

chasing the blood tie: surrogate mothers, adoptive mothers and fathers

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An election that's about ideas and values is also about philosophy, and I have one. At the bright center is the individual, and radiating out from him or her is the family, the essential unit of closeness and love. For it's the family that communicates to our children, to the 21st century, our culture, our religious faith, our traditions, and our history.

—George Bush, Presidential Nomination Acceptance Speech, 1989

In the wake of publicity created by the Baby M Case,¹ it seems unlikely that any in the United States can have remained unfamiliar with surrogate motherhood or have yet to form an opinion. The Baby M Case raised, and ultimately left unanswered, many questions about what constitutes motherhood, fatherhood, family, reproduction, and kinship. Much of what has been written about surrogate motherhood has, however, been largely speculative or polemical in nature; it ranges from the view that surrogate motherhood is symptomatic of the dissolution of the American family² and the sanctity of motherhood to charges that it reduces or assigns women to a breeder class structurally akin to prostitution (Dworkin 1978) or that it constitutes a form of commercial baby selling (Annas 1988; Neuhaus 1988).

In recent years a plethora of studies on reproduction has emerged in the field of anthropology (Browner 1986; Delaney 1986, 1991; Dolgin 1993; Ginsburg 1987, 1989; Martin 1987; Modell 1989; Newman 1985; Ragoné 1991, 1994; Rapp 1987, 1988, 1990; Scrimshaw 1978; Strathern 1991, 1992a, 1992b).³ Not since the "virgin birth" controversy have so many theorists turned their attention to the subject (Leach 1967; Spiro 1968). Many of these studies represent a response to the interest generated by the emergence of what are collectively called assisted reproductive technologies, such as in vitro fertilization, surrogate motherhood, amniocentesis, and ultrasound. Much of the relevant research examines how these technologies are affecting the relationship between "procreative beliefs and the wider context (worldview, cosmology, and culture)" (Delaney 1986:495), as exemplified by concepts and definitions of personhood and knowledge (Strathern 1991, 1992a). There nevertheless remains a paucity of ethnographic material about these technologies—in particular about surrogate motherhood, the subject of

This article examines the ways in which surrogates, fathers, and adoptive mothers negotiate the novel terrain that came into existence with the advent of surrogate motherhood. It is suggested that women who choose to become surrogate mothers do so as a means of transcending the limitations of their roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers while concomitantly attesting to the importance of those roles and to the sense of satisfaction they derive from them. Like surrogates, commissioning couples who enter into a surrogate arrangement focus less on the aspects of surrogacy that depart from tradition than they do on those that are consistent with American kinship ideology, most notably in their emphasis on the importance of family and nurturance. [reproduction, parenthood, family, kinship, nurturance]

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this article, which is based on fieldwork conducted at three different surrogate mother programs from 1988 to the present.

Historically there have been three profound shifts in the Western conceptualization of the categories of conception, reproduction, and parenthood. The first occurred in response to the separation of intercourse from reproduction through birth control methods (Snowden et al. 1983), a precedent that may have paved the way for surrogate motherhood in the 1980s (Andrews 1984:xiii). A second shift occurred in response to the emergence of assisted reproductive technologies and to the subsequent fragmentation of the unity of reproduction, when it became possible for pregnancy to occur without necessarily having been “preceded by sexual intercourse” (Snowden et al. 1983:5). The third shift occurred in response to further advances in reproductive medicine that called into question the “organic unity of fetus and mother” (Martin 1987:20). It was not, however, until the emergence of reproductive medicine that the fragmentation of motherhood became a reality; with that historical change, what was once the “single figure of the mother is dispersed among several potential figures, as the functions of maternal procreation—aspects of her physical parenthood—become dispersed” (Strathern 1991:32). As will be shown in the following section, the a priori acceptance of surrogates’ stated motivations has often produced an incomplete profile of surrogate mothers.

surrogate motivations

When I began my field research in 1988, surrogate mother programs and directors had already become the subject of considerable media attention, a great deal of it sensationalized and negative in character. At that time there were ten established surrogate mother programs in the United States; in addition, there were also a number of small, part-time businesses (none of which were included in the study) in which lawyers, doctors, adoption agents, and others arranged occasional surrogate mother contracts.⁴ In order to obtain as stable a sample as possible, I chose to include only firmly established programs in my study. The oldest of the programs was established in approximately 1980, and none of the programs included in my study had been in business for fewer than ten years as of 1994.

There are two types of surrogate mother programs: what I call “open” programs, in which surrogate and couple select one another and interact throughout the insemination and the pregnancy, and “closed” programs, in which couples select their surrogates from information—biographical and medical information and a photograph of the surrogate—provided to them by the programs. After the child is born in a “closed” program, the couple and surrogate meet only to finalize the stepparent adoption.⁵ I formally interviewed a total of 28 surrogates, from six different programs. Aside from these formal interviews I also engaged in countless conversations with surrogates, observing them as they interacted with their families, testified before legislative committees, worked in surrogate programs, and socialized at program gatherings with directors and others. Quite often I was an invited guest at the homes of program directors, a situation that provided me with a unique opportunity to observe directors interacting with their own spouses and children, with couples and surrogates, and with members of their staffs. The opportunity to observe the daily workings of the surrogate mother programs provided me with invaluable data on the day-to-day operations of the programs. At one program I attended staff meetings on a regular basis and observed consultations in which prospective couples and surrogates were interviewed singly by members of the staff such as the director, a psychologist, a medical coordinator, or the administrative coordinator.

