Birth Control and American Modernity

How did birth control become legitimate in the United States? One kitchen table at a time, contends Trent MacNamara – as Americans reexamined old ideas about money, time, transcendence, nature, risk, and their relationship to family planning. By the time Margaret Sanger and other activists began campaigning for legal contraception in the 1910s, Americans had been effectively controlling fertility for a century, combining old techniques with explosive new attitudes. Birth Control and American Modernity charts those attitudes, capturing a movement that relied less on traditional public advocacy than dispersed action of the kind that nullified Prohibition. Acting in bedrooms and gossip corners where formal power was weak and moral feeling strong, Americans of both sexes gradually normalized birth control in private, then in public, as part of a wider prioritization of present material worlds over imagined eternal continuums. The moral edifice they constructed, like similar citizen movements around the world, remains tenuously intact.

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Contents

List of Figures  page viii
List of Tables  ix
Acknowledgments  x

1  The Long History of Birth Control  1
   Introduction  1
   The Outlines of Legitimacy  6
   Background to a Mass Movement  8
   Birth Control Methods  8
   Regulating Birth Control  14
   Population Thought in America  15
   Power in the Birth Control Movement  20
   The Story of Birth Control: Historians and Gender  22
   The Story of Birth Control: Demographers and Modernization  25
   Fertility and Ideas about Time  28
   Subjective Modernization  28
   Being across Time  33
   Note on Parameters and Methods  34

2  Race Suicide: The Moral Economy of Birth Control, 1903–1908  37
   Public Opinion before Polling  39
   Explaining Fertility Decline: Self and Society  41
   Moral Economy  44
   Worldliness and Transcendence  46
   Time  51
   Gender  53
   Conclusions  57
Contents

3 Sensible as Spinach: The Moral Economy of Birth Control, 1927–1935 65
   Fracture and the New Moral Economy 66
   Religious Pronatalism 72
   Naturism and Eugenics 76
   Activists 78
   Gender 81
   Conclusion: Privatizing Reproduction 84
   Epilogue: Baby Bust to Baby Boom 87

4 Dear Friend: Citizen Letters to Birth Controllers 91
   The Letters 93
   Justifying Birth Control 95
      Health 96
      Well-being 100
      Living Standards 103
   Movement Consciousness 106
      Legal Reform 108
      Clinics and Contraceptive Provision 110
      Eugenics 114
      Feminism 115
      Sexual Liberation 117
   Conclusions 121

5 Missionary Work: Touring America for Birth Control 122
   The Process of Contraceptive Legitimation 125
   Overcoming the Stigma of Radicalism 127
   Popular Science 130
   Repealing Reticence 133
   Progress, Eugenics and Naturism 137
   Regional and Rural–Urban Divides 139
   Conclusions 140

6 Marriage as It Is: Birth Control on the Radio 142
   The Respondents 144
   The Wider Controversy 145
   Favorability 149
   Pragmatism 150
   Progress 153
   Liberal Optimism 154
   Gender, Feminism, and Companionate Marriage 156
   Western Americans and Birth Control 157
   Conclusions 159
Contents

7 Conclusion and Epilogue
  Conclusion 161
  Epilogue: Global Fertility Control and Liberal Modernity 165
  The Globalization of Low Fertility in Substance? 166
  Does Low Fertility Endanger Liberalism in Perception? 170
  Does Low Fertility Endanger Liberalism in Substance? 173
  Liberal Pronatalism? 177
  Will to Transcendence 181
  Conclusion 185

Appendix 188
Notes 201
Bibliography 271
Index 294
Figures

2.1 Three “female medicines,” early twentieth century page 59
2.2 Abortifacient tablets, early twentieth century 59
2.3 Syringes used to apply douching solutions 60
2.4 Box of condoms, c.1931 60
2.5 Postcard, c.1906 61
2.6 Postcards, c.1905–10 62
2.7 A family of fourteen from Emmett, Tennessee 63
2.8 Two-child family, Vermont, 1939 64
6.1 Location of KOA respondents by state or province 146
6.2 Ben Lindsey speaking on KOA, c.1927 147
A.1 Explanatory frames, 1903–08 189
A.2 Descriptive and other frames, 1903–08 190
A.3 Favorability to pronatalism, 1903–08 192
A.4 Gender valence of birth control decisions 193
A.5 Favorability, 1903–08 and 1927–35 194
A.6 Explanatory frames, 1927–35 194
A.7 Great Depression: Favorability and selected frames before/after December 1929 195
A.8 Favorability by sex and period 196
A.9 Gender valence by period 196
# Tables

| A.1 | Explanatory frames: definitions | page 190 |
| A.2 | Descriptive and other frames, 1903–08: definitions | 191 |
| A.3 | Newspaper roster, 1903–08 | 191 |
| A.4 | Writers’ socioeconomic self-descriptions | 197 |
| A.5 | Letter writers’ terms of justification for fertility control | 198 |
| A.6 | Doctors’ involvement in writers’ pursuit of birth control | 199 |
| A.7 | Fertility control methods mentioned in letters to birth controllers | 199 |
| A.8 | Letter writers mentioning gendered agency in birth control | 200 |
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