

Abstract

How is the experience of pregnancy in a patriarchal society shaped by pregnant women's socioeconomic status? So far, qualitative studies have primarily focused on the effect of socioeconomic status in healthcare, and unintended conception in poor adolescents. Based on a 17-month comparative ethnography conducted in Lima, the hyper-stratified capital of Peru, this dissertation addresses experiences of women of different socioeconomic dispositions including conception, abortion, and (inter)personal lived pregnancy experience. The dissertation employs the concept of reproductive habitus to reflect on the differing classed and gendered dispositions in women of different socioeconomic statuses as an embodiment of institutions: the institution of patriarchy and healthcare institutions. The dissertation identifies status-related reproductive dispositions/differences in forming pregnancy experience in four areas: (i) in women's conception circumstances primarily in terms of pregnancy (non)intentionality, women's childbearing age span, relationship status (integrity), and male partner (non)abandonment (desertion). Socioeconomically differing conception circumstances produce psycho-physiologically different human subjects. (ii) Women's reproductive habitus is expressed in women's possibilities of safe abortion, illegal in Catholic Peru. Since affluent women can afford to bypass the law, abortion illegality naturalizes the engendering of undesired babies and imposes health- and life-risks primarily on lower-class women. (iii) Reproductive habitus profiles women's access to healthcare as patients, or clients: either to state healthcare services, marked by (infra)structural deficits and the relative impossibility of continual care; or private healthcare services, technomedicalized, 'gynecologized' and pro-profit oriented, which commodify women and prime them for (unnecessary, nonpreferred) cesareans. Unmedicalized options, enabling reduction of obstetric violence, and humanized birth, including doulas' accompaniment, are limited for "the rich". (iv) Reproductive habitus is expressed in women's experience of their pregnant embodiment in: their possibilities of safe urban transportation and networks of collaborating actors; relating to the unborn and their body; male pregnancy participation; and food and baby-shopping consumption. While classed dispositions of reproductive habitus are divisive, the fact that pregnant is the female body, plays out as a unifying transclass disposition in the local religious patriarchy. The recurrent subliminal theme during fieldwork was a multidimensional abandonment of women and of their bodies (body alienation) and the related fragmentation and dispossession of their embodiment.

Key words: experience of pregnant embodiment, female reproductive habitus, socioeconomic status, social class, Lima, Peru, patriarchy, machismo, conception, abortion, prenatal healthcare, childbirth, women's abandonment, female body alienation and dispossession, pregnancy-related consumption