Regulating the Biological Family:
policy, genetics, discourse, and
diminishing ‘Other’ bodies

Bronwyn Donaghey

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Discipline of Politics
School of History and Politics
University of Adelaide
December 2006
# Table of Contents

Abstract  
Declaration Statement  
Acknowledgements  
Introduction  
1. Policy, Discourse and Regulating Bodies  
   2. A Genealogy of Genetics: eugenics, gendered genes and the ‘birth’ of the genetic family  
   3. Re-producing the Family: family, population, government control and the implications for reproductive technologies  
   4. Fragmenting the Reproductive Body: constituent parts, fetal ‘subjects’, and competing claims over the pregnant body  
Section 2: Revealing Contradictions  
   5. IVF: proper families, donor genes and intrusive bodies  
   6. Surrogacy: the primacy of genetic material and the invisible reproductive body  
   7. Genetic Material in Policy: men, families and the control of genic material  
Conclusion. Giving Weight to Biological Bodies: material effects and implications for future technologies  
Bibliography
Abstract

This thesis starts with the premise that Western ideas about genetic inheritance play a large part in shaping Australian social policy around reproduction and family formation. This premise has gone largely under-discussed in other examinations of policies concerned with these areas and there is a need to redress this. There remains in Western society a dominant belief, built on notions of biological heredity, that we are a product of our genes – they make us who we are (Rose et al. 1984: 65). Historically, it has been men’s genes and male genetic continuity that has been considered to be of primary importance. This has had significant ramifications for women’s bodies.

This thesis identifies and elaborates on the way in which notions of genetic inheritance connect with notions of ‘proper’ families and hence shape policies concerning reproduction and family formation. Assumptions about the structure and shape of the ‘proper’ or ‘traditional’ family – as a heterosexual two-parent unit with biological children – and its claim to naturalness are embedded in policies related to reproductive technologies and family formation. Where the use of ‘other’ bodies has been necessary to produce children, policy has effectively erased these bodies through creating an ‘imagined’ biological family. These are families which can be ‘passed off’ as biological families. However, a number of developments in reproductive technologies and related areas of family formation are producing tensions and contradictions in the policies relating to these areas, in the process challenging the claim to ‘naturalness’ of the traditional family unit.

This thesis explores the discourses surrounding the following specific policies – surrogacy, IVF, adoption, abortion, child support and posthumous reproduction – to elucidate the frameworks of meaning within which we understand these issues. Surrogacy and IVF are looked at in detail. Attention is paid to the ways in which material bodies, in particular women’s material bodies, have been constituted in policies relating to the above areas. It is argued, in these cases, that genetic material is privileged over biological bodies, with negative effects on the material bodies of women. I argue that there is a need for a different approach to policy in this area and suggest that a useful way of proceeding is to employ a body-focussed approach to policy.