A review of the literature on surrogate motherhood reveals that, until now, the primary research focus has been on the surrogate mother herself, and that there have been no ethnographic studies on surrogate mother programs and commissioning couples. Studies of the surrogate population tend to focus, at times exclusively, on surrogates’ stated motivations for

becoming surrogate mothers (Parker 1983). Their stated reasons include the desire to help an infertile couple start a family, financial remuneration, and a love of pregnancy (Parker 1983:140). As I began my own research I soon observed a remarkable degree of consistency or uniformity in surrogates' responses to questions about their initial motivations for becoming surrogates; it was as if they had all been given a script in which they espoused many of the motivations earlier catalogued by Parker, motivations that also, as I will show, reflect culturally accepted ideas about reproduction, motherhood, and family and are fully reinforced by the programs.⁶ I also began to uncover several areas of conflict between professed motivations and actual experiences, discovering, for example, that although surrogates claim to experience "easy pregnancies" and "problem-free labor," it was not unusual for surrogates to have experienced miscarriages, ectopic pregnancies, and related difficulties, as the following examples reveal. Jeannie, age 36, divorced with one child and employed in the entertainment industry, described the ectopic pregnancy she experienced while she was a surrogate in this manner: "I almost bled to death: I literally almost died for my couple." Nevertheless, she was again inseminating a second time for the same couple. As this and other examples demonstrate, even when their experiences are at odds with their stated motivations, surrogates tend not to acknowledge inconsistencies between their initially stated motivations and their subsequent experiences. This reformulation of motivation is seen in the following instance as well. Fran, age 27, divorced with one child and working as a dog trainer, described the difficulty of her delivery in this way: "I had a rough delivery, a C-section, and my lung collapsed because I had the flu but it was worth every minute of it. If I were to die from childbirth, that's the best way to die. You died for a cause, a good one." As both these examples illustrate, some surrogates readily embrace the idea of meaningful suffering, heroism, or sacrifice, and although their stated motivations are of some interest they do not adequately account for the range of shifting motivations uncovered in my research.

One of the motivations most frequently assumed to be primary by the casual observer is remuneration and I took considerable pains to try to evaluate its influence on surrogates. In the programs, surrogates receive between \$10,000 and \$15,000 (for three to four months of insemination and nine months of pregnancy, on average), a fee that has changed only nominally since the early 1980s.⁷ As one program psychologist explained, the amount paid to surrogates is intentionally held at an artificially low rate by the programs so as to screen out women who might be motivated solely by monetary gain. One of the questions I sought to explore was whether surrogates were denying the importance of remuneration in order to cast their actions in a more culturally acceptable light, or whether they were motivated in part by remuneration and in part by other factors (with the importance of remuneration decreasing as the pregnancy progresses, the version of events put forth by both program staff and surrogates).

The opinion popular among both scholars and the general population, that surrogates are motivated primarily by financial gain, has tended to result in oversimplified analyses of surrogate motivations. The following are typical of surrogate explanations for the connection between the initial decision to become a surrogate and the remuneration they receive. Dismissals of the idea that remuneration serves as a primary source of motivation for surrogates of the kind expressed by Fran were frequent: "It [surrogacy] sounded so interesting and fun. The money wasn't enough to be pregnant for nine months."

Andrea, aged 29, was married with three children. A high-school graduate who worked as a motel night auditor, she expressly denied the idea that remuneration motivates most surrogates. As she said here, "I'm not doing it for the money. Take the money: that wouldn't stop me. It wouldn't stop the majority."

Sarah, age 27, who attended two years of college, was married with two children, and worked part-time as a tax examiner. Here she explains her feelings about remuneration:

What's \$10,000 bucks? You can't even buy a car. If it was just for the money you will want the baby. Money wasn't important. I possibly would have done it just for expenses, especially for the people I did it for. My father would have given me the money not to do it.

The issue of remuneration proved to be of particular interest in that, although surrogates do accept monetary compensation for their reproductive work, its role is a multifaceted one. The surrogate pregnancy, unlike a traditional pregnancy, is viewed by the surrogate and her family as work; as such, it is informed by the belief that work is something that occurs only within the context of paid occupations (Ferree 1984:72). It is interesting to note that surrogates rarely spend the money they earn on themselves. Not one of the surrogates I interviewed spent the money she earned on herself alone; the majority spend it on their children—as a contribution to their college education funds, for example—while others spend it on home improvement, gifts for their husbands, a family vacation, or simply to pay off “family debts.”

One of the primary reasons that most surrogates do not spend the money they earn on themselves alone appears to stem from the fact that the money serves as a buffer against and/or reward to their families—particularly to their husbands, who must make a number of compromises as a result of the surrogate arrangement. One of these compromises is obligatory abstinence from sexual intercourse with their wives from the time insemination begins until a pregnancy has been confirmed (a period of time that lasts on average from three to four months in length, but that may be extended for as long as one year).

