Susan Klepp. *Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility, & Family Limitation in America, 1760-1820*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. Pp. 312. Paper $25.95.

In a letter written near the end of the eighteenth century, Margaret Shippen Arnold praised her sister for her efforts on family limitation. Whereas married women in colonial America prior to 1763 reproduced almost every two years, the Shippen sisters participated in a growing trend that endorsed family planning. In her long-awaited book, *Revolutionary Conceptions*, Susan Klepp, Professor of Colonial American and American Women's History at Temple University, examines Mid-Atlantic middle class and elite married white women's family limitation efforts between 1760 and 1820, using women's writings, medical writings, and printed materials. To a lesser extent, Klepp analyzes enslaved women's attempts at family planning, using census data, slave owner letters and diaries. Incorporating statistical data, art history and social and cultural historical methods, Klepp argues that women appropriated the American Revolution's ideals of life, liberty, and happiness to repudiate traditional patriarchal structures. In return, women implemented affectionate parent-child relationships and asserted agency in their marriages.

Before 1760, female fecundity garnered social praise not only for mothers but also for the fathers whose progeny became a source of capital for nations. The pregnant form evoked an image of beauty, abundance, and strength. On a national scale, large families became a necessary ingredient for prosperity. Locally, children served utilitarian purposes as laborers to supplement the family income. Women steadily embraced concepts of equality and republican virtue in the latter half of the eighteenth century, placing greater emphasis on sentimental bonds and giving equal status to all children, regardless of gender. Parturient women used endearing phrases like "beloved object[s]" and "little stranger" (109). Similar shifts occurred in portraiture. Klepp's chapter, "Beauty and the Bestial," demonstrates how artists prior to 1763 highlighted women's fertility by incorporating sexual symbols, such as fruit or pearls, into their paintings. Later portraits depicted girls and women paired with books, symbolizing women's increased access to education.

Klepp's work reaches its best moments in "Potions, Pills, and Jumping Ropes," which includes a fascinating analysis of limitation methods employed by women. She reminds readers that pregnancy was not always easily determined in this period. Doctors, midwives, and women of all ethnic backgrounds diffused knowledge about emmenagogues, methods to that stimulated menstruation, and abortifacients. Though family planning infers some degree of male approval, women largely led the campaign and in doing so claimed control over their reproductive systems. From this emerged new meanings of marriage, motherhood, and childbearing.

Thoroughly researched and beautifully written, *Revolutionary Conceptions* brings to light new information on America's declining fertility rates. Klepp locates a period roughly between 1760 and 1820 when women maintained substantial control over definitions of fertility, motherhood and family. The advent of modern gynecology after 1820 saw the power over women's bodies handed once more over to male hands. Students of the history of gender, sexuality, family, and medicine will benefit from Klepp's research. Her inclusion and careful examination of portraiture reminds historians

to seek answers in non-traditional sources. Indeed, her inter-disciplinary approach to the history of family limitation should serve as an example to historians, sociologists, economists and anthropologists alike.

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