

Surrogate motherhood



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In the past adoption was the only alternative for infertile women who wished to have children. Advances in technology however have created new options for women who have a defective uterus or defective ovaries. Two alternatives that are gaining popularity are straight surrogacy and host surrogacy. In straight surrogacy, or traditional surrogacy, the surrogate mother is impregnated with the sperm of the intended father by way of artificial insemination. In these cases, the surrogate mother not only carries the child but is genetically linked to the child as well. She however relinquishes her role of social mother to the intended mother.

In host surrogacy the intended parents produce an embryo through in vitro fertilization, which is then transplanted into the surrogate mother who develops and gives birth to the child. In host surrogacy the surrogate mother is not genetically linked to the child, however she is the child's birth mother. In either case once the baby is born the surrogate mother is to turn the baby over to the child's legal parents. The alternatives of surrogacy have created a variety of both benefits and problems for those involved as well as raising a number of questions for society as a whole.

Surrogacy has added a great deal of confusion to the already complicated problem of determining who the "real" parents of a child are that began with adoption and egg and sperm donations. It is no longer as simple as who is genetically related to the child or who gives birth to the child, but rather is greatly determined by circumstance. Genetically a child may have only two parents however the child can have in essence three mothers, or two fathers: a genetic mother or father who donated the egg or sperm, a

surrogate mother who carried and developed the child, and a mother or father who raises the child.

Surrogate motherhood often requires legal involvement because of the complexity of the question of who the “ real” parents are. Before being carried out, a contract must be agreed upon to establish who the legal parents are, the amount of money to be paid to the surrogate mother, visitation rights of the surrogate mother, if any, and a number of other terms and conditions to be followed preceding and following the birth of the child. Despite laws governing surrogacy problems and questions can still arise that can be difficult to resolve.

Among them being, what happens if a surrogate mother decides she does not want to go through with the pregnancy and opts for an abortion? , or if a straight surrogate mother who is the genetic and birth mother of the child decides she wants to keep the child? Is it ethical to use legal action to force a woman to continue the pregnancy, or a straight surrogate mother who is both the biological and birth mother of a child to hand the baby over to the intended parents against her will, because it is called for in a contract?

Such a question was raised when Beth Whitehead was hired as a straight surrogate mother and artificially inseminated with William Stem’s sperm. There was a possibility that Mr. Stems wife, Elizabeth, had multiple sclerosis and could suffer temporary paralysis during pregnancy. Surrogacy therefore seemed like the best alternative. Things however did not go as planned. When Whitehead gave birth to a girl on March 27, 1986, who she named “ Sara Elizabeth Whitehead” she refused to give her up to the Stems.

This resulted in a custody battle that ended in 1988 when a family court in New Jersey awarded custody to the biological father and visitation rights to the surrogate mother. The case attracted a great deal of attention from the public, with mixed feelings about the outcome, and demonstrated the deep rooted emotional and ethical problems that can be created by surrogate motherhood. Such extreme cases however are rare and for the most part surrogacy is successful, with problems being minimal. In fact research shows most cases are successful.

In the largest and most representative study of surrogate mothers so far, 34 women were interviewed approximately one year after they had given birth. After handing over the child, eleven of the woman experienced only mild difficulties, one reported moderate difficulty, and the rest reported not having any difficulties. After a year only two reported experiencing occasional mild difficulties, while the rest reported none. In none of the cases did any of the woman report feeling that the child was like their own.

As it was put by one of the woman, she never viewed it as handing over the child, instead she considered she was handing back the child. Surrogate mothers often report feeling a positive sense of self worth, that “ seeing their commissioning couple’s faces once the child is born makes the whole process worthwhile. ” Surrogacy has not only benefited many couples hoping to have children, but surrogate mothers wishing to give the gift of life to a child as well. Surrogacy however has also raised ethical questions in determining who claims the right as the legal parent of a child, sometimes creating problems that can be difficult to resolve.

Surrogacy should therefore be handled with caution and careful planning to avoid potential problems, and allow for the greatest success during and after the pregnancy for those involved. Bibliography " Surrogacy" © Adoption Media, LLC 1995-2006 <http://adopting.adoption.com/child/surrogacy.html> " Surrogate mothers have no doubts about handing over the baby" Science Blog. Copyright © 2004 " Surrogacy" Wikipedia® trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. Heeral Joshipura " Surrogate Motherhood and Technology" Michelle Vadeboncoeur " Surrogate Motherhood"