Surrogacy is viewed by surrogates as a part-time job in the sense that it allows a woman, especially a mother, to stay at home—to have, as one surrogate noted, “the luxury of staying home with my children,” an idea that is also attractive to their husbands. The fact that a surrogate need not leave home on a routine basis or in any formalized way to earn money is perceived by the surrogate and her husband as a benefit; the surrogate, however, consequently spends less time with her family as a result of a new schedule that includes medical appointments, therapy sessions, and social engagements with the commissioning couple. Thus surrogates are able to use the monetary compensation they receive as a means of procuring their husbands' support when and if they become less available to the family because of their employment.

The devaluation of the amount of the surrogate payment by surrogates as insufficient to compensate for “nine months of pregnancy” serves several important purposes. First, this view is representative of the cultural belief that children are “priceless” (Zelizer 1985); in this sense surrogates are merely reiterating a widely held cultural belief when they devalue the amount of remuneration they receive. When, for example, the largest and one of the most well-established surrogate mother programs changed the wording of its advertising copy from “Help an Infertile Couple” to “Give the Gift of Life,” the vastly increased volume of response revealed that the program had discovered a successful formula with which to reach the surrogate population. With surrogacy, the gift is conceptualized as a child, a formulation that is widely used in Euro-American culture—for example, in blood (Titmuss 1971) and organ donation (Fox and Swazey 1992).

The gift formulation holds particular appeal for surrogates because it reinforces the idea that having a child for someone is an act that cannot be compensated for monetarily. As I have already mentioned, the “gift of life” theme is further enhanced by some surrogates to embrace the near-sacrifice of their own lives in child birth.

Fran, whose dismissal of the importance of payment I have already quoted, also offered another, more revealing account of her decision to become a surrogate mother: “I wanted to do the ultimate thing for somebody, to give them the ultimate gift. Nobody can beat that, nobody can do anything nicer for them.” Stella, age 38, married with two children, noted that the commissioning couples “consider it [the baby] a gift and I consider it a gift.” Carolyn, age 33, married with two children and the owner of a house-cleaning company, discussed her feelings about remuneration and having a surrogate child in these terms: “It's a gift of love. I have always

been a really giving person, and it's the ultimate way to give. I've always had babies so easily. It's the ultimate gift of love."

As we can see, when surrogates characterize the child they reproduce for couples as a "gift," they are also suggesting tacitly that mere monetary compensation would never be sufficient to repay the debt incurred. Although this formulation may at first appear to be a reiteration of the belief that children are culturally priceless, it also suggests that surrogates recognize that they are creating a state of enduring solidarity between themselves and their couples—precisely as in the practice of exogamy, where the end result is "more profound than the result of other gift transactions, because the relationship established is not just one of reciprocity, but one of kinship" (Rubin 1975:172). As Rubin summarizes Mauss's pioneering work on this subject, "the significance of gift giving is that [it] expresses, affirms, or creates a social link between the partners of exchange . . . confers upon its participants a special relationship of trust, solidarity and mutual aid" (1975:172).

Thus when surrogates frame the equation as one in which a gift is being proffered, the theme serves as a counterpoint to the business aspect of the arrangement, a reminder to them and to the commissioning couple that one of the symbolically central functions of money—the "removal of the personal element from human relationships through its indifferent and objective nature" (Simmel 1978:297)—may be insufficient to erase certain kinds of relationships, and that the relational element may continue to surface despite the monetary exchange.

This formulation of surrogacy as a matter of altruism versus remuneration has also proved to be a pivotal issue in legislative debates and discussions. Jan Sutton, the founder and spokeswoman of the National Association of Surrogate Mothers (a group of more than 100 surrogates who support legislation in favor of surrogacy), stated in her testimony before an information-gathering session of the California state legislature in 1989: "My organization and its members would all still be surrogates if no payment was involved" (Ragoné 1989). Her sentiment is not unrepresentative of those expressed by the surrogates interviewed for this study. Interestingly enough, once Sutton had informed the committee of that fact, several of the members of the panel who had previously voiced their opposition to surrogacy in its commercial form began to express praise for Sutton, indicating that her testimony had altered their opinion of surrogacy.

In direct response to her testimony, the committee began instead to discuss a proposal to ban commercial surrogacy but to allow for the practice of noncommercial surrogacy. In the latter practice the surrogate is barred from receiving financial compensation for her work, although the physicians and lawyers involved are allowed their usual compensation for services rendered. In Britain, where commercial surrogacy has been declared illegal, the issue was framed often in moral terms: "The symbol of the pure surrogate who creates a child for love was pitted against the symbol of the wicked surrogate who prostitutes her maternity" (Cannell 1990:683). This dichotomous rendering in which "pure" surrogates are set in opposition to "wicked" surrogates is predicated on the idea that altruism precludes remuneration. In the Baby M Case, for example, the most decisive issue was the one concerning payment to the surrogate (Hull 1990:155).

