

## **‘A Nine-Month Head-Start’: The Maternal Bond and Surrogacy**

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*This article considers the significance of maternal bonding in people's perceptions of the ethics of surrogacy. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Scotland with people who do not have personal experience of surrogacy, it describes how they used this ‘natural’ concept to make claims about the ethics of surrogacy and compares these claims with their personal experiences of maternal bonding. Interviewees located the maternal bond in the pregnant woman's body, which means that mothers have a ‘nine-month head-start’ in bonding with their children. While this valorises it, it also reproduces normative expectations about the nature and ethic of motherhood. While mothers are expected to feel compelled to nurture and care for their child, surrogate mothers are supposed to resist bonding with the children they carry. This article explores how interviewees drew on the polysemous nature of the maternal bond to make nuanced claims about motherhood, bonding and the ethics of surrogacy.*

**Keywords:** maternal bonding, surrogacy, nature, ethics, motherhood

### **‘A Nine-Month Head-Start’**

One afternoon towards the end of my fieldwork in northeastern Scotland, I was sitting talking with Erin. I had spent quite some time with her and her family over the previous eighteen months and had got to know her well. Now, she had agreed to let me record an interview with her about her thoughts on surrogacy. While her daughter was at nursery school, we talked for a couple of hours – about surrogacy, but also about Erin's personal experience of motherhood, which had come somewhat unexpectedly as she had been told that she was unlikely to conceive a child after sustaining serious abdominal injuries in a car accident as a teenager.

Erin, who had always wanted to be a mother, conceived her daughter on honeymoon and her pregnancy was a wonderful surprise. She described

feeling a 'special bond' starting to form with her unborn daughter from the moment she had a positive pregnancy test:

[F]or me, part of this special bond was, all the way through the pregnancy, my intestines were being kicked to bits, I was the one on the loo twenty times a day, but it was actually something that [my husband] could only participate in to a point. You know, I could say, 'ooh look, come and feel this baby kicking', but you already have a psychological and emotional bond ... if you like, I got a nine-month head-start on the bloke concerned and I think you can't compete with that and I think that makes mummies that carry their own children special in their own right.

By emphasising her intimate, physical connection to her daughter through her phrase 'a nine-month head-start', Erin located her bond with her in both a different time and place, which her husband could not access because of his different physiological relationship to her. In this article, I will explore the effects of this idea that mothers experience a unique and special bond formed during pregnancy with their children in relation to people's own experiences and observations and in terms of their judgements about the ethics of surrogacy.

This article is based on twenty months' ethnographic research in northeastern Scotland between 2006 and 2007, where I investigated what surrogacy, which is a practice that has provoked intense and sustained public and ethical debate in the UK and elsewhere, means to people who, like Erin, are not personally involved in it and how their ethical claims about surrogacy relate to their more everyday concerns and values. I was based in a small, picturesque village on the Moray Firth coast. The people described in this article are white, middle-class and university-educated, they work in the public or voluntary sector and they are largely left of centre in their politics.

I collected data through participant observation and interviews. As a

participant observer, I was involved in the lives of around sixty people and carried out semi-formal interviews with thirty women and men of various ages. I used this methodology to formulate a contextualised analysis of how people make ethical judgements, relating my observations of their everyday practice to the claims they made about surrogacy in interviews, tracing the connections between their moral values and ethical decisions in claims and in practice. This paper takes one particular aspect of what they said about surrogacy, which is the problem of surrogate mothers (not) forming a bond with the children they carry for the intended parents. Rather than treating their thoughts about maternal bonding surrogacy in isolation, it also relates their observations and experiences of maternal bonding from their own lives in order to both provide context to their judgements on surrogacy and to show the contingent and strategic ways in which they drew upon the idea of the 'natural' phenomenon of the maternal bond. This focus on maternal bonding emerged from the interviewees' responses.

