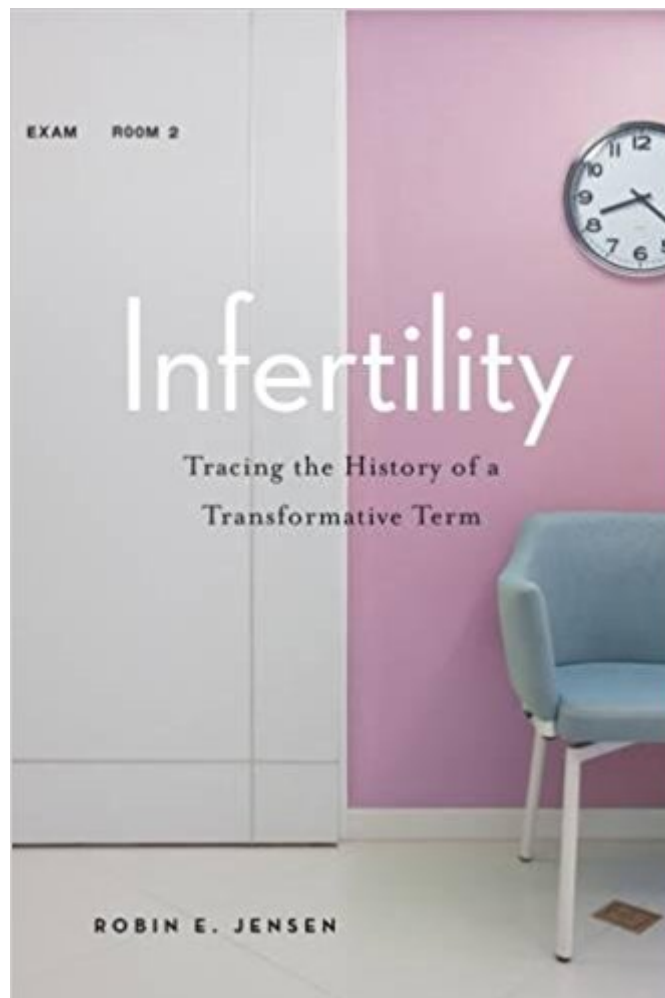




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# Infertility: Tracing The History Of A Transformative Term (RSA Series In Transdisciplinary Rhetoric)



## Synopsis

This book explores the arguments, appeals, and narratives that have defined the meaning of infertility in the modern history of the United States and Europe. Throughout the last century, the inability of women to conceive children has been explained by discrepant views: that women are individually culpable for their own reproductive health problems, or that they require the intervention of medical experts to correct abnormalities. Using doctor-patient correspondence, oral histories, and contemporaneous popular and scientific news coverage, Robin Jensen parses the often thin rhetorical divide between moralization and medicalization, revealing how dominating explanations for infertility have emerged from seemingly competing narratives. Her longitudinal account illustrates the ways in which old arguments and appeals do not disappear in the light of new information, but instead reemerge at subsequent, often seemingly disconnected moments to combine and contend with new assertions. Tracing the transformation of language surrounding infertility from “barrenness” to “(in)fertility,” this rhetorical analysis both explicates how language was and is used to establish the concept of infertility and shows the implications these rhetorical constructions continue to have for individuals and the societies in which they live.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“In *Infertility*, Robin Jensen examines how discourses of infertility change over time, deftly revealing how these discourses do not follow a linear progression but instead shift, overlap,

disappear, and re-emerge. Scholars of the rhetoric of science and medicine, medical and health humanities, and science and technology studies will marvel at her insightful, fine-tuned analysis, which beautifully illustrates how medicalized discourses continue to moralize, positioning infertile women as degenerate, noncompliant, or untimely despite ever greater technological and medical advances.

• Jordynn Jack, author of *Autism and Gender: From Refrigerator Mothers to Computer Geeks*

“Robin Jensen asks, What is human infertility? How do we understand that involuntary childlessness, known at different times, and within different rhetorical ecologies, as barrenness and sterility? She constructs her answer by weaving a rhetorical-historical account that is informed and engaging, layered and complex: no linear narrative here. The book is a shining example of what critical rhetoricians do, and how and why we do it.”

• Judy Segal, author of *Health and the Rhetoric of Medicine*

“Robin Jensen’s thoughtful and engaging study interrogates a complicated matrix of cultural narratives, medical epistemologies, and gender normativities in order to scrutinize the evolution and constitution of infertility. Her investigation of infertility’s medicalization, shaped by metaphors that simultaneously percolate and lurk at particular historical moments, is compelling in its execution and impressive in its scope. Jensen’s sweeping archive and innovative thesis resist narrative simplicity, offering a valuable contribution to the field of rhetorical studies.”

• Jeff Bennett, author of *Banning Queer Blood: Rhetorics of Citizenship, Contagion, and Resistance*

Robin E. Jensen is Associate Professor of Communication at the University of Utah and the author of *Dirty Words: The Rhetoric of Public Sex Education in the United States, 1870–1924* (2010).

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