

Laura Harrison
Brown Bodies, White Babies: The Politics of Cross-Racial Surrogacy
New York: New York University Press, 2016 (ISBN 978-1-4798-9486-4)

Reviewed by Emma Tumilty, 2017

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Laura Harrison's book *Brown Bodies, White Babies: The Politics of Cross-Racial Surrogacy* provides readers with a comprehensive and insightful analysis of surrogacy using both intersectional theory and discourse analysis, before concluding with a call for activism and engagement. The writing is clear and evocative, demonstrating thoughtfulness and consideration for the realities of women's lives. Arundhati Roy states that "There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless,' only the deliberately silenced or preferably unheard" (Roy 2004). Harrison throughout this work draws on research and sources that include the voices, where they are available, of the women who provide reproductive labor and products for others. Through these voices we hear nuance and conflict in the motivations and emotions felt by those who act as surrogates about their roles, their options, and their relationships to the fetuses they carry and then often ultimately bear. This is in contrast to the dominant discourses Harrison evidences in the US setting on surrogacy and the motivations of surrogates.

This book is not only a must-read for anyone interested in the area (and therefore likely well-versed in the literature), but also for those coming to surrogacy or intersectional reproductive rights philosophy with no prior knowledge. Harrison provides sufficient background information when describing practices, technologies, cases, and social settings, so as to bring every reader along: that is, new readers to the topic with understanding and more knowledgeable readers without boredom.

The book begins with an introduction to the field and an overview of ground to be covered, illustrated nicely with a pop cultural reference. This reference is then used to highlight the difference in how surrogacy is portrayed and practiced. Chapter 1 sets the scene by introducing the Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) that make surrogacy possible, explaining the distinction between types of surrogacy (traditional and gestational), and outlining the various feminist arguments that have arisen in response to both ARTs and surrogacy. -These responses, which position ARTs either as disruptive (for example, Stanworth 1987 or Sawicki 1991) or as oppressive tools (for example, Dworkin 1983 or Rothman 2000) of the patriarchy, have generally focused on the commodification of reproduction, the restriction of a women's freedom and autonomy, the opportunity for more freedom and autonomy, or issues of roles and identities in

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family-making, without specifically including an intersectional perspective. -Harrison²'s treatment of the range of arguments and depth of analysis is sufficient for its place in the overall argument being made.

In chapter 2, Harrison describes how we talk about surrogacy, surrogates, and those who work with surrogates. Using media sources from the United States setting, she qualitatively analyzes various narratives and arrives at three main themes: "women-helping-women" "regulation," and "kinship." These themes describe how people talk about surrogacy in ways that help to make it benign (women-helping-women), that legitimize and offer safety to those involved (regulation), and separate surrogates from the fetuses they carry for would-be parents (kinship). Harrison²'s analysis describes how these themes work as a sort of pink-washing to portray surrogacy as a service between equals, with regulation largely intended for the protection of would-be parents over that for surrogate mothers, who are often of a different racial identity and mostly of a different socioeconomic class. A media analysis, previously done by Susan Markens using an intersectional approach (Markens 2012), describes similarly the way the overlying hegemonic narrative operates for surrogacy on different women based on their race and class. Framing of surrogacy as opportunity or exploitation, and narratives around altruism and empowerment, differ based on women²'s overall positions of power in society. Harrison²'s themes concur with these findings while describing them somewhat differently and in more depth. I also found of interest in the theme of "regulation" Harrison²'s survey of feminist group websites, blogs, and so on, and their lack of—or minimal—reference to surrogacy and surrogates. There is no speculation here on why this might be the case and no evidence to suggest what reasoning might lie behind it, which is a failing of the work.

Chapter 3 explores the relationship among social relations, science, and truth-making, arguably one of the most relevant for our current times. - In it Harrison shows that when deciding issues of reproductive labor-sharing, scientific facts and understandings are reframed or ignored to suit hegemonic norms. Through the use of both historical analysis of wet nursing and related discourses of the time, as well as the analysis of modern-day legal surrogacy cases, Harrison makes clear the distortion of science for the purpose. Although Harrison does argue that ARTs create some disruption in the traditional system, this disruption is minimized through the use of scientific truth malleability for social/political causes. This malleability is particularly evident in the persistence of the concept of race as scientifically grounded rather than socially constructed.