The participants in my research talked about surrogacy as an ethical issue, discussing the right and wrong ways in which it should be handled, typically using the language of nature and naturalness and focusing on the emotional ramifications it might have for those involved. They assumed that the motivations of intended parents in surrogacy arrangements were self-evident: they 'naturally' wanted to have children 'of their own' (i.e. to whom at least one of them was genetically related). In our conversations they focused much more on surrogate mothers, who seemed to be the most problematic parties in these agreements, as they challenge fundamental precepts about

both the 'given' and 'made' aspects of motherhood – and, by extension, femininity and kinship.

The maternal bond appeared to the participants in my research to be a natural phenomenon, and therefore stable, universal and automatic. In fact, in our discussions about surrogate mothers bonding or not bonding with the children they carry showed, people formulated and expressed it in different, and sometimes contradictory, ways. Like nature, which is itself a highly polysemous concept, they appealed to the concept of the maternal bond as if it were stable, whilst deploying it creatively to make particular and partisan claims. It is this multifaceted quality, as well as its association with the natural, that gives the maternal bond its rhetorical and moral purchase. Because a woman who has gestated and given birth to a child is supposed to give that child up to another person's care at birth, surrogacy destabilises the popular status of the maternal bond as a natural phenomenon arising inevitably out of embodied experience; it is this aspect of the ethical dilemmas provoked by surrogacy that I will concentrate on here.

While there is no shortage of work on motherhood and variant forms of mothering within the social sciences, the profundity of its significance for how we think about ourselves, and our relationships with others, can sometimes get lost in the cracks between academic disciplines and in our own assumptions about the naturalness of this primary relationship. Some time ago, Lee Drummond (1978) examined earlier forms of 'mother surrogation' including the work of domestic nannies in raising and rearing middle- and upper-class English children.<sup>1</sup> He showed that, not only is there variation in motherhood between different cultures, but that even within English society,

the mother concept is, and has historically been, 'internally inconsistent' (1978: 40). Traditional practices like nannying, fosterage and wet-nursing split maternal roles between different women and brought financial reward into maternal labour; historically, 'blood ties' have been emphasised or de-emphasised for particular purposes and different aspects of motherhood have been more or less defined by physical or emotional nurturance.<sup>2</sup>

The purchase that the mother-child relationship has had on psychological theory suggests the deep significance of this relationship to how we conceptualise identity, sexuality, kinship and gender, amongst other things. From Freud to Bowlby, psychoanalysts and psychologists have assumed that unhealthy attachments between mother and child create higher risks of mental, and even physical, ill health for the child later in life. Attachment theory may have lost some of its former authority for psychologists, yet ideas about mother-child bonding are inherent in popular parenting culture (see Davis 2008; Eyer 1992; Faircloth 2013; Lee et al 2014; Suizzo 2004; Taylor 1998; Wall 2001) and current social and public policy is underlain by an assumption that a positive early experience of mother-child bonding is vital to giving children the right start in life (see the discussion in Lee et al 2014).

Scholars working on breastfeeding culture in the Western world have shown the kind of moral judgements that inflect motherhood and how important concepts of nature are in assessing and accounting for parenting practices (see Faircloth, this issue). Glenda Wall has noted that, in contemporary Western culture, 'there is much moral authority inherent in the cultural construct of nature, authority that often goes unquestioned and

unchallenged' (2001: 596). Motherhood is thought to be driven by *natural* forces, from the nebulous concept of maternal instinct to the influences of hormones such as oxytocin on the body. Along with this, there has been an increasing shift towards a 'child-centred' intensive parenting philosophy which prioritises the needs of children over their parents, yet which also reproduces an expectation that mothers will be the primary caregivers and which demands high investments of time, money and emotional labour (see Hays 1996; Faircloth et al 2013; Lee et al 2014).

As this brief review of relevant literature shows, nature and ideas of naturalness are key to ideas about motherhood and, in particular, *good* mothering. Drummond's analysis reminds us that there is a long history of maternal labour being split between different women, but also that perceptions of such practices depend on contemporary discourses and ethics. Wet nursing became popular in the context of a particular classed division of labour but it was also possible because the idea of maternal bonding had less salience at the time. As the literature on parenting and breastfeeding shows, in a time of heightened awareness of assisted reproductive technologies, public concern about parenting practices and more general fears about the future of the natural world (Dow 2013), motherhood has become a focus for wider anxieties about the future. Ideas about maternal bonding reflect a sense that relationships need nurturing, that responsibility needs fostering and that nature can help guide good mothering.