Although surrogates overwhelmingly cast their actions in a traditional light, couching the desire to become a surrogate in conservative and traditionally feminine terms, it is clear that in many respects surrogate motherhood represents a departure from traditional motherhood. It transforms private motherhood into public motherhood, and it provides women with remuneration for their reproductive work—work that has in American culture been done, as Schneider has noted, for "love" rather than for "money" (Schneider 1968). It is this aspect that has unintendedly become one of the primary foci of consideration in state legislatures throughout the United States. Of the 15 states that now have surrogacy laws in place, the "most common regulations, applicable in 11 states . . . are statutes voiding paid surrogacy contracts" (Andrews 1992:50). The overwhelming acceptance of the idea of unpaid or noncommercial surrogacy

(both in the United States and Britain) can be attributed to the belief that it “duplicates maternity in culturally the most self-less manner” (Strathern 1991:31).

But what is perhaps even more important, the corresponding rejection of paid or commercial surrogacy may also be said to result from a cultural resistance to conflating the symbolic value of the family with the world of work to which it has long been held in opposition. From a legal perspective, commercial surrogacy has been viewed largely by the courts as a matter of “merg[ing] the family with the world of business and commerce” (Dolgin 1993:692), a prospect that presents a challenge to American cultural definitions in which the family has traditionally represented “the antithesis of the market relations of capitalism; it is also sacralized in our minds as the last stronghold against the state, as the symbolic refuge from the intrusion of a public domain that consistently threatens our sense of privacy and self determination” (Collier et al. 1982:37).

Resistance in U.S. society to merging these two realms, the domestic and the public, may be traced to the entrenched belief that the

private realm [is] where women are most in evidence, where natural functions like sex and bodily functions related to procreation take place, where the affective content of relations is primary and [that] a public realm [is] where men are most in evidence, where culture is produced, where one’s efficiency at producing goods or services takes precedence. [Martin 1987:15–16]

With the introduction of the phenomenon of public motherhood in the form of surrogacy, however, the separation of family and work has been irrevocably challenged.

Over time it became clear to me that many of the women who chose to become surrogate mothers did so as a way to transcend the limitations of their domestic roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers while concomitantly attesting to the importance of those roles and to the satisfaction they derived from them. That idea indeed accounted for some of their contradictory statements. Surrogates, who are for the most part from predominantly working-class backgrounds, have, for example, often been denied access to prestigious roles and other avenues for attaining status and power. Surrogacy thus provides them with confirmation that motherhood is important and socially valued.⁸ Surrogacy also introduces them to a world filled with social interaction with people who are deeply appreciative of the work that they do, and in this way surrogates receive validation and are rewarded for their reproductive work through their participation in this new form of public motherhood.

Of all the surrogates’ stated motivations, remuneration proved to be the most problematic.⁹ On a symbolic level, remuneration detracts from the idealized cultural image of women/mothers as selfless, nurturant, and altruistic, an image that surrogates have no wish to alter. Then, too, if surrogates were to acknowledge money as adequate compensation for their reproductive work, they would lose the sense that theirs is a gift that transcends all monetary compensation.¹⁰ The fact that some surrogates had experienced difficult pregnancies and deliveries and were not thereby dissuaded from becoming surrogate mothers, coupled with their devaluation of remuneration and their tendency to characterize the child as a gift, suggested that current theories about surrogate motivations provided only a partial explanation for what was clearly a more complex phenomenon.

From the moment she places a telephone call to a surrogate mother program to the moment she delivers the child, the balance of power in a surrogate’s personal life is altered radically. Her time can no longer be devoted exclusively to the care and nurture of her own family because she has entered into a legal and social contract to perform an important and economically rewarded task: helping an infertile couple to begin a family of their own. Unlike other types of employment, this activity cannot be regarded as unfeminine, selfish, or nonnurturant. As I have previously mentioned, the surrogate’s husband must sign a consent form in which he agrees to abstain from sexual intercourse with his wife until a pregnancy has been confirmed. In so doing he agrees to relinquish both his sexual and procreative ties to his wife and thus is understood

to be supporting his wife's decision to conceive and gestate another man's child (or another couple's child, in the case of gestational surrogacy). Once a surrogate enters a program, she also begins to recognize just how important having a child is to the commissioning couple. She sees with renewed clarity that no matter how much material success the couple has, their lives are emotionally impoverished because of their inability to have a child. In this way the surrogate's fertility serves as a leveling device for perceived, if unacknowledged, economic differences—and many surrogates begin to see themselves as altruistic or heroic figures who can rectify the imbalance in a couple's life.

fathers, adoptive mothers, and surrogate mothers

Studies on surrogate motherhood have tended to characterize the couples' motivations as lacking in complexity; in other words, it is assumed that the primary motivation is to have a child that is biologically related to at least one member of the couple (in this case the father and, in the case of donor insemination, the mother) (Glover 1990). A tendency on the part of earlier researchers to accept this theory at face value may be said to stem from the influence of Euro-American kinship ideology, particularly from its emphasis on the centrality of biogenetic relatedness, and perhaps secondarily from the fact that researchers have not had ready access to this population. Biological relatedness thus continues to be accepted as a given, "one way of grounding the distinctiveness of kin relations . . . the natural facts of life that seem to lie prior to everything else" (Strathern 1992a:19).¹¹

