Disrupted Bodies: History, Identity and Reproduction
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Abstract:

Recent anthropological studies of technologically mediated reproduction have provided insight to changing meanings of the body, nature and kinship. However, the majority of these studies sited in Western industrial nations have focused on normative subjects – White, upper-class women (and sometimes men).

My presentation will be based on anthropological fieldwork in the San Francisco Bay area with men and women struggling with infertility who are not the standard consumers of the new reproductive technologies. I will explore the reconfiguration of social identities catalyzed by the experience of infertility. I recount interviewees’ perspectives on ethnic/racial identity in relation to reproduction and their interlinkage with gender and class. I then examine how these notions are both challenged and transformed by the experience of infertility. Of particular note is the finding that the experiential meaning of infertility is mediated by individual knowledge of and relation to a collective history of constrained reproduction. I argue that the disruption to biography caused by infertility is not just experienced at the individual level, but on the collective level of racial and ethnic identity as well.