## **A Vital Difference**

Before discussing the importance of maternal bonding to surrogacy for the people I interviewed in northeastern Scotland, in this section I will outline their sense of the importance of maternal bonding more generally by describing their own experiences and observations of maternal bonding. For participants in my research, whether or not they have children, the maternal bond is a psychological and emotional attachment that arises naturally and inevitably out of embodied experience of pregnancy. Like Erin, they all thought of the maternal bond as compelling mothers towards particular kinds of behaviours and relationships, including specifically a sense of ultimate responsibility for the dependent child.

Nina was in her early twenties and worked for an animal conservation charity. She comes from the Highlands and her partner is in the RAF. She told me that she planned to have children in the future and that if she had trouble conceiving 'naturally' she would prefer to use assisted conception to adopting, because she was concerned that it would not be 'enough' for her:

Yeah, it's just carrying on the family line, I guess, and I don't know if you'd ever have quite the same bond with a child that you'd adopted, even from a baby, with a child that had actually come from you and you'd had inside you for nine months. I think that's – it might be different for men and women – because, you know carrying a child for nine months, you're bonding with it for all that time. Whereas, adoption, you don't really get the whole thing, you just get the baby, you don't get the whole experience that goes with it. I think just being pregnant, before you even get the child, is a big part of it, and something that every woman maybe wants to experience.

For Nina, being pregnant is an important part of being a woman, but carrying and giving birth to a child is also about safeguarding the formation of a bond between mother and child.

I had many conversations with mothers who recounted stories of difficult

births and admitted the pressures, as well as the rewards, of parenthood. Many of these comments suggested that bonds between mothers and children need to be worked on, implying that, while maternal bonding may be something that begins 'naturally', its full development is not always inevitable or automatic, but must be nurtured, though the specific embodied experience of pregnancy also implies that women are predisposed towards such nurturance. This is consistent with Kelly Davis' (2008) research amongst mothers of different ages in Scotland. Davis found that bonding with their children was something that mothers expected to happen, but that in reality it entailed work and time. For the mothers she interviewed 'maternal instinct' was on the one hand a complex of emotions, especially protectiveness and deep love, which seemed to arise naturally, while on the other hand it was the intimate and personal knowledge of one's child that comes through knowing and caring for her. As Erin talked more about her experience of motherhood in her interview, she told me that, 'Women, biologically, are more genetically predisposed to nurture in a far greater way, a different way from men'. She told me that she sees female nurturance as both a 'role' and a 'predisposition' and the bond between mother and child is doubly special because it is *both* 'natural' and 'social'.

Kirsty is a medical researcher in her thirties. At the time of our interview she had recently returned to full-time work following maternity leave. Her husband looks after their daughter full-time. This reversal of typical parental roles was unique amongst those I met during fieldwork. While most would approve of such arrangements, they assumed that mothers would usually act as the primary caregivers for children. Indeed, Kirsty told me that, if she could,



she would have stayed at home with her daughter, but because her husband is disabled, it makes more financial sense for her to be the working parent in their family.

During the course of our interview, I asked Kirsty if she perceived differences between her and her husband's parenting styles. She said:

I think that men and women approach parenthood differently in the time leading up to it. Women have the nine months where they're getting used to the idea – your body's being taken over by this parasite that you've got growing inside you. Men, although they kind of know what's going to happen, it doesn't really hit them between the eyes until the moment that the baby arrives and then, in our case, it was a bit of a shock to the system. He was like, 'oh my god, I'm a dad!', but in a good way.

