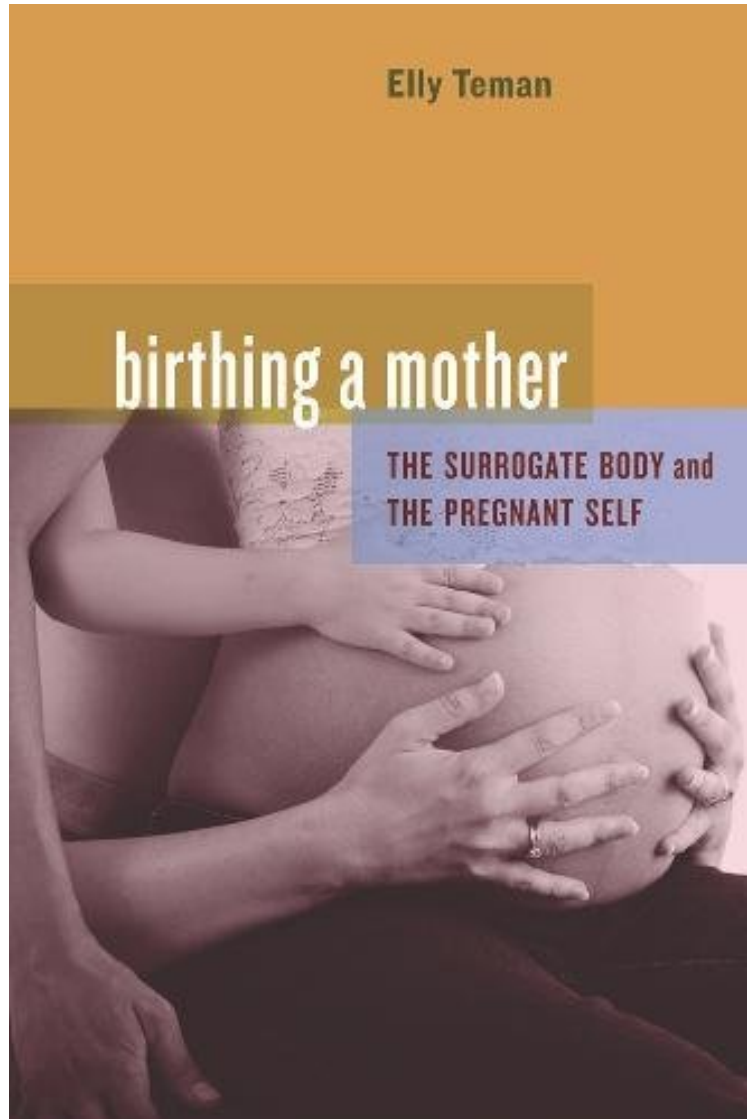


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Birthing a Mother: The Surrogate Body and the Pregnant Self

Elly Teman

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Elly Teman : Birthing a Mother: The Surrogate Body and the Pregnant Self before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Birthing a Mother: The Surrogate Body and the Pregnant Self:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An insightful, well crafted and well written research of surrogate motherhoodBy Ron DayanA rare view into the world of gestational surrogates, a vital contribution to the academic study of the field of surrogacy. Highly recommended.0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. This book is a

