

# Surrogate Motherhood in India: An Emotional Labor

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## 1. Aim

This paper examines and brings to light the emotional aspect of the labor performed by the reproductive laborers in the commercial surrogacy industry in India. Part of the work of the reproductive laborers include reworking or suppression of emotions, or, what Arlie Hochschild (1983) calls as 'emotional labor'. The reproductive laborers manage the feelings of attachment, or detachment, they have for the babies they carry. This is because showing their true feelings might portray them as 'bad workers' or 'bad mothers'. Drawing on the narratives of the reproductive laborers, I aim to comprehend the ways in which the reproductive laborers carve their paths in a manner that keeps them dissociated with these discourses.

## 2. Data & Methods

For the purpose of this research, I adopted ethnography as my methodology. The methods include unstructured interviews and participant observation. The data come from ethnographic fieldwork over a span of six months during the period 2015-2017. The field site is Anand, a small city in Gujarat, which is also known as the commercial surrogacy hub of India. The respondents include: forty reproductive laborers, three intended parents, two doctors (including the medical director), one nurse, and the hostel matron.

## 3. Results

On the basis of my interviews, the research suggests that the reproductive laborers align their emotions for the benefit of the market – for surrogacy to be portrayed and understood as an enterprise that produces perfect gestational mothers who birth babies at the exchange of money. This emotional management, in turn, according to the reproductive laborers, bring prosperity to their families. The regulated environment of the hospital exerts considerable amount of emotional stress on the reproductive laborers to be continually conscious in performing to the expectations set for them. Highlighting these intricacies of reproductive labor has been the major concern of this ethnographic research. The narratives of the reproductive laborers present the emotional challenges that they are encountered with and the ways in which they devise ways to manage their emotions in order to ensure their survival in the commercial surrogacy industry.

## 4. Conclusion

From these findings, the paper maintains that commercial surrogacy is a form of alienated and emotional labor.