

Discourses on the pregnant body in advice literature

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Introduction

Dissertation project outline

Risk discourses and body concepts

Bodily changes and gender

Conclusions

Dissertation project

The transition to parenthood in german pregnancy advice literature

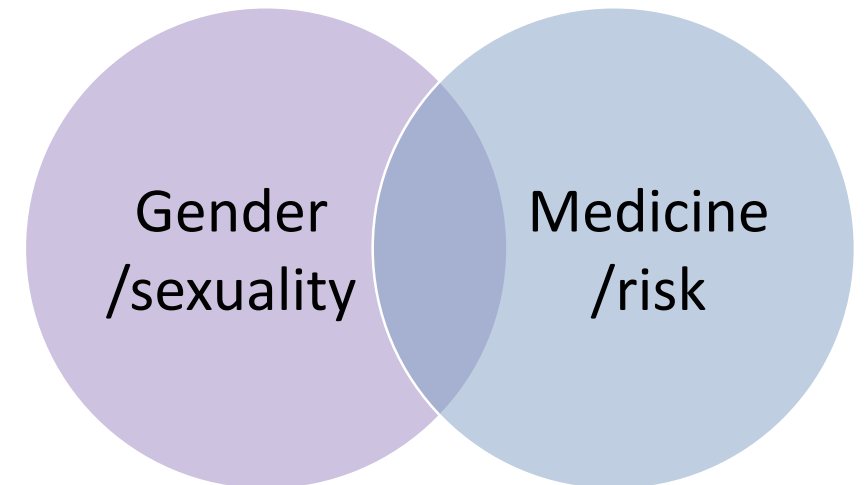
Research questions: How are parents-to-be adressed in advice literature? Which subject positions are offered to them?

Method: Discourse analysis

Analytical perspective: Interpellation

„Discourse does not merely represent or report on pregiven practices and relations, but it enters into their articulation and is, in that sense, productive.“

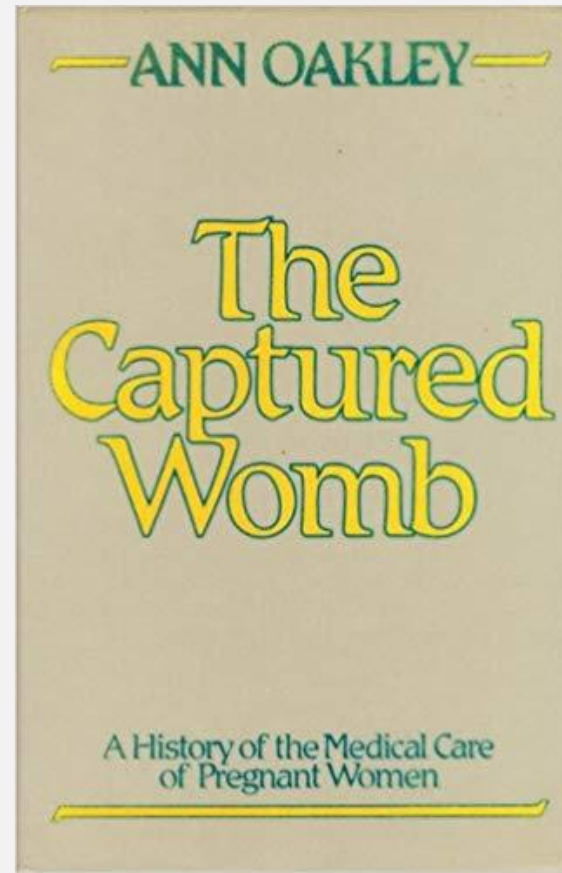
(Butler 1995: 138)



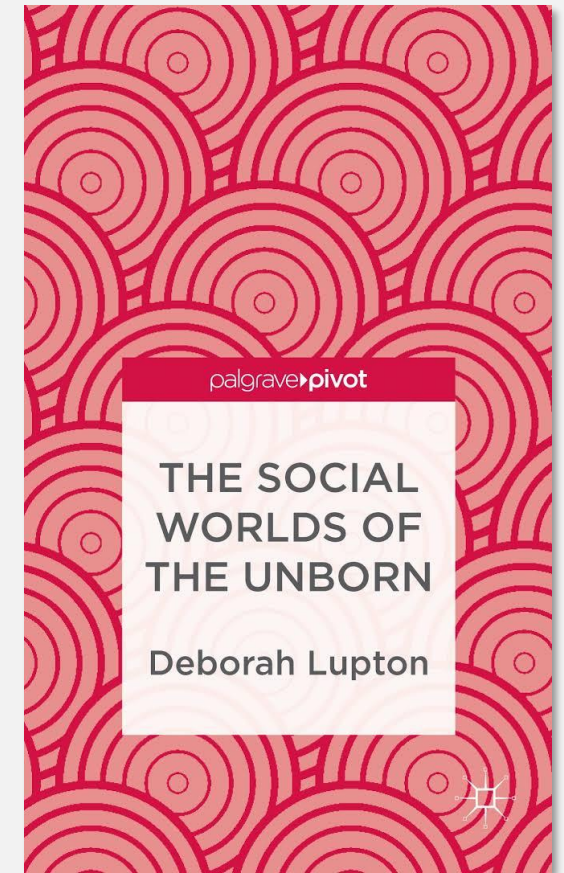
Theoretical background: Medicalization

Feminist cultural-historical analyses

- Strong medicalization of pregnancy
- Risk-oriented prenatal care
- Monitoring and responsabilization of pregnant persons
- Disregard of social and environmental factors
- Personalization of the unborn child
- Theoretical shift: from pregnancy as ‚natural‘ capacity of female bodies to ‚naturalization‘ as discursive strategy