In our case, we approach parenthood in exactly the same way. We have pretty much the same views on what is the right or wrong thing to do. *The difference is that when my daughter cries, I have a physical reaction to it, not just an emotional reaction.* It's not quite so bad now she's a year old, but you can feel the hormone rush in response to the crying, which he doesn't have, so I respond more quickly and a little bit more anxiously, and he's a little bit more chilled out – but that's not a bad thing! I don't think other than that that we approach it any differently. (Emphasis added)

Kirsty was keen to emphasise what she and her husband share, which is the values they bring to parenthood, yet she nonetheless identified a difference in the physicality of her bond to their daughter, referring, like others, to the nine-month period of pregnancy to differentiate her experience as a parent and the bond with her daughter from her husband's, though she suggested this is an initial difference that will ultimately be evened out. While she used a physiological idiom for both of them, she perceived a different time span for the process of bonding, so while her body was 'taken over by this parasite' from conception, her husband was not physically 'hit ... between the eyes' by fatherhood until their daughter was born, which was a 'shock to the system'.

Erin saw motherhood as one of the most important and transformative experiences of her life. In particular, she described being 'hit with this massive responsibility, or a notion of responsibility, which just explodes when the child arrives'. Other interviewees also assumed that feeling such a close connection to her child would drive her mother to take ultimate responsibility for caring for and nurturing her. Given that they believed the maternal bond to be a natural phenomenon, it is perhaps unsurprising that most believed this would have an effect on how mothers and fathers cared for their children. This is demonstrated by Amy's comments. At the time of our interview, Amy was in her early thirties, single, did not have children and worked in environmental education. She told me:

I think the mum has a stronger bond at the beginning, but I think that's just to do with carrying the baby around for nine months. But then, the dad seems to be kind of more doting and spoils the child a lot more sometimes. So, I think the mother – it's kind of stereotypical – but the mother always seems to be the more kind of practical one and does the basic care of the child, whereas the dad is usually the one that comes in and spoils the children and plays with them.

Interviewees were evenly split in whether they thought that a mother's bond to a child would be stronger or more special than a father's throughout their child's life or if this difference would eventually even out. But, while people disagreed about how far-reaching the effects of the mother-child bond may be in time, they all assumed that the physical, hormonal and emotional realities of pregnancy and labour offer the right conditions for a 'special' relationship to grow between mother and child. Their repeated references to the nine-month gestation period show the significance of time in maternal bonding: while maternal bonding is set in motion by natural and physical processes, it must be nurtured to develop properly.

While they were supportive of gender equality, in talking about the maternal bond, the participants in my research foregrounded biologically determinist ideas of gender difference to make a claim for the specialness of motherhood. They saw this specialness as bringing rewards and costs. By associating the responsibilities of parenthood with the maternal bond, which is seen as being closely related to the physical intimacy of pregnancy and birth, it becomes both a biological and ethical expectation for a mother to form a close bond with her child and this has implications for the way in which parenthood is thought to properly impact on her life (see also Ginsburg 1989; Rapp 1999). Given the strong and recurrent feelings of bonding which people expected to be generated during pregnancy and which shape the ensuing relationship between parent and child, what happens when pregnancy, bonding and parenting are separated between different women?

### **Surrogacy and the Maternal Bond**

The continued coverage of surrogacy arrangements in the media and the ongoing debate over surrogacy in feminist philosophy (see Anderson 1990; Corea 1985; Stanworth 1987; Zipper and Sevenhuijsen 1987 for some early and influential examples and Cooper and Waldby 2014 for a more recent approach) show how surrogacy provokes intense cultural, ethical and political anxieties (see Cook et al 2003; Edwards et al 1993; Strathern 1992a, 1992b, 2003). This continues to this day, though the focus of research most recently has turned to the burgeoning transnational surrogacy industry.

Clearly, surrogacy can be distressing and exploitative for those involved and as such it has rightly received attention from bioethicists, feminist scholars and from the point of view of reproductive justice. But, on the level of public debate and ethical judgements in the UK which is my focus here, the reason why it is so contentious is because it upturns taken-for-granted beliefs about the nature of motherhood and challenges normative ideas about motherhood, kinship and femininity. Where once maternity seemed certain because a child's mother could only be the woman who had given birth to her, with surrogacy and ova donation, opportunities to have more than one 'biological' mother are opened up (Konrad 2005; Ragoné 1994; Strathern 2003), though as discussed above, practices like wet-nursing show that motherhood has never been entirely singular. However, as Sarah Franklin (2013) has recently shown, despite the challenges that assisted reproductive technologies present to deeply held views about kinship, parenthood and gender, in practice they often have the effect of reinforcing heteronormative models of family formation and conjugal relationships.

