

Fourth Edition



BIRTH IN FOUR CULTURES

*A Crosscultural
Investigation of
Childbirth in
Yucatan, Holland,
Sweden, and
the United States*

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Revised and expanded by
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CHAPTER



The Achievement of Authoritative Knowledge in an American Hospital Birth¹

Drawing on videotaped data from a high-technology birth setting, I explore in this chapter the role of technology and social interaction in the constitution and display of authoritative knowledge. I argue that obstetric technology and technical procedures are central in this environment and that the "ownership" of the artifacts necessary to manage the labor simultaneously defines and displays who should be seen as possessing authoritative knowledge and, consequently, legitimate decision-making power.

I have chosen this particular birth because I have good video data for it, which is essential for doing the kind of close analysis that I hope will make my point. Some will object that the birth I describe is not typical; that theirs was different; that births in their community are not carried out like this. However, my argument here does not hinge on whether American births generally look like the one I describe. The conclusions I draw apply to

¹ The analysis presented in this chapter has been published as part of a larger study that compares the organization of work and the production of authoritative knowledge in two high-technology settings: this particular labor room and an airlines operations room in a western metropolitan airport (Jordan 1992).

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