1984



2013

Risk discourses and body concepts

„Is she unduly burdened or can look forward to having her child light-heartedly, does she smoke during pregnancy, drink alcohol or take medications, is she physically or mentally ill, does she move a lot or little, is she overnourished or undernourished – all this, as we know today, influences the development of the unborn child.“ (Hüther/Weser 2015: 142)

⇒ The pregnant body as a risky vessel or environment and the unborn child as its „precious cargo“ (Lupton 2012)

Risk discourses and body concepts

“Women who want to do everything ‘right’ and prepare down to the tiniest detail may experience pregnancy as a difficult test they have to pass with an A+. [...] Luckily, pregnancy – the production of the baby – as well as birth run automatically. [...] The baby comes into the world (normally) after 40 weeks – no matter whether you have occupied yourself with every possible risk or passed the process in utter ignorance! To avoid unnecessary worries, you should nonetheless know as much as possible about the pregnancy and the involved practical requirements.”

(Jordan/Ufberg 2011: 9f.)

- Pregnant body as production unit
- Ambiguous messages about risks
- Creating uncertainties and promising reassurance

„How you yourself can observe the development of your child

If you observe yourself and your body attentively, you will repeatedly find signs to indicate that your baby grows continually and develops well.

[...] Try to simply enjoy the movements of your child. Leave the judgement on the child's condition to your medical advisor. He has the more reliable means.“

(Kainer/Nolden 2009: 68)

- Establishing a routine of self-monitoring
- Ambivalent message: „Relax“ vs. „be alert“
- Child movements as disquieting *and* reassuring
- Unreliable boundary between ‚normal‘ discomforts and complications

Risk discourses and body concepts

„Consider your pregnancy as a natural, healthy condition that a woman's body is well prepared for. [...] Stay relaxed, composed and trust your own rational assessment, but also your gut instincts („Bauchgefühl“). Well informed, you will be your own best counselor!“
(Höfer/Scholz 2014: 7)

- Common notion of pregnancy as natural: Runs by itself – if not disrupted
 - Instincts and body signals as instruments in addition to expert medical knowledge and monitoring
 - Bodies and minds of women as potential risk factors
- ⇒ Discursive efforts to consolidate concepts of pregnancy as natural bodily phenomenon and as risky process in need of monitoring

Bodily changes and gender

„In the first weeks you might still like your new femininity and maybe even enjoy your extra curves. But in the 7th, 8th month at the latest you will think: This is enough.”
(Heil 2008: 31)

„Some women feel too fat and deprived of their femininity.”
(Gebauer-Sesterhenn/Villinger 2012: 121)

„Having a baby is not the End of Style.”
(Dannhauer 2017)

Discourses on attractiveness and femininity

- 2nd Trimester: Promise of gaining femininity
- 3rd trimester: Threat of losing femininity
- Ideal of making an effort to look appealing

Bodily changes and gender

„Postnatal: Sex, a few other things, and sex“
(Nichols 2009: 3)

„**My wife is human again**
The responsibility is partly yours to tinker the worn out, mangled, probably female being with whom you created a real human back into a presentable, halfway passable, daylight-fit person.“
(Busemann 2010: 196)

“Many women need an extended period of time to feel ‘at home’ in their body again, to accept its maybe changed appearance and to learn to love it again. [...] Tell your partner repeatedly and spontaneously what you like about her looks, that she feels good, smells good, you like the sound of her voice... and that you love her.”

(Richter/Schäfer 2014: 155f.)

Advice literature for fathers-to-be:

- Explicit descriptions of sexuality before, during and after pregnancy
- Assessment of the pregnant body in terms of appeal and fitness for sexuality
- Partly demeaning and dehumanizing language

„Co-pregnant?

Daddy's belly is getting bigger, too? This is not unusual, and can even be accompanied by tiredness, nausea, food cravings and indigestion. Extreme cases are called ‚couvade syndrome‘. [...] The hormonal balance of fathers-to-be changes: Testosterone, the hormone of belligerence, decreases, and prolactine, the caring hormone, increases. [...] Sounds like a useful brooding programme of nature!“

(Weigert/Lütje 2018: 171)

Narratives of ‚male pregnancy‘ are contextualised as

- Naturalization of caring fatherhood
- Rejection of the idea of ‚male pregnancy‘, linked to threatening loss of masculinity
- Discursive efforts to consolidate involvement in pregnancy and baby care with conservative ideas of masculinity

„Pseudo-pregnant? Why men could be, but shouldn't.

Men are not pregnant. Just to be very clear: The pregnancy of your wife is no excuse for you to grow a fat belly and complicate your already strained relationship with moody behavior.“

(Wiechmann 2008: 151)

Conclusions

- Tensions in consolidated concept of pregnancy as ‚natural‘ and risky
 - Idea of transnatal continuity moves responsible parenthood to the time before birth
 - Medical risk discourses are intertwined with concepts of biography and life transitions

 - Tensions in consolidated concepts of hegemonial masculinity and caring fatherhood
 - Temporary discursive destabilization of gender relations and gendered subject positions
– within a binary frame
- ⇒ Pregnancy advice literature discursively (re)produces concepts and ideas of biographical transitions, bodies, and gender

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All citations translated by JK

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