relief” (lay)
 - “The career women especially are so used to getting everything they want, when you tell them what the numbers are, a lot of them are very shocked” (expert)
 - Upon learning of infertility: “They’re not surprised, they’re shocked. Which is shocking to us” (expert)
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Biological Destiny

- Infertility “strikes so close to home because this is all about children and sex and family and really the most powerful stuff of human nature” (expert).
 - “I want [my son] to feel like he has one person in the world who is a complete blood relative after I’m gone. I did not want my son to feel deprived, that the other sibling had a father and he didn’t.”
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Metaphors of Chance

- “There’s a little anxiety [...] You don’t know if the [eggs] you are keeping are going to grow. It’s kind of a crap shoot” (expert).
 - [It depends on] “how we react to the luck of the draw” (lay).
 - “We would have kept going until we got pregnant. It’s almost like gambling” (lay).
 - “[Ovarian tissue transplant success] “is a matter of odds” (expert).
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Brave New World: God & Technology

- Gender Selection Technology is “one more step down the line toward crafting children.”
 - “I just thank God there is the technology that there is today. Without it, I wouldn’t have these little guys.”
 - “I’m not playing God. I’m not interfering with God’s work, I’m using my talents to help people.”
 - “Patients say, ‘Don’t you feel like you’re acting like God?’ I say, ‘No I don’t. I’m just the instrument of God to help couples have babies.’ I’m the guardian of technology.”
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Economics

- “You don’t want to go completely broke trying to have a baby.”
 - “It wasn’t cheap to have kids, but it was worth it.”
 - “They’re going to make a lot of money, and the more money they make, the more money I’m going to make.”
 - “Yes we’ve spent a lot of money already. But more than that, the emotional toll – you can’t have a dollar figure put on it.”
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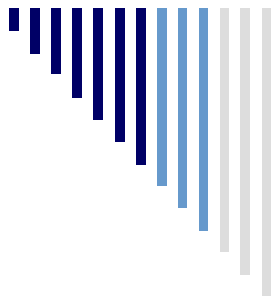
Implications for Primary Care

- Social Construction Theory stipulates that aspects of our social reality are constructed from communication, including mediated texts.
 - As is the case with WebMD and other electronic sources, patients will consume these texts and appear in the clinician's office "armed" with information.
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Implications for Primary Care

- As is the case with patients, physicians are equally susceptible to an uncritical consumption of mediated discourse.
 - In an effort to enhance the physician/patient relationship, the reflexive primary care physician will ask important questions that should contextualize the patient's understanding.
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Questions and Comments