While genetic relatedness is clearly one of the primary motivations for couples' choice of surrogate motherhood, this view is something of a simplification unless one also acknowledges that surrogacy contradicts several cultural norms, not the least of which is that it involves procreation outside marriage. The case of surrogate motherhood requires that we go beyond the parameters that until now have delineated domains such as reproduction and kinship, to "pursue meaning[s] where they lead" (Delaney 1986:496). Although couples may be motivated initially by a desire to have a child that is biologically related to at least one of the partners, the fact that this can only be achieved by employing the services of a woman other than the wife introduces a host of dilemmas.

Fathers and adoptive mothers resolve the problems posed by surrogate motherhood through various and separate strategies. Their disparate concerns stem not only from the biogenetic relationship the father bears to the child and from the adoptive mother's lack of such a relationship, but also from the pressures of having to negotiate the landscape of this novel terrain. For the father the primary obstacle or issue posed by surrogate motherhood is that a woman other than his wife will be the "mother" of his child. The following quotations from fathers illustrate the considerable degree of ambiguity created by surrogate motherhood. They also reveal the couples' shared assumptions about American kinship ideology and how it is that "biological elements have primarily symbolic significance . . . [whose] meaning is not biology at all" (Schneider 1972:45).

Tom and his wife, for example, had experienced 17 years of infertility. Initially opposed to surrogate motherhood out of concern that his wife would feel "left out," Tom described his early reactions: "Yes, the whole thing was at first strange. I thought to myself; here she [the surrogate] is carrying my baby. Isn't she supposed to be my wife?"

Ed, a 45-year-old college professor, described a similar sense of confusion: "I felt weird about another woman carrying my child, but as we all got to know one another it didn't seem weird. It seemed strangely comfortable after a while."

Richard, age 43, a computer engineer, described similar feelings of awkwardness about the child's biological tie to the surrogate:

Seeing Jane [the surrogate] in him [his son], it's literally a part of herself she gave. That's fairly profound. I developed an appreciation of the magnitude of what she did and the inappropriateness of approaching this as a business relationship. It didn't seem like such a big thing initially for another woman to carry my baby, a little awkward in not knowing how to relate to her and not wanting to interfere with her relationship with her husband. But after Tommy was born I can see Jane in his appearance, and I had a feeling it was a strange thing we did not to have a relationship with Jane. But it's wearing off, and I'm not struck so much with: I've got a piece of Jane here.

Questions such as Tom's "Isn't she supposed to be my wife?" reflect the concern and confusion experienced by husbands, their ambivalence underscoring the continued symbolic centrality of sexual intercourse and procreation in American kinship, both of which continue to symbolize unity and love (Schneider 1968). The father's relationship to the surrogate, although strictly noncoital, is altered by the fact that it produces what was always, until the recent past, the product of a sexual union—namely, a child. Feelings of discomfort or "awkwardness," and concerns as to how to behave toward the surrogate and the surrogate's husband, stem from the idea that the father-surrogate relationship may be considered adultery by those unfamiliar with the particulars of the surrogate arrangement. For example, one program reported that a client from the Middle East arrived with the expectation that he would engage in sexual intercourse with the surrogate. One surrogate remarked on this ambivalence: "The general public thinks I went to bed with the father. They think I committed adultery!"

In addition to concerns about his relationship to the surrogate vis-à-vis the child, a father is aware that the child bears no genetic tie to his wife. The husband thus gains his inclusivity in the surrogate relationship through his biological contribution vis-à-vis the surrogate: he is both the genitor and pater; but it is the surrogate, not his wife, who is the genetrix. One of the primary strategies employed by both couples and surrogates is to deemphasize the husband's role precisely because it is the surrogate-father relationship that raises the specter of adultery or, more accurately, temporary polyandry and temporary polygyny. They also downplay the significance of his biological link to the child, focusing instead on the bond that develops between the adoptive and the surrogate mother.

the surrogate and adoptive mother bond

The adoptive mother attempts to resolve her lack of genetic relatedness to the child through what I have labeled her "mythic conception" of the child—that is, the notion that her desire to have a child is what first makes the surrogate arrangement a possibility. Cybil, an adoptive mother, explained the mythic conception in this way: "Ann is my baby; she was conceived in my heart before Lisa's [the surrogate's] body." Lucy, an adoptive mother, described the symbiotic relationship that developed between herself and her surrogate in a slightly different way: "She [the surrogate] represented that part of me that couldn't have a child."

The adoptive mother also experiences what can be described as a "pseudopregnancy" through which she experiences the state of pregnancy by proxy—as close to the experience as an infertile woman can be. As one surrogate said of this relationship, "I had a closeness with Sue [the adoptive mother] that you would have with your husband. She took Lamaze class and went to the delivery room with me." In fact, when geographical proximity permits, it is expected in the open programs that adoptive mothers will accompany surrogates to all medical appointments and birthing classes, in addition to attending the delivery of the child in the hospital (where the biological father and the surrogate's husband are also present whenever possible).

