

Gender Benders and the Reconfiguration of Assisted Conception in Taiwan

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Abstract

This paper investigates four diverse reconfiguring activities of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) use by single women, lesbians, and gays in Taiwan over the past 30 years. Data include archives, participant observation, and in-depth interviews. Taiwan has continued to prohibit singles and lesbians from using ARTs, from the first ethical guideline in 1986 to the legislation of the Human Reproduction Law in 2007. However, several waves of moral pioneers have rewritten the script of ART use. First, some single female celebrities went abroad to seek ART as reproductive exiles, thus creating a new public imagination of ART use. Next, single women created two other routes to gain access to ART. The first is to conform to the legal requirement to be married: hence a lesbian marries a gay man to remove the categorical barrier. The second is “smuggling”: some women find sympathetic doctors who will provide access to donor insemination to allow them to build an unconventional family. Such clinical encounters triggered the Taiwanese Society for Reproductive Medicine Society (TSRM) to lobby for the inclusion of singles in the early 2000s. TSRM’s efforts did not continue, in part because of social controversy. Finally, the Lesbian Mothers Alliance, first formed as a support group in 2005 and transformed in 2007 into an activist group, provides information on self-insemination to lesbian couples and advocates for legal reform. They have now become powerful network-builders in rewriting the script of ART use in Taiwan. This paper reveals the spectrum of reconfiguring activities by these so-called gender benders—reproductive exile, conforming with married status, smuggling, and building alliances—and examines the extent to which they are rewriting the gender script of ART.