



A critical approach to surrogacy: Reproductive desires and demands

by D. W. Riggs and C. Due, Abingdon, Routledge, 2018, 147 pp., £37.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-138-12365-6

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BOOK REVIEW

A critical approach to surrogacy: Reproductive desires and demands, by

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Riggs and Due offer an engaging read and a compelling critical view of surrogacy, which they explore through a capitalist perspective. They offer eight chapters introducing a historical perspective on surrogacy, the language commonly used to discuss it, as well as their position on the topic. I was particularly drawn to chapter three (*woman who act as surrogates*), chapter 4 (*intending parents*), chapter five (*children and surrogacy*) and chapter six (*surrogacy clinics*) for their perspectives of the lived experiences of those involved with surrogacy. Their book forms part of Routledge's Critical Approaches to Health series and I read it using multiple lenses: that of an American and British systemic family psychotherapist and social worker with professional and personal experiences of altruistic surrogacy and adoption, and that of someone who personally understands social infertility, and who has positive experiences of non-genetic relatedness through adoption and anonymously donated genetic material. My book review aims to capture some of the complexity of an ever-changing way to start a family.

The consumer/commercial nature of surrogacy is a consistent theme throughout the book and the authors offer a polarising debate highlighting how such arrangements can potentially be exploitative and marginalising for all involved within surrogacy arrangements. The book offers a constructive and honest critique of surrogacy. However, it pays little attention to surrogate autonomy, altruism and the strong desire for intended parents to have children. The central focus on capitalism is bolstered by a good range of research supporting the authors' argument. Throughout the book, the authors provide useful quotes from surrogates, intended parents and clinicians which highlight their view of the binary concept of *love and money*. With medical, social and legislative advancements, there is always an opportunity to make money at the expense of others and this book deconstructs this well.

The book takes a global perspective of surrogacy but misses the nuance of cultural and local constructs. Reading it from a UK perspective the book does not fully capture the current British legislative framework on surrogacy which does not permit commercial surrogacy arrangements. The authors take a sceptical view of any altruistic or compensatory agreement. Throughout the book, I wondered about their professional and personal experiences of surrogacy, and I remained curious as to whether they had had negative experiences which may have motivated them to take such a critical view. Nonetheless, more analysis of the impact of medical and social infertility would have been beneficial, as well as for the authors to contextualise their positioning on subjects such as genetic relatedness, especially in relation to gay men who choose surrogacy over adoption.

This book does offer a useful historical insight into surrogacy which explores this phenomenon well from a capitalist perspective. The danger, however, of such a critical stance is that it may cast doubt that more equitable and ethical arrangements can exist, which they most definitely do. If you are wanting to read a book about happy families made through surrogacy then this is not the book for you. This is an academic piece which sets out to critique surrogacy and it achieves that well. I found some of the language used uncomfortable at times and I was left wondering why the authors do not capture or reference when surrogacy does work.

However, I recognise that perhaps focusing on positive stories may also result in overlooking the potential exploitative nature of surrogacy that the authors aimed to capture.

This book is timely with surrogacy being debated all around the world. Some countries are changing the regulation especially in relation to international surrogacy arrangements. There are certain truths about women's rights and the rights of children which should be universal, but there is a big cultural context which the authors do not address in any significant depth. The complexity of the debate is much greater than what they can reasonably be expected to consider in such a short book. Their perspective is not the definitive answer, but it does offer a vital contribution to the continuously evolving field of fertility, reproduction, and transnational healthcare. Therefore I do recommend that everyone involved with surrogacy reads this book (professionals, clinics, surrogates and intended parents) to guarantee they are fully informed of both sides of the debate, and especially for professionals and assisted reproduction clinics to ensure that people are put before profit.

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