Together, the surrogate and the adoptive mother thus define reproduction as "women's business," often reiterating the idea that their relationship is a natural and exclusive one. As Celeste, a surrogate mother, pointed out: "The whole miracle of birth would be lost if she [the adoptive mother] wasn't there. If women don't experience the birth of their children being born they would be alienated and they would be breeders." Mary, a surrogate whose adoptive mother

gave her a heart-shaped necklace to commemorate the birth of the child, said, "I feel a sisterhood to all women of the world. I am doing this for her, looking to see her holding the baby."¹² Both of the adoptive mother's strategies, her mythic conception of the child and her pseudopregnancy, are—as these quotations demonstrate—greatly facilitated by the surrogate, who not only deemphasizes the importance of her physical pregnancy but also disavows the importance of her own biological link to the child. Celeste summed up the sentiment expressed by many surrogates when she stated, "She [the adoptive mother] was emotionally pregnant, and I was *just physically pregnant*" (emphasis added).

Without exception, when surrogates are asked whether they think of the child as their own, they say that they do not.¹³ Kay, a surrogate, age 35 and divorced with two children, explained her feelings in this way: "I never think of the child as mine. After I had the baby, the mother came into the room and held the baby. I couldn't relate that it had any part of me."

Mary, age 37, married with three children, similarly stated, "I don't think of the baby as my child. I donated an egg I wasn't going to be using." Jeannie, yet another surrogate, described herself as having no connection to the child: "I feel like a vehicle, just like a cow; it's their baby, it's his sperm."

The surrogate's ability to deemphasize her own biological link to the child is made possible in part by her focus upon the folk theory of procreation in which paternity is viewed as the "primary, essential and creative role" (Delaney 1986:495). Even though in the realm of scientific knowledge women have long been identified as cocreators, "in Europe and America, the knowledge has not been encompassed symbolically. Symbols change slowly and the two levels of discourse are hardly ever brought into conjunction" (Delaney 1986:509).

With the "dominant folk theory of procreation in the West," paternity has been conceptualized as the "power to create and engender life" (Delaney 1986:510), whereas maternity has come to mean "giving nurturance and giving birth" (Delaney 1986:495). Surrogates therefore emphasize the importance of nurturance and consistently define that aspect of motherhood as a choice that one can elect to make or not make. This emphasis on nurturance is embraced readily by the surrogate and adoptive mother alike since "one of the central notions in the modern American construct of the family is that of nurturance" (Collier et al. 1982:34). In the United States nurturance until now has been considered "natural to women and [the] basis of their cultural authority" (Ginsburg 1987:629). Like other kinds of assisted reproduction, surrogate motherhood is understood to "fall into older cultural terrains, where women interpret their options in light of prior and contradictory meanings of pregnancy and childbearing" (Rapp 1990:41).

For this reason surrogates underplay their own biological contribution in order to bring to the fore the importance of the social, nurturant role played by the adoptive mother. The efforts of surrogates and adoptive mothers to separate social motherhood from biological motherhood can be seen to represent a reworking of the nature/culture dichotomy. A primary strategy an adoptive mother may employ in order to resolve her lack of genetic relatedness to the child is her use of the idea of intentionality, specifically of "conception in the heart"—that is, the idea that in the final analysis it is the adoptive mother's desire to have a child that brings the surrogate arrangement into being and ultimately results in the birth of a child. The surrogate thus devalues her own genetic/physical contribution while highlighting the pseudopregnancy of the adoptive mother and the importance of the latter's role as nurturer. In this way motherhood is reinterpreted as primarily an important social role in order to sidestep problematic aspects of the surrogate's biogenetic relationship to the child and the adoptive mother's lack of a biogenetic link. This focus upon intentionality and nurturance by both surrogates and adoptive mothers is reflected in the following statement by Andy, a 39-year-old surrogate, who is the divorced mother of two children and a full-time nurse:

Parents are the ones who raise the child. I got that from my parents, who adopted children. My siblings were curious and my parents gave them the information they had and they never wanted to track down their biological parents. I don't think of the baby as mine; it is the *parents, the ones who raise the child*, that are important. [emphasis added]

The adoptive mother and father of the child attempt to resolve the tensions inherent in the surrogate arrangement, in particular its rearrangement of boundaries through the blurring of the distinctions between pregnancy and motherhood, genetic relatedness and affective bonds, wife and mother, wife and husband, and wife and surrogate mother. The surrogate's role in achieving these goals is nevertheless essential. Through the process in which pregnancy and birth are defined as being exclusively women's business, the father's role is relegated to secondary status in the relational triangle. The surrogate plays a primary role in facilitating the adoptive mother's role as mother of the child, something that is made possible by her refusal to nurture the child to which she gives birth. In the interest of assisting this process the surrogate consistently devalues her biological contribution or genetic relationship to the child.