Surrogacy, like other assisted reproductive technologies, has traditionally been studied by social scientists in infertility clinics and surrogacy agencies, and from the point of view of those using this reproductive technology (see Ragoné 1994; Roberts 1998; Teman 2003, 2010; Thompson 2001). One exception to this rule has been Susan Markens' (2007) comparative study of surrogacy regulation in the states of New York and California. Of particular relevance to my analysis here is Markens' focus on 'discursive frames' in the debates in each state. In both New York and California, both pro- and anti-surrogacy camps referred to 'the best interests

of the child' and the 'freedom to choose' in making opposing arguments (see Edwards et al 1993 for some parallels in the British debates around assisted conception in the 1980s and Ginsburg 1989 on the American abortion debate). Similarly, we shall see in the following discussion that the participants in my research appealed to apparently stable concepts of genetics, biology and nature, but to make different and in some cases contradictory claims.

As Markens' analysis shows, surrogacy has an important place in the public imagination as an ethical 'problem' that crosses, or at least stretches, ethical boundaries. Viewed from the outside, it seems to signify changing family constitutions, scientific and technological progress, the ability of people to overcome what once seemed natural or god-given conditions and the possibility that women's reproductive capacities might become subject to market forces. It is this gap between public and policy discussions of surrogacy on the one hand and personal experiences that my research addresses, by asking what people who do not have a personal stake in surrogacy, but who are aware of the practice through media and public debate, think about its ethics.

Although there are suggestions that informal surrogacy arrangements have always existed, surrogacy decisively entered the British public arena in the 1980s with the case of Kim Cotton, the UK's first, and so far only, 'commercial' surrogate mother. Cotton, a married mother of two, carried a baby on behalf of a Swedish couple who paid her £6,500 in an arrangement organised by an American surrogacy agency working in southeast England, though in fact she received far more money for selling her story to a

newspaper (Cotton and Winn 1985). Her case provoked a media storm and led to the hasty establishment of the Surrogacy Arrangements Act (1985), which bans profit-making agencies from working as surrogacy 'brokers', the advertising of surrogacy services and the payment of compensation 'beyond reasonable expenses' by intended parents to surrogate mothers.

Fenella Cannell (1990: 674) has argued that Cotton was a culturally problematic figure because she had failed to bond with the child she carried as a surrogate. Despite the fact that she was thereby fulfilling the obligation she had made to the intended parents, in the contemporary uproar, her actions came to represent quintessentially 'bad' and 'unnatural' maternal behaviour. Maternal bonding is crucial in people's judgements about surrogacy because it is both a template for good feminine and maternal behaviour and a concept in which, as Cannell says, the moral and biological seem to be fused in one relationship.

Surrogacy disturbs normative ideas of maternal bonding, maternal responsibility and more widely, feminine behaviour, because a surrogate is supposed, and in some sense morally obliged, to relinquish the child she has borne to someone else's care. With surrogacy, the expectation that a pregnant woman will naturally 'bond' with the child she is carrying collides with her obligation to uphold her bond of trust<sup>3</sup> to the intended parents. This exposes the fact that maternal bonding might not be as natural and automatic as might be assumed. However, if a surrogate mother does bond with the child she is carrying, she will find it difficult, or perhaps impossible, to relinquish her to the intended parents. Thinking about maternal bonding from the perspective of surrogacy is therefore an opportunity to examine and

explore the nature, and the naturalness, of the maternal bond more carefully and I turn now to what the participants in my research thought about maternal bonding in surrogacy.

Fiona, a divorced teacher in her early fifties with one adult daughter, was generally pro-surrogacy. She was, however, concerned that a surrogate would find it difficult to hand over a baby and saw this as the greatest risk for all parties to a surrogacy arrangement. She said:

I know that I could never have handed over a baby that I had borne. I would find that completely impossible, and that's not a rational decision based on any kind of belief, I just simply couldn't do it. ... Some women don't have nearly such a strong maternal sense. To me, it would be like cutting off my hand, I couldn't do it.