This point is further developed and evidenced in chapter 4, where Harrison analyzes surrogacy and egg-donor websites, making explicit the presumptions of heritability and desirability evident in the distinction between those who donate eggs (reproductive products) over those who carry fetuses (reproductive labor). -Harrison²'s analysis also points to the issue that, as reproductive products become marketable commodities, they are removed from historical social connections reflecting family ties and traits, and instead betray, through issues of supply and demand, the traits society values.

Moving beyond the US, chapter 5 analyzes reproductive tourism in India. This "tourism²²" is explained through various regulatory, economic, and practical restrictions (waiting lists and so on) that may exist for would-be parents in their home countries and states. - Harrison describes the problems of power in these relationships, leaving surrogates little opportunity for redress

should something go wrong. Problems can of course also occur for would-be parents, but they more often have recourse because of their financial and social status. The arguments already outlined in chapter 4 that rationalize kinship for intended parents on the basis of scientific ideologies are supported in this setting when using surrogates from India who are genetically distinct and “other.” This intersection of race and socioeconomic status makes these women particularly vulnerable to exploitation in surrogacy. Harrison is careful to draw on ethnographic research on Indian women to include their voices in understanding this exploitation and presenting a variety of viewpoints. In describing reproductive tourism in India, Harrison concludes that the parallels between these practices and those occurring in the US would support the case for identifying surrogacy practices in the US as reproductive tourism.

It is in this chapter that the force of Harrison’s arguments come together. -The threads of socioeconomic vulnerability, cultural and social narratives dictating roles and motives, and scientific facts regarding race and kinship distorted through hegemonic lenses are nicely tied together in describing this surrogacy environment. -While commercial surrogacy organizations may continue the narrative of altruistic motives for surrogate mothers and apply these to Indian surrogates, research referenced by Harrison, as well as work by Raywat Deonandan and his colleagues and more recently by Kristin Førde, suggests that personal and family survival, along with cultural narratives of self-sacrifice and women’s roles, play into these decisions (Deonandan, Green, and Van Beinum 2012; Førde 2016).- It is particularly interesting that would-be parents, in seeing the situation as “win-win” (Førde 2016), see their own actions as altruistic—that is, in getting what they want, they are helping these women who act as their surrogates by providing resources they would otherwise not have. -Such views are easier to self-justify when the distance both metaphorically and physically between the would-be parents and surrogates is so stark. Would-be parents, whose exposure to India prior to surrogacy is unlikely to have been in-depth and reflective, can more easily construct explanations in their minds that help support a win-win perception. -As Deonandan and his colleagues observe, however, the money provided to surrogates is not necessarily life-changing (Deonandan, Green, and Van Beinum 2012); it is much less than the global average for surrogate mothers, and this is in the context of an “industry” that in India is worth by some estimates \$400 million (Saigal 2015).

Harrison’s conclusion brings the book together and links it to the broader picture of reproductive rights in the US, showing how efforts to restrict abortion using arguments regarding fetuses have direct impact on those championing reproductive rights for infertility issues. These two groups (reproductive rights groups for abortion access and reproductive rights groups for infertility issues) may not have previously seen their overlapping interests, so this conclusion proves useful in uniting women in championing reproductive justice.

Throughout the book Harrison weaves feminist theory, empirical sources, discourse analysis (of media, websites, cases, and so on), scientific information, and women’s lives to illustrate a powerful perspective on the intersectional issues of assisted reproduction and surrogacy. -At no point does she make a strong case for either of the previously dichotomized positions of ARTs as disruptive good or ARTs as oppressive tools of patriarchal and neoliberal ideologies. Her analysis, rather, provides us with an insightful, comprehensive view of the issues that arise around gender, race, sexuality, and class in relation to surrogacy, considering both science and social practice.

What was of particular interest to me, and I imagine to many feminists considering social change, is a thread that runs throughout the book arguing convincingly (and reaffirming) that regardless of the hopes pinned to disruptive technologies (of any kind, context) to change the status quo, hegemonic norms and practices subvert these technologies to reinforce their own power. –Although many may have thought that surrogacy and related ARTs may have changed family roles and opened opportunities for new family-making, in reality, without the work done to directly affect dominant structures/systems that place people in oppressive relations of power to one another (whether by race, class, gender, or sexuality), such changes are generally minor and reserved for a status-jumping few (in this case, those who can sometimes transcend their identities through access to wealth). Harrison's call in her final chapter to unite various groups interested in the reproductive justice frontlines, whether that be abortion advocates or infertility advocates, ensuring that people of color are in leadership so that race is not ignored is something we should heed and take active steps to realize.

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