In this process of emphasizing the value of nurturance, surrogates describe motherhood as a role that one can adopt or refuse, and this concept of nurturance as choice is for them the single most important defining aspect of motherhood. Surrogates believe that, in the case of surrogacy, motherhood is comprised of two separable aspects: first, the biological process (insemination, pregnancy, and delivery); and second, the social process (nurturance). They reason that a woman can choose either to nurture—that is, to accept the role of social mother—or choose not to nurture, thereby rejecting the role of social mother.¹⁴

As we have seen, surrogates, couples, and surrogate mother programs work in concert to create a new idea of order and appropriate relations and boundaries by directing their attention to the sanctity of motherhood as it is illustrated in the surrogate and adoptive mother bond. The surrogate and adoptive mother work in unison, reinforcing one another's view that it is social rather than biological motherhood that ultimately creates a mother. Nurture, they reason together, is a far more important and central construct of motherhood than nature. The decision on the part of the surrogate not to nurture the child nullifies the value of biological motherhood, while the adoptive mother's choice to nurture activates or fully brings forth motherhood.

Because of the emphasis couples place on having a child that is biologically related to at least one partner, I was initially perplexed to learn that less than 5 percent of couples chose to have a paternity test performed once the child had been born (although this option is offered to every couple); surrogate contracts specifically state that the couple is under no obligation to accept the child until such a test has been performed. In view of the fact that couples spend between \$40,000 and \$45,000 in fees to have a child who is biologically related to them, such a lack of interest in the paternity test is initially perplexing. When asked about paternity testing, wives and husbands typically give responses such as these: "We knew she was ours from the minute we saw her," or "We decided that it really didn't matter, he was ours no matter what."

While these statements may initially appear to contradict the stated purpose of pursuing a partially biogenetic solution to childlessness, they can also be understood to fulfill two important purposes. From the wife's perspective, an element of doubt as to the child's paternity introduces a new variable that serves to equalize the issue of relatedness. The husband is of course aware that he has a decisive advantage over his wife in terms of his genetic relatedness to the child. Although paternal doubt is always present for males, in the case of surrogate motherhood paternal doubt is thereby culturally enhanced. Allowing paternal certainty to remain a mystery represents an attempt to redress symbolically the imbalance created between wife and husband through the surrogate arrangement. Before the advent of these reproductive technologies, the "figure of the mother provided a natural model for the social construction of the 'natural' facts" (Strathern 1991:5); motherhood was seen as a single, unified experience, combining both the social and biological aspects—unlike fatherhood, in which the father acquired a "double identity." With the separation of the social and biological elements, however, motherhood has,

in the context of surrogacy, also acquired this double identity (Strathern 1991:4–5). In this way, surrogate motherhood thus produces the “maternal counterpart to the double identity of the father, certain in one mode and uncertain in another” (Strathern 1991:4).

All the participants in the surrogate motherhood triad work to downplay the importance of biological relatedness as it pertains to women. They tend to reinforce the idea of motherhood as nurturance so that the adoptive mother’s inability to give birth or become a genetrix (both wife and mother) is of diminished importance. At the same time, the husband’s relationship to the surrogate vis-à-vis the child and his biological relationship to the child, is also deemphasized. The idea that the adoptive mother is a mother by virtue of her role as nurturer is frequently echoed by all parties concerned. In this sense motherhood, as it pertains to surrogacy, is redefined as a social role. This occludes the somewhat problematic issues of the surrogate’s biogenetic relationship to the child and the adoptive mother’s lack of such a relationship.

Thus the decision not to have a paternity test performed provides additional reinforcement for the idea of parenthood as a social construct rather than a biological phenomenon. The importance of the bond that develops between the surrogate and the adoptive mother is twofold: it merges the adoptive mother (or mater) and the surrogate (or genetrix) into one by reinforcing and maintaining the unity of experience, erasing the boundaries that surrogacy creates; and, at the same time, it establishes and maintains new boundaries as they are needed between surrogate and father.

I have attempted here to show that surrogates’ stated motivations for choosing surrogate motherhood represent only one aspect of a whole complex of motivations. While surrogates do, as they say, enjoy being pregnant, desire to help an infertile couple to start a family of their own, and value the compensation they receive, there are other equally—if not more compelling—reasons that motivate this unique group of women to become surrogate mothers. Biological relatedness is both the initial motivation for and the ultimate goal of surrogacy, and it is also that facet of surrogacy that makes it most consistent with the biogenetic basis of American kinship ideology. Nevertheless, it must be deemphasized—even devalued—by all the participants in order to make surrogacy consistent with American cultural values about appropriate relations between wives and husbands. In addition to broadening the scope of our understanding about the motivations of the couples who choose to pursue a surrogate solution, I hope that this article illuminated the complexity of the couples’ decision-making process as well as of their motivation.

As we have seen, surrogates as a group tend to highlight only those aspects of surrogacy that are congruent with traditional values such as the importance of family. Like the couples, they also tend to deemphasize those aspects of the surrogate relationship that represent a departure from conventional beliefs about motherhood, reproduction, and the family. Interspersed with surrogates’ assertions that surrogate motherhood is merely an extension of their conventional female roles as mothers, however, are frequent interjections about the unique nature of what they are doing. The following quotation, for example, reflects surrogates’ awareness of the radical, unusual, and adventurous nature of their actions: “Not everyone can do it. It’s like the steelworkers who walk on beams ten floors up. Not everyone can do it, not everyone can be a surrogate.”