Luke, a graduate student in his late twenties with no children, described the bond between a surrogate mother and child in a very similar manner to that used by others to describe the bond between a conventional mother and child:

I can fully understand the attachment after having gone through all the process of having the baby growing inside you must, you can't shut yourself off from that, you can't treat it like it's a job, so I can understand the emotional attachment. ... It must be very natural for a mother to want to keep the baby.

Luke suggests that it is natural that a surrogate should form a bond with the child she has carried, so it would be unnatural for her to 'reject' this bond by relinquishing her to her intended mother. Yet, to do so would be to abrogate her obligations towards the intended parents.

Roughly half of interviewees interpreted the hypothetical 'nightmare scenario' of a surrogate mother refusing to relinquish the child as a question

of whether the child was, in fact, 'hers' (cf. Warnock 1985: 47). Nina said quite bluntly, 'Well, it's not her baby, is it? ... Biologically, it's not hers. I mean, she's [just] carried it'.<sup>4</sup> Nina's assumption that gestational surrogacy, where the surrogate carries a foetus which has been conceived from the intended parents' gametes using IVF, was the most common form of surrogacy, suggests a desire to minimise the more culturally problematic aspects of surrogacy. In fact in the UK amongst heterosexual intended parents it is not as common as 'traditional surrogacy', in which the surrogate is artificially inseminated with the intended father's sperm.

Andrew, a conservation volunteer in his mid-twenties who had no children, also argued that a gestational surrogate who lacks a genetic link with the child would have a less valid claim to motherhood:

I think that, while the nine month period is very, very important, I don't think that, if she doesn't have any genetic link and she's been aware from the first instance that it was almost a business relationship – and I'd imagine they'd sign contracts these days, anyway – I don't think I would grant custody [to the surrogate] if I were a judge in that situation.

Surrogacy contracts are legally unenforceable in the UK, which prioritises the gestational mother's claim to parenthood until a Parental Order has been issued transferring parental rights to the intended parents. Britain has therefore experienced a small number of legal cases concerning surrogacy. In the fairly recent case of *TT (a minor)* ([2011] EWHC 33 (Fam)), a British judge found in favour of a surrogate mother who claimed the baby she had carried for the intended parents as hers. Mr Justice Baker summed up his position, saying, '[the] natural process of carrying and giving birth to a baby creates an attachment which may be so strong that the surrogate



mother finds herself unable to give up the child' (quoted in Gamble and Ghevaert 2011). Interestingly, in his judgement, the judge did not refer to the fact that the surrogate was a 'traditional surrogate' and was therefore genetically related to the child she had carried, but focused instead on the 'attachment' created by the 'natural process' of pregnancy and labour, implying, in line with Fiona and Luke's judgements, that this in itself is a sufficient basis from which to claim motherhood.

Luke and Fiona expected a surrogate mother to form a bond with the child because the maternal bond arises naturally out of the embodied experience of pregnancy. According to this reasoning, it is difficult to completely refute either a traditional or gestational surrogate mother's claim to the child since, as Luke said, 'it must be very natural for a mother to want to keep the baby'. Nina and Andrew, meanwhile, claimed that the maternal bond comes from genetic kinship, so it would be impossible to deny a traditional surrogate's claim to motherhood, while gestational surrogacy is acceptable as the intended mother's claim represents a more comfortable balance of both biological and social motherhood. In making these distinct claims, each set of participants draws on the concept of the maternal bond as a natural – and therefore given – phenomenon.

### **A Natural Feeling**

The idea that a surrogate mother might decide to assert parental rights over the child she has carried for the intended parents was often expressed by interviewees as a 'change of mind', based on the assumption

that feelings of attachment to the child might 'kick in', causing her to feel that she was, after all, her mother. In talking about surrogacy and maternal bonding, interviewees often mentioned feelings and emotion. They described emotions as physical, embodied experience and the maternal bond as a feeling of attachment that compels a mother to respond to her child appropriately.

