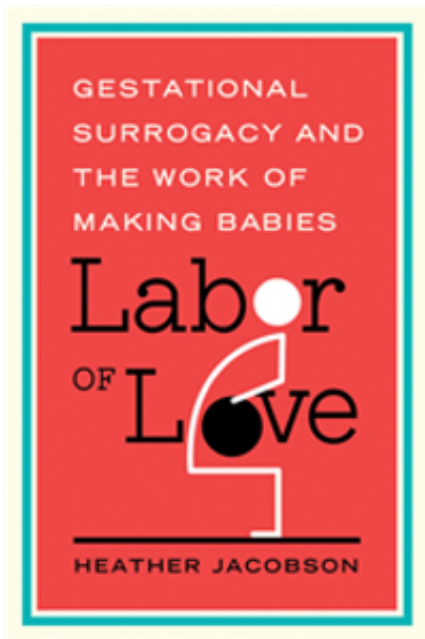


# Study finds gestational surrogacy often misunderstood, unevenly judged

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For more than 30 years women have been working as surrogates for strangers who are unable to bear children.

A University of Texas at Arlington researcher has found that although the majority of today's surrogates are compensated for their services, many of the women are reluctant to think of themselves as workers and outsiders often misunderstand their vocation.

Heather Jacobson, associate professor of sociology, offers the first book-length ethnographic examination of gestational surrogacy in the U.S. in "Labor of Love: Gestational Surrogacy and the Work of Making Babies (Rutgers University Press)." Jacobson explores the complexities of surrogacy and conflicted attitudes that emerge when the act of bringing a child into the world becomes a paid occupation.

"Many people have a difficult time understanding why someone would want to carry a baby for a stranger," said Jacobson, whose interest in surrogacy stems from her studies of family formation. "I found most surrogates in my study loved being a surrogate. They were interested in helping others have a child because they enjoyed being pregnant. They saw it as something they were good at – a skill set."

Elisabeth Cawthon, acting dean of the College of Liberal Arts, said Jacobson's research provides valuable insights about reproductive technology affecting Americans and changing how we think about maternity, family and the labor involved in giving birth.

"Dr. Jacobson does a comprehensive job of dissecting the complex set of social attitudes underlying gestational surrogacy, its role in health and gender studies," Cawthon said. "There are a lot of misconceptions about infertility, reproductive technologies and surrogacy that are reinforced in the media, popular television programs and movies; and, this work will help advance the larger conversation about these issues and help to correct misinformation."

Cawthon added that the research is representative of UTA's commitment to advancing health and the human condition as outlined in UTA's [Strategic Plan 2020: Bold Solutions | Global Impact](#).

In her studies, Jacobson found surrogates and others involved in surrogacy having to navigate basic misconceptions about the medical

procedures involved and the motivations and experiences people have in surrogacy.

The research is based on in-depth interviews conducted between 2009-2015 with surrogates that Jacobson connected with through surrogate agencies and various digital platforms. In addition to surrogates, she interviewed, their family members, the "intended parents" who employ surrogates, infertility doctors, directors of surrogacy agencies, family lawyers, and various other professionals who work to facilitate gestational surrogacy – an advanced [reproductive technology](#) that allows women to be surrogates without contributing their own eggs.

The surrogates in her study were between the ages of 25 and 45 at the time of the interviews, with the oldest surrogate having given birth to a "surro-baby" at the age of 41. All were paid, from \$15,000 to \$35,000. Most of the women were married, financially stable and all had children of their own. Most were Caucasian, but there were also Hispanic and African-American surrogates in the study. Jacobson noted that the majority of the surrogates in her study were not stay-at-home mothers, as often assumed, but worked outside of the home in what are called the 'caring professions'—such as nursing, teaching, social services or social work.

Surrogacy itself is not federally regulated, so there is no federal data on the numbers of surrogacies in the United States, Jacobson said. According to the book, there are an estimated 1,500 surrogate births per year in the U.S.

"I found it interesting that surrogates are reluctant to think of this as work because they engage in a tremendous amount of labor in helping to produce a child for people who desperately want one," Jacobson said. "They re-arrange their lives and the lives of their families, and if the

pregnancy goes well, it can be a year-long investment—if there are complications, it can be a many year investment."

In the book, Jacobson investigates why not only [surrogates](#), but the surrogacy industry, are reluctant to think about surrogacy as work.

Jacobson joined the UTA Department of Sociology and Anthropology in 2006. She holds both a Ph.D. and Master's degree in Sociology from Brandeis University. She also has a Master's degree in Women's Studies from the University of Dublin, Trinity College. She earned bachelor's degrees in drama and history from Carnegie Mellon University.

In her first book, "Culture Keeping: White Mothers, International Adoption, and the Negotiation of Family Difference (Vanderbilt Press, 2008)," she examined how conceptions of family and of race shape the ethnic practices of international adoptive families with children from China and Russia.

"Labor of Love: Gestational Surrogacy and the Work of Making Babies" is available now at [Amazon.com](#) and at the UTA Bookstore, 400 S. Pecan St.

Provided by University of Texas at Arlington

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