It is thus not surprising, in view of their socialization, their life experiences, and their somewhat limited choices, that surrogates claim that it is their love of children, pregnancy, and family, and their desire to help others that motivates them to become surrogates. To do otherwise would be to acknowledge that there may be inconsistencies within, and areas of conflict between, their traditional female roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers and their newfound public personae as surrogate mothers.

In conclusion, it can be said that all the participants involved in the surrogacy process wish to attain traditional ends, and are therefore willing to set aside their reservations about the means

by which parenthood is attained. Placing surrogacy inside tradition, they attempt to circumvent some of the more difficult issues raised by the surrogacy process. In this way, programs and participants pick and choose among American cultural values about family, parenthood, and reproduction, now choosing biological relatedness, now nurture, according to their needs.

notes

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1. A couple, William and Elizabeth Stern, contracted with a surrogate, Mary Beth Whitehead, to bear a child for them because Elizabeth Stern suffered from multiple sclerosis, a condition that can be exacerbated by pregnancy. Once the child was born, however, Whitehead refused to relinquish the child to the Sterns, and in 1987, William Stern, the biological father, filed suit against Whitehead in an effort to enforce the terms of the surrogate contract. The decision of the lower court to award custody to the biological father and to permit his wife to adopt the child was overturned by the New Jersey Supreme Court, which then awarded custody to William Stern, prohibiting Elizabeth Stern from adopting the child while granting visitation rights to Mary Beth Whitehead. These decisions mirrored public opinion about surrogacy (Hull 1990:154).

2. See Rapp (1978:279) and Gordon (1988:3) for a historical analysis of the idea of the demise of the American family.

3. For a more extensive review of the literature, see, for example, Ginsburg and Rapp 1991.

4. As of 1994, only seven of the original ten are now in existence. I have changed the names of programs, surrogates, couples, and directors in order to protect their identities.

5. Over the years I have interviewed surrogates who had been employed by closed programs, interviewed the administrative assistant at the largest closed program, and spoken with program directors who arrange either a closed or open arrangement (depending upon the couple's choice). Many of the data presented in this article were collected in the open programs.

6. See, for example, Ragoné 1994 for a detailed account of the role of the surrogate mother program.

7. One of the programs has, however, recently increased its rate to \$15,000. Surrogates also receive an allowance for maternity clothing, remuneration for time lost from work (if they have employment outside of the home), and reimbursement for all babysitting fees incurred as a result of surrogate-related activities.

8. The quantifiable data reveal that surrogates are predominantly white, an average of 27 years of age, high-school graduates, of Protestant or Catholic background, and married with an average of three children. Approximately 30 percent are full-time homemakers, and those surrogates who are employed outside the home tend to be employed in the service sector. A comparison of surrogate and couple statistics reveals pronounced differences in educational background, occupation, and income level. The average combined family income of commissioning couples is in excess of \$100,000, as compared to \$38,000 for married surrogates.

9. For example, Gullestad (1992) observed that girls who work as babysitters in Norway tended to emphasize the extent to which their work was motivated by nurturance, deemphasizing the importance of the remuneration they received.

10. Surrogate motivations are diverse and overlapping, and surrogates express empathy for infertile couples as well as joy experienced during pregnancy.

11. Commissioning couples consistently articulate the belief that surrogacy is a superior alternative to adoption. Many couples have attempted to adopt, only to discover the shortage of healthy white infants and age limit criteria of adoption agencies; see Ragoné 1994. Surrogacy not only provides them with the highly desirable partial-genetic link (through the father), but it also permits them to meet and interact with the biological mother—something that is usually not possible with adoption.

12. When Robert Winston, a pioneer in assisted reproductive technologies in Britain, revealed that he had facilitated a surrogate arrangement that involved two sisters, the case tended to elicit from the public "strong and sentimental approval" (Cannell 1990:675).

13. Prospective surrogates who find themselves unwilling to dismiss their biological link to a child frequently opt for gestational surrogacy rather than abandon the idea of surrogate motherhood altogether, even though the risk of medical complication is thereby greatly increased. Over a three-year period I observed that the rate of gestational surrogacy had increased from less than 5 percent to close to 50 percent at the largest of the surrogate mother programs and at another well-established program. I am currently in the process of researching gestational surrogacy.

14. Giddens's theory of structuration is understood as a corrective to both the exclusively rigid structuralist worldview (which tends to eliminate agency) and phenomenologists, symbolic interactionists, and

ethnomethodologists who overemphasize the plasticity of society (Baber 1991:220). Giddens has articulated the view that "all structural properties of social systems are enabling as well as constraining" (1984:177), a phenomenon that can be seen in surrogate arrangements when surrogates and couples focus upon certain elements or aspects of parenthood while deemphasizing others. The way in which these different idioms of nature and nurture are emphasized and deemphasized also parallels and substantiates Strathern's observations (1992c) about the selective weight of nature/nurture in the kinship context.

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