great leisure read if you're interested in learning about an ...By GKThis book is a great leisure read if you're interested in learning about an American observing Israeli surrogates. Otherwise don't go for it. It's long, it's complicated and there's a bunch of other ethnographies out there.1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Thoughtful and compelling workBy Z. B.In recent years, surrogacy has been both sensationalized and understudied. Elly Teman's *Birthing a Mother* is a welcome corrective; it is a thorough and fascinating ethnographic exploration of Israeli surrogacy in the context of the regulatory practices of the pronatalist state. Luckily for the reader, Teman does not ask what personality traits distinguish surrogates from other women, or whether the practice is good or bad. These questions have been asked often enough and never brought us any closer to understanding surrogacy as a social practice. *Birthing a Mother* documents the lived experience of the women involved in third-party reproduction and probes into their understandings of bodily boundaries, motherhood, nature, love, and gift in the Israeli political, cultural, and institutional context. Teman's empathy for both surrogates and intended mothers is admirable, and it never clouds her analytic acuity. The Israeli and American approaches to surrogacy are in many ways opposites. The Israeli state actively supports, and tightly controls surrogacy contracts and mandates a rigorous screening process while American surrogacy is mostly unregulated and contracts are often unenforceable. American agencies and clinics encourage both traditional and gestational surrogacy and the use of "donated" gametes in pursuit of success; in Israel the vast majority of intended parents are the genetic parents and only gestational surrogacy is allowed. Israeli medical professionals and the public trivialize gestation in favor of genetics and Teman's intriguing analysis shows how in this context surrogates think of themselves as carriers of the host fetus. The surrogate's body and self are no longer synonymous; women separate themselves from the pregnancy that belongs to the genetic mother. Intended mothers see this the same way; they personalize genetics in their claim to motherhood. Strikingly, no one refers to the "unborn child," an expression most Americans now take for granted, often forgetting that this phrase is the political child of the pro-life movement. In the Israeli cultural and political context, embryos and fetuses are not regarded as babies, and women are cautious not to bond with them before birth. And once the surrogate gives birth, the state again takes an active regulatory role, effectively prescribing which woman is in the maternity ward (the intended mother, sometimes even dressed in hospital gown), thereby officially recognizing her as the only mother. Surrogates agree; they birthed not only a child but also a mother. Israeli women - only single mothers are eligible - initially embark on surrogacy for money. Accepting compensation is not nearly as stigmatized as it is in the US, and the Israeli organizational structure legitimizes payments. Yet during the course of the state-controlled selection process, the subsequent IVF attempts and pregnancy, these women, just like their American counterparts I study, bond with their intended mothers and focus on giving them a child. One of the book's significant contributions is its challenge to the binary understanding of surrogacy as either altruistic giving or the commodification of life. The market logic does not subtract from the sacrifice, "the payment does not eclipse the gift" (p. 211). Teman marshals an impressive range and depth of scholarship to tease out the meanings and implications of women's narratives. She also takes a nuanced stance in favor of state regulation. Assisted reproduction is here to stay, raising many troubling questions. Scholars may condemn surrogacy, advocate only uncompensated arrangements, or argue that the free market is the best regulator of such reproduction. But whether we like it or not, only consistent regulation guarantees some basic protection for women who bear children for others and for couples who hire surrogates when it comes to medical bills, payments to surrogates, and the resulting children. Elly Teman writes clearly and compellingly about this very complex topic; the book is enjoyable for non-academic readers interested in contemporary issues. This rich and thought-provoking work is a must-read for students of assisted reproduction; I also recommend it to anyone interested in cultural conceptualization of nature, family, and motherhood and in the politics of reproduction.

Birthing a Mother is the first ethnography to probe the intimate experience of gestational surrogate motherhood. In this beautifully written and insightful book, Elly Teman shows how surrogates and intended mothers carefully negotiate their cooperative endeavor. Drawing on anthropological fieldwork among Jewish Israeli women, interspersed with cross-cultural perspectives of surrogacy in the global context, Teman traces the processes by which surrogates relinquish any maternal claim to the baby even as intended mothers accomplish a complicated transition to motherhood. Temans groundbreaking analysis reveals that as surrogates psychologically and emotionally disengage from the fetus they carry, they develop a profound and lasting bond with the intended mother.

Winner of the 2010 Eileen Basker Memorial Prize Winner of the 2010 Diana Forsythe Prize Winner of the 2010 Stirling Prize in Psychological AnthropologyFrom the Inside Flap*Birthing a Mother* is brilliant and beautifully written. It showcases Temans great skills as an ethnographer and her sophisticated analytic mind. She portrays all her subjects with empathy and compassion, whether surrogates, intended parents, or professionals otherwise involved in the reproductive procedures she documents. Charis Thompson, author of *Making Parents* Teman deftly portrays surrogacy as a joint project through which one woman assists another, through sacrifice and instruction, to become also a mother. Heather Paxson, author of *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and Family Planning in Urban Greece*