When I talked to Lizzy, a student in her late teens without children, about surrogacy, she mentioned that a friend of hers has once offered to act as a surrogate in the future for a mutual gay male friend of theirs if he ever decided to have children. Lizzy told me she admired her friend's generosity, but explained that she would not be able to do it herself: 'I am a very emotional person and I am not sure if I would be able to cope emotionally being a surrogate mother', adding, 'after going through the emotional rollercoaster of having a child and then to give it to someone else even if that was already established beforehand, I don't think I would be able to do it'.

Many believed that some process of psychological assessment would be appropriate before a surrogacy arrangement was set up, suggesting that counselling should be provided to the parties involved (but especially the surrogate mother), not only to provide emotional support but also as a means of vetting potential surrogates by weeding out those who are not emotionally fit for the role (see also Hirsch 1993). This idea that the assessment of a potential surrogate's psychological state may act as a competent measure of her fitness for the role is commensurate with British clinical practice, as surrogates and intended parents are expected to attend repeated counselling sessions throughout the entire process (Brinsden 2003). By insisting that the

surrogate be emotionally strong, in itself a difficult thing to measure, people implicitly set limits on surrogacy's availability.

The participants in my research agreed that 'altruism', or feelings of love and sympathy towards the intended parents, was the best motivator for a surrogate mother but the vast majority also believed that surrogate mothers are entitled to receive some payment for their service. As Cannell has pointed out, if surrogates can claim to be *motivated* by altruism towards the intended parents, even if they are also paid, then it may be easier to frame their behaviour as acceptable within wider cultural ideologies of femininity.

In her classic study of commercial surrogacy arrangements in the USA, Helena Ragoné (1994) observed that intended parents are encouraged to nurture their surrogates, thereby cultivating feelings of attachment between them in order to make their obligation to relinquish the child when she is born all the more compelling. The participants in my research assumed that if she were motivated by altruism then a surrogate would feel better about what she had done, because she could emphasise her motivation to help someone over the fact that she had 'failed' to form a maternal bond and 'given up' a child. For those who were in favour of surrogacy, the surrogate's 'unnatural' relinquishing of the child she has carried is obviated by her altruistic act of helping another, with whom she has, or has come to form, a bond of sisterhood or friendship that can replace the bond she might have formed with the child. In the British context, which prohibits payment of the surrogate mother, this could also provide a 'reward' for the surrogate mother.

As Catherine A. Lutz (1988) has argued in her classic work, emotions confound the Cartesian splitting of mind and body, because they are thought

to originate in the mind but be felt in the body. Because they are seen in Western cultures as arising out of an individual's particular psyche, their social nature is rarely appreciated. As Lutz (1988: 4) argues, we need to recognise that emotions are as much an index of social relations as external manifestations of individuals' inner states. As this case of people speculating about the emotional state and drives of surrogate mothers shows, the language of emotions is an important clue to wider ethical values and 'structures of feeling' (Williams 1977). The example of surrogacy also reminds us that ideas about motive and human nature are gendered – women are expected to be naturally compelled towards altruism and this is exemplified by motherhood.

Another important point made by Lutz is that emotions are strongly associated with nature and biology, which makes them appear given and inescapable. Here, when people talked about the emotional strength of the surrogate mother, they were not only connecting mind and body through the language of emotions, but also talking about nature. The concerns people expressed to me about the consequences of a surrogate forming a bond with the child and her emotional state, particularly at the moment of postpartum handover, show the cultural and moral significance of this defining act in the surrogacy arrangement. Surrogacy is troubling because the surrogate is expected to resist a natural feeling that is supposed to be so strong and compelling that refuting it would be emotionally damaging.

## **Conclusion**

Surrogacy is interesting to social scientists precisely because, in the debates that surround it, norms of motherhood, femininity and kinship become, in Strathern's (1992a) terms, 'literalised'. The ethical dilemmas provoked by surrogacy demonstrate that motherhood is heavily laden with moral values which inscribe expectations for proper behaviour and relationships and which are articulated in the language of nature, genetics, biology and embodied feeling. Any challenge to maternal bonding, like the relinquishing of a child by a surrogate mother, seems to represent a threat to our most basic relationship and source of identity.

