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Sex Cells: The Medical Market for Eggs and Sperm. By Rene Almeling. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011. Pp. x+228. \$60.00 (cloth); \$24.95 (paper).

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This cleverly titled debut book addresses egg and sperm donation in the contemporary United States, focusing on donation agencies/services and donors rather than recipients. Using a comparative approach to identify similarities and differences in the two donation processes, Rene Almeling argues that gender matters both for how this unique market for bodily goods is organized and for how it is subjectively experienced by donors. *Sex Cells* is based on qualitative research at six donation agencies or programs, conducted between 2002 and 2006: two that engage solely in sperm donation, two dedicated to egg donation, and two that handle both sperm and eggs. Almeling conducted interviews with staff and donors, analyzed donor profiles (which are used by “recipients”—customers of these agencies—to select donor material), and briefly observed the daily operations of some of the sites.

The introduction presents a clear overview and history of sperm and egg donation, thankfully sparing readers the technical intricacies of these medical processes. The remainder of the book is divided into two parts. Part 1, “Organizing the Market,” examines how donation agencies recruit donors and recipients, categorize donors and their biological materials, set fees, and manage relationships. Almeling shows how cultural ideas about gender figure into the way that agencies work, providing evidence for her assertion that “what makes an egg donor sellable is not what makes a sperm donor sellable” (p. 53). Part 2, “Experiencing the Market,” foregrounds the accounts of women and men who donate their sex cells. By including newer as well as veteran donors, Almeling is able to explore the effects, motivations, and interpretations of donation at different points in the process. In this section, the author explores the embodied experience of donation (spoiler alert: sperm donation requires more physical discipline than you might imagine), donors’ feelings about the monetary exchange involved, and how donors conceive of their connection to any children who might result from their sperm or eggs. The fascinating differences in the physical investments required of sperm versus egg donors are clearly illustrated through the accounts of the individual donors. Throughout, Almeling shows that egg donation is consistently framed as a “gift,” while sperm donation is seen as a “job.” These differently gendered understandings of similar processes (both egg and sperm provide half of the genetic material necessary to create a human being) are shared by agency staff and donors and are based on a division between the economy/market and the family that “*makes sense*, culturally speaking” (p. 170).

The study is situated in three main subfields of sociology: (1) medical

sociology, (2) sociology of reproduction, and (3) sociology of the body. In the interest of brevity I will focus on this final subfield. The most important contribution of the book is to question or challenge the “either/or” moralistic approaches to the commodification of the body. Some scholars view the commodification of the body as a linear process inevitably leading to dehumanization, objectification, and alienation. Almeling likens this perspective to a “light switch: if money is exchanged, then there is commodification” (p. 170). As the book shows, commodification is complex, and a one-size-fits-all definition is neither useful nor desirable. Here, the study shares with recent research on sex work and cosmetic surgery the aim to move past simplistic, dead-end arguments about whether social processes are “good” or “bad” and explore how new kinds of markets are created, how bodies and body parts are assigned monetary value, and how people interpret their position and make choices accordingly. As economic sociologists have been trying to tell us, the economic, the social, and the cultural cannot be disentangled; Almeling provides empirical support for this argument.

My criticisms of the book relate to the style in which information is presented and to the substance of what is presented. First—and it is possible that the fault lies with the publisher rather than the author—some of the most illustrative and interesting facts, quotes, and anecdotes are consigned to the endnotes at the back of the book. Readers who skip the notes will not know about sperm donors’ preoccupation with the thin walls of the rooms where they masturbate for pay, or about the egg donor telling her boyfriend that they must not have sex while she is injecting fertility drugs, lest she end up “popping out eight kids at once” (p. 203). These anxieties are significant in the embodied experience of sex cell donation. Key evidence for Almeling’s claims about donors’ emotional connection to children conceived with their sperm or eggs, and the important finding that “nearly everyone conceptualized his or her donation in terms of children,” are tucked away in endnotes rather than being featured prominently in the text (pp. 206–7). Second, social class does not receive the attention it deserves in this treatment of marketized reproduction. Money is the major initial motivator for nearly all of the donors she spoke with, and Almeling does not dispute the commonsense premise that donors as a group are less socioeconomically privileged than the recipients of their genetic materials. This inequality is built in to the system of buying and selling eggs and sperm. Despite Almeling’s reminder in the conclusion that this exchange takes place between “people who occupy particular social locations” (p. 170), the book’s treatment of the class differences structuring the exchange seems underdeveloped.

Because it is a clearly written book on a controversial subject, *Sex Cells* will appeal to not only sociologists and scholars of reproduction but also undergraduate and graduate students (in courses on gender, consumption, economic sociology, or the body) and interested nonacademics. The comparative research design demonstrates how cultural gender divides shape

medicalized reproduction, and the focus on individuals' experiences means that more than a few readers will close the book asking themselves, "Would I ever . . . ?"

Working for Justice. Edited by Ruth Milkman, Joshua Bloom, and Victor Narro. Ithaca, N.Y.: ILR Press, 2010. Pp. xiv + 296. \$68.50 (cloth); \$21.95 (paper).

Andrew W. Martin
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Working for Justice is a collection of case studies, edited by Ruth Milkman, Joshua Bloom, and Victor Narro, that provides detailed, firsthand accounts of new organizing successes in Los Angeles. This model of union organizing, which has been well documented in recent years, has often been referred to as the "social movement model." Unions employ a variety of confrontational tactics, buttressed with careful research on the targeted firm and assisted by community allies. Although the case studies encompass a range of industries and occupations, there are a number of important generalizations we can draw from them.

First, the chapters provide overwhelming evidence that to successfully organize low-wage service workers, issues of immigration and ethnic/racial divisions must be addressed by the union. In virtually every case examined here, the groups of workers targeted for mobilization were composed at least partially of recent arrivals to the United States. Indeed, a number of studies made the linkages between union organizing and immigrant reform explicitly. Nazgol Ghandnoosh's analysis of the Filipino Workers Center recounted how the center was instrumental in politically mobilizing the Filipino community for workers' rights causes. This challenge was significant, as Filipino immigrants have generally been quite successful, and, since many come from middle-class backgrounds, tend to be politically conservative. Caitlin C. Patler's account of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights takes an even broader view of the linkages between unionization and immigrant rights, exploring how this organization moved from a service model to an advocacy one. Such a shift necessitated an expansion of its agenda, covering issues from workers' rights to the unique educational needs of immigrants and their children.

Even if unions are to seriously consider immigration as "their" issue (and many have), in multiethnic locales like Los Angeles it becomes necessary for these organizations to negotiate the crosscutting demands of organizing across different ethnic lines. Certain industries are often dominated by a single ethnic group, but many union organizing efforts bring together workers from different ethnic backgrounds, ethnicities that are often initially mistrustful of one another. Such was the case in Jong Bum Kwon's account of the Koreatown organizing campaign that centered