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REL 358R

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03/30/23

Class 10: Surrogacy Continued

Throughout this class, I have felt a little bit out of my wheelhouse at times as I did not grow up particularly religious, nor have I felt confident in my knowledge about the histories and/or ideologies of pretty much any religion. However, I feel as though my academic background lends itself well to interpreting and forming an opinion on both the readings for this week. As a psychology major, I found Elly Teman's *The Social Construction of Surrogacy Research: An Anthropological Critique of the Psychosocial Scholarship on Surrogate Motherhood* particularly interesting, as well as quite compelling. There were some aspects of her piece that I do not know if I am quite in total alignment with, but overall my opinion on what I think the psychological underpinnings of surrogate motherhood were represented through Teman's piece. In addition to my psychological academic background, I am also completing a minor in women's, gender, and sexuality studies. And though I consider myself a feminist, I found myself disagreeing with Katz's central argument in her piece *Reproductive Technologies and Surrogacy: A Feminist Perspective*. I think Katz's feminist perspective on surrogacy represents a fairly antiquated, western-centric idea of feminism, motherhood, and family. There were some lines of thinking in her piece that I did find compelling, but I found her summative argument troubling, in my opinion. With that said, I can see how she lands at her stance through the various leading arguments in her piece. It is just not how I view pregnancy and motherhood.

My overall interpretation of these two pieces is that Katz represents more the essentialist view of motherhood, that leads her to feel strongly against surrogacy. Teman represents a constructionist view of motherhood that leads her to a much more supportive stance on surrogacy. For myself, I tend to lean more toward the social constructionist side on, frankly, most things. Therefore, I found myself aligning much more with what Teman had to say. But, I do think, often, social constructionists are very dismissive of essentialist arguments and I do think there is value in considering and hearing essentialist arguments, especially when thinking about the topics we discuss in this class. I do not think we will ever decipher or agree on the true meaning of why we do what we do or what we should do, but I think most people would agree that it's not all black and white—whether it's arguing nature versus nurture, essentialism versus constructionism, etc., we definitely cannot definitively say it is one or the other one-hundred percent. Although there are arguments each way.

For Katz, her main argument can be summed up in her statement that a woman's "nurturing of that child with the blood and nutrients of her body establishes her parenthood of that child" (1607). She argues that the biological and emotional experience of pregnancy itself establishes the relationship of mother and child. Katz also describes the experience of infertility as a disability. I am very curious as to what people think about this statement. Although I have never experienced what the process of infertility is like for those who desire to have children, I imagine it takes quite a physical and emotional toll. However, I do not think infertility can quite be likened to a disability, because at the end of the day, people choose to confront their infertility with their choice to try and have a child. I do not see infertility as something that affects one's ability to go about the world with ease; however, the emotional toll that infertility causes could cause someone to experience severe depression or potentially other mental health issues that

maybe would really inhibit their ability to go about their lives without assistance. She argues that infertility as a disability does not entitle them to utilize another healthy person's body, though she says that she understands the urge.

Returning to Katz's main argument though about how the process of pregnancy is the determination of motherhood, I can understand her ideology about the intimate experience of pregnancy between the child and whomever carried it, but in my opinion, I think the bulk of the bonding and the actual establishment of the mother and child relationship comes in those critical early years outside of the womb when the child experience affection and safety provided by whomever is actually raising the child. I think the nine months of pregnancy, though it is definitely significant and long, pale in comparison to the close and intimate relationship that occurs between parent and child for the 18+ years after the child is born. I do think it is important to consider the psychological and physical implications of the process of pregnancy for the surrogate mother, but I simply do not think that carrying a child in one's womb makes that person a mother, I think motherhood consists mainly of what comes after pregnancy. I am familiar with some other feminist arguments against surrogacy that involve feelings about seeing a surrogate woman's body as just a tool or commodity, which is a feminist argument I can see and follow much more than I can with Katz feminist perspective. I think Katz provides us with valuable perspective though as to how some people view the process of pregnancy and motherhood; she sees it through a very naturalistic lens and it is helpful to read her perspective to have a more empathic understanding for why some people view parenthood differently than I do, and maybe some of you, too.

Teman's main argument follows that previous research pathologizing the psychology of surrogate motherhood has been inaccurate and not representative of the experience or

characteristics of most surrogate women. Teman states that the “majority of surrogates have reported high satisfaction with the process and report no psychological problems as a result of relinquishment” (1104). She also described the “subversive nature of surrogacy” that puts people in a state of unease because of the emphasis on western ideas of family and motherhood, and that this emphasis has affected research that has pathologized surrogate mothers (1105). Teman focuses on the accepted “fact” that it is “natural” for women to bond with their child during pregnancy and how this idea has affected the way that surrogate mothers are othered, despite the fact that she found that the majority of surrogates are “conservative, moral women who independently make this non-normative decision” (1107). It is difficult for me to say definitively what I think about the idea of bonding during pregnancy as I do not have a ton of background on the subject nor have I had the experience myself, but I do find myself aligning with Teman’s characterization of surrogacy that places less emphasis on the idea of the bond that occurs during pregnancy. I imagine that the “natural” bond that many women have with the children they carry and subsequently parent, comes from the knowledge that they will be that child’s caretaker for life. Teman also describes how psychological issues for the surrogate may actually stem from the dynamic between the surrogate and the prospective parents. This makes a lot of sense to me as I have to imagine there is a complex dynamic of control going on between the parties, as well as the point Teman makes about the potential loss of companionship between the surrogate and prospective parents after the baby is delivered. I do not necessarily believe the idea that there is no bonding whatsoever that occurs during pregnancy, but I think Teman’s results indicate that that bond is insignificant enough during pregnancy that relinquishment of the child is not all that difficult for surrogate mothers. Overall, I align much more with Teman’s social constructionist view on pregnancy and motherhood that lead to a supportive view of surrogacy; however, I do

think it is crucial to understand and acknowledge a more naturalistic argument like Katz because pregnancy, parenthood, and surrogacy are all such personal experiences that I think to attempt to understand why people may be for or against surrogacy, we need to value the different lines of thinking.