The data presented here demonstrate that, for the participants in my research, the maternal bond is a natural phenomenon with powerful effects on our understandings of kinship and gender and on the organisation of parenting. It shows that maternal bonding, while 'natural', needs to be worked on. Putting time, care and effort into bonding with their children is the primary act of maternal labour and responsibility.

Various anthropologists have shown the way that those personally involved in surrogacy arrangements use concepts like nature and maternity strategically, in order to place surrogacy within a more socially acceptable frame (see Ragoné 1994; Thompson 2001). As we have seen here, maternal bonding is not a rigid ideology but one that encompasses a range of both given and made aspects. Nonetheless, its naturalness was never questioned – for the people I interviewed in Scotland, the maternal bond can still be 'natural' whether it is based in gestational or genetic kinship. Nature has long been associated with automatic and instinctual behaviours, but, as this special issue argues, it is also a concept with great ethical force and moral authority

in the contemporary Western world. It is little wonder, then, that the idea of maternal bonding has such potency.

While the maternal bond is a particularly robust concept, participants in my research disagreed about its specific form and effects. They did not suggest that fathers lack a connection with their children, nor did they doubt that intended parents in surrogacy arrangements would bond with their children, but they did assume that mothers who have carried and given birth to children experience a qualitatively different – or ‘special’ – bond. They differed on whether this is an initial difference or a more long-term one. Similarly, while this difference was closely associated with the physical experience of maternity, different people emphasised various aspects of this, including pregnancy, labour, breast-feeding and responses to the sound of a child crying.

The maternal bond informs expectations about mothers’ different responsibilities and identities in all spheres of life. Locating it in the pregnant woman marks off motherhood as special, unique and somewhat mysterious. This provides mothers with pleasurable and rewarding feelings of attachment to their children and access to a highly valued status. But the idea of the ‘nine-month head-start’ has significant ramifications for how parental labour is organised. The term ‘bond’ encompasses notions of physical constraint and obligation as well as emotional attachment. Good mothering is thought to entail self-sacrifice, selflessness and a strong sense of responsibility; these expectations are compelled by the feelings of attachment that women are expected to form with their children from pregnancy onwards. It therefore seems ‘natural’ that mothers will also be the primary caregivers of their

children, because they feel physically and emotionally compelled to do so by their bond with their child.

For the participants in my research, the surrogate mother epitomised the anomalous and ethically fraught nature of surrogacy, and talking about her 'unnatural' act of rejecting a child she had borne made their ideas about maternal bonding and the nature of motherhood explicit. So, while surrogacy seems on the one hand to challenge fundamental ethical values and axioms of kinship and parenting, it also causes people to reproduce normative ideas about the nature and ethic of motherhood.

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<sup>1</sup> Of course the particular ideas about motherhood and surrogacy discussed here are located in a particular socio-economic milieu. Not only are the participants in my research middle-class, but it is generally assumed that assisted conception including surrogacy is most commonly sought by middle- and upper-class intended parents. Though it is difficult to get accurate figures on this, there is some evidence to suggest that at least in commercial surrogacy, surrogates are more likely to be working class than intended parents (see Ragoné 1994). Furthermore, while the public debate around surrogacy crosses class and party political boundaries, on the whole, the most influential figures in terms of policy have been lawyers, journalists and ethicists. This is reflected in much of the anthropological work on assisted conception, with the notable exception of Edwards' (2000) work in Lancashire.

<sup>2</sup> See also Strathern (2003; 1992b) for a discussion of whether the ethical dilemmas presented by surrogacy are as novel as they might at first appear.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, the word 'bond' has a further, financially inflected meaning, which is worth bearing in mind given the contentious debate over commercial surrogacy.

<sup>4</sup> Notably, when talking about her own reproductive plans as quoted in the previous section, Nina emphasised the importance of experiencing pregnancy, yet with surrogate motherhood she sidelines gestation.