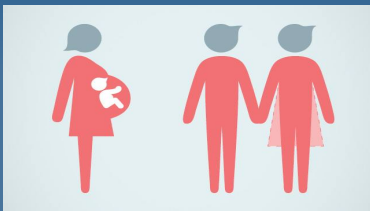


A Blessed Event: How Intended Parents Conceptualize



Transnational Surrogacy

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Abstract

This study analyzes the language intended parents use when they disclose their plans to have a child through surrogacy to their friends and family. Through narrative interviews and content analysis of Facebook posts, blog, and chat forum posts, I found that many of the IP narratives, both online and in-person, utilized animal metaphors in explaining surrogacy to family members and young children. Two other elements also emerged, first that it was important not only *what* the IPs said when they shared their decision to have a child through surrogacy but also *when*. Most IP's sought advice as to when they should tell people rather than what they should say. Second, the question of who controls the narrative—whose story it is to tell—given that the agentive role is now shared between two “mothers.”

Introduction

The research that has been done on the narratives of surrogates and IP's tends to focus on the way either party understands the other within the surrogacy framework (Vora, 2013) or the ways intended parents moralize surrogacy (Rudrappa & Collins, 2015).

My research looks at how IP's communicate their decision to hire a surrogate to their friends and family. The language that intended parents use at these crucial junctures in their lives reveals the frameworks implicit in their understanding of the transnational surrogacy agreement.

Interview

Catherine and Damien are a couple from Australia who had a child via Canadian surrogate, Pamela. Catherine went through 14 cycles of in-vitro fertilization before their IVF doctor recommended surrogacy. Damien also found that he was positive for the Huntington's Disease gene. The only way they were able to have a child was through surrogacy, where both the eggs and sperm were from donors.



Terms

Gestational surrogacy occurs when a hired woman agrees to undergo IVF, where the egg will be that of the intended mother or another egg donor and the sperm will be that of the intended father or a donor.

A commercial surrogate receives a predetermined amount of money and is generally chosen from a pool of candidates by the intended parents.

International surrogacy is an arrangement in which the intended parents and surrogate are from different places. Because states impose legal frameworks on such arrangements, surrogacy comes to be illegal or restricted in some countries (e.g. Britain, Japan, and Australia), leading many to go elsewhere (e.g. India or Canada) where there are fewer governmental regulations and surrogates cost comparatively less.

Narrative Theory

“Personal narrative is a way of using language or another symbolic system to imbue life events with a temporal and logical order” (Ochs and Capps, 2001, p. 2). I use narrative theory to explore how narratives act as both a way to curate but also perhaps navigate the contradictions of surrogacy experiences. “Narrative activity becomes a tool for collaboratively reflecting upon specific situations and their place in the general scheme of life” (p. 2).



Reproscope

Inhorn (2010, 2011) expands Appadurai's (1996) notion of ‘scapes’ to include the ‘reproscope.’ The idea of scapes addresses “the fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics,” which Appadurai argues can be explored through his five global ‘flows’: ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes (p. 32-33).

Reproductive tourism, as we might particularly call transnational surrogacy, might be thought of productively as a more complex “reproscope.” The reproscope is a way of looking at reproduction in a global context that highlights the interconnectedness of the other ‘scapes.’

Analysis

In interviewing Catherine and Damien, as well as conducting a content analysis on Facebook groups, blogs, and IP chat rooms, I found two things: first, that it was important not only *what* the IPs said when they shared their decision to have a child through surrogacy but also *when*. I wonder what factors (e.g., how far along the surrogate's pregnancy is, or how public the IPs efforts to conceive have been) most affect this decision. Second, what emerges from my analysis so far is the question of who controls the narrative, given that the role of “mother” is now shared between two women. An intended mother seems to feel compelled to (re)assert control over a pregnancy that is a shared experience. While a surrogate mother is tasked with reconciling the tension between the commodity relationship and the maternal relationship, knowing that the baby is not hers.

Many of the IP narratives, both online and in-person, utilized animal (e.g. marsupial) metaphors in explaining surrogacy to family members and young children. Animal metaphors are useful because they are a common foundation of knowledge on which to describe surrogacy but describing a child as an animal can be seen either as a way for the IP's to separate themselves from their child as well as to emphasize their natural connection to the child.

Bibliography

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