

Sub-project 3: Ethnography of Human Reproduction and Single Case Studies in Threshold Areas

Sub-project 3 adopts a qualitative and empirical approach to explore the remaking of human reproduction. Can exploring human reproduction at the current normative and technological boundaries help unravel the effects of reproductive technologies on what it means to be human? To what extent does the prospect of genome editing change these notions? This sub-project examines how the human is coproduced by technology, biology, and practices of meaning making, all of which change over time. It aims to provide insight into the diversity of perspectives, actions, and interactions of the people developing, implementing, and using reproductive technologies and the histories of their emergence. It draws on a combination of approaches and methodologies from social anthropology, history, religious studies, sociology, and clinical ethics. It will also work closely with the citizen-science group by inviting participants to be part of the counselling group. Empirical research in this sub-project will focus on three interrelated areas:

Emergence of reproductive medicine: Current knowledge, views, and practices of reproduction do not float free from their historical contexts. Through archival work and interviews with stakeholders, this project seeks to trace the histories of reproductive technologies in Swiss clinics and link it to broader developments in society. Whereas the early discourse on reproductive medicine was shaped by fears of the historical precedent of eugenics and racial hygiene, recent developments in the field have highlighted the potential for treating and preventing heritable diseases. Does that mean that reproductive medicine has moved from realizing fertility to optimizing it?

For more information, please contact: Prof. Dr. Flurin Condrau, Institut für Biomedizinische Ethik und Medizingeschichte

Ethnography of human reproduction: Human reproduction is the realm in which nature and culture most intricately interconnect. To understand these interconnections, this project engages in ethnography of human reproduction, analyzing the discourses, practices, and perspectives of clinic staff and researchers, patients and prospective parents, and institutions that regulate and provide reproductive care services. This study will involve ethnographic research on how reproductive and gene-editing technologies are developed, applied, and discussed daily in IVF and CRISPR laboratories and clinics. Through participant observation and interviews with health care professionals and scientists, including those involved in the URPP H2R, this study seeks insight into the aspirations and anxieties involved in the making or editing of human life.

For more information, please contact: Prof. Dr. Annuska Derks, Institut für Sozialanthropologie und Empirische Kulturwissenschaften

Meaning making of human reproduction: How are human reproduction and gene-editing technologies are perceived by patients? This project will focus on existential questions about identity, biography, and the role of cultural and/or religious perspectives in patients' approaches to reproductive medicine. Through narrative interviews, we will seek to understand underlying meanings ascribed to reproductive technologies and their relation to changing notions of gender, parenthood, and kinship.

For more information, please contact: Prof. Dr. Dorothea Lüddeckens,
Religionwissenschaftliches Seminar

These studies, combined with a postdoctoral research focusing on patients and other individuals who are affected by genetically caused or mediated diseases or who carry a risk of transmitting these conditions to offspring and are therefore interested in using new reproductive technologies, aim to provide a unique insight into the making and meaning of human reproduction today in Switzerland.