It starts with wanting children

Norwegian parents' experiences with commercial surrogacy in the USA

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Abstract

This thesis explores Norwegian parents' experiences with commercial surrogacy in the USA. Surrogacy is a controversial phenomenon, and illegal in Norway, yet relatively little research has been done on the population of Norwegians that travel abroad for such arrangements. This thesis centers their experiences, and asks: How do Norwegian parents describe and understand their own experiences with commercial surrogacy?

In order to answer this question, three men and three women who had sought surrogacy arrangements in the USA were asked to participate in a two-part interview process guided by the principles of free association narrative interviewing (FANI). FANI assumes a psychosocial subject whose experiences and meaning-making processes are influenced both by societal discourses and their own personal biographies. I present my analysis in three parts:

1. The first analytical chapter deals with the way the parents of my study understand surrogacy to be the key part to a *family creation* process. It shows how they each experience the use of surrogacy as a norm violation, and showcases some examples of how such violations were dealt with emotionally and narratively.
2. The second analytical chapter concerns how the parents make use of different understandings of kinship to redraw boundaries between kin and non-kin. Parents creatively drew on established notions of kinship to prove their rightful and exclusive relatedness to the child.
3. The third and last analytical chapter concerns the threat of money, and how the parents negotiate the intimate and the commercial aspects of surrogacy. It shows that as a kinship project, the integrity of the activity was upheld by focusing on the intimate aspect of surrogacy, while the parents found different ways to accommodate the commercial aspect into this narrative.

I conclude that the parents draw on a variety of narrative strategies that both reproduce and challenge normative ideals in creative ways. I suggest that their choices help shape global commerce in a way that increasingly works to accommodate intimate and deeply personal needs, and that despite reiterating certain notions of kinship, in the end, these new ways of making families must be seen together with the cultural movements to expand our notions of kinship and family altogether.

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Content

1 Introduction

1.1 Two rooms

When I was 22 years old, I was shown a short documentary called *Wombs for Rent*, about the Akanksha Infertility Clinic in Gujarat, India. I had to leave the classroom to take a breather after a particularly crude depiction of Dr. Naya Patel performing a cesarean section on an Indian surrogate[1] whilst unaffectedly scheduling meetings over the phone. The depiction shook me. I had always felt queasy around birth, especially hospital birth, where two worlds that connoted horror to me, clashed: the raw, aching, screaming female body, bathed in blood and fluorescent lighting, surrounded by masked strangers holding scissors and syringes. *Shudder*. But this was my introduction to surrogacy: that split open body, left alone to cry in a poorly lit surgery room, with no one to hold her hand. Even when I separated the idea of surrogacy from my cowardly reaction to birth, I still didn't quite understand what it was that I had seen.

I asked: Who was this woman on the table? Why was she subjecting herself to this for someone else? And moreover, where were the people who had put her through this, the intended parents[2]? I sought answers in textbooks, in news media, in documentaries and books. The more I learned about surrogacy, as a technological phenomenon, as business, as favor, as labor and as kinning praxis, the less I felt like I understood. Tired, but still curious, I picked up Mala Naveen's book one day whilst browsing the library. The jacket had gone missing. Traces of little donkey ears existed in about twenty different pages throughout the book. I opened it to page 10, and pressed my nose to the headline, *The Room of Shame*. It smelled like fresh print. I turned a few more pages, and sunk down on the floor, resting my back against the bookshelf, as I read:

[1] Surrogates have elsewhere been called surrogate mothers, gestational carriers, surrogate workers, and the like. *Gestational carrier* is a medical term, and I feel that use of this word only serves to depersonalize her. That is not desirable in a thesis most concerned with people and how they relate to each other. As will be explained in chapter 1, there is controversy surrounding whether or not one can call a surrogate a *mother*, a *worker*, or neither. I am admittedly drawn to terminology that encapsulates the potential for labor and intimacy or motherhood to exist within the same concept/activity, yet I have, for the sake of simplicity and to reflect much of the literature on the subject, chosen to use the word *surrogate* rather consistently throughout the thesis.

[2] Surrogacy literature often speak of *intended parents* or *commissioning parents*, but since the majority of my respondents are currently living as the only parents of the child, I have chosen to simply call my research participants *parents*. *Commissioning parents* are used in certain places to emphasize their role in a contractual market relationship; *intended parents* is used to speak more generally about the population.

> *I wanted children in the welfare state of Norway, where you really don't need children to be taken care of. The word infertile had taken me from a relatively normal place in life, to making me feel stricken with a sort of panic. The whole world was my echo chamber. If you're having trouble conceiving, you'll quickly discover your friends furrowing their brows and lowering their voices. Some because they probably feel like they've had gotten ahold of classified information. Others because they as quietly as possible wanted to tell me they had struggled to get pregnant, too. Not only does this reinforce the feeling of failure, but it increases the gap in knowledge between those who should know better, and those who know, but won't share. (...) I started telling people about my childlessness. (...) I tried to convey that I felt lucky, because despite everything, the desire for children existed side by side with the desire to write, enjoy my relationship, be free, read, and travel. I was a person who found meaning in a lot more than just having children, but I had a recurring sense that I wasn't being believed. This fed my desperation. It was here I started pondering what boundaries we push when we want something more.* (Naveen, 2013, p. 14-15)

Naveen wrote a book on surrogacy, yet opened with her own experience with infertility. Though she never ended up seeking a surrogacy arrangement, she realized how chasing a dream changes you fundamentally - it changes your world, your principles. I felt infinitely curious about this, and realized that I knew very little about the experience of the parents who seek families through surrogacy. I found tabloid and sensationalistic accounts of Norwegians' experiences with the ethically complex and here illegal phenomenon, yet felt a yearning for more. I wanted to know about their experiences; I wanted to know what pushed them toward surrogacy, what the road that took them there looked like, if they were, in fact, as morally corrupt as some suggested. Most of all, I wanted to know about the *boundaries*, the *pushing*, and the *wanting something more*.

1.2 Research question and thesis reading guide

My quest was simple: to try to understand the parents' experience. This thesis builds upon a lack of academic exploration of the reproductive choices made by Norwegian infertile couples who *want something more* but conceivably can't find it at home. Surrogacy raises important questions about family, kinship and commerce. It challenges our notions of kinship, what it is and how it is created, and asks if a family can be bought without harming the integrity of those involved. Surrogacy brings written and unwritten law into the limelight, and

fuzzes out boundaries between love and money, work and family, intimate and private. My thesis is informed by the need to reexamine these boundaries, and asks how these major cultural shifts and conversations manifest in deeply personal, lived experiences. The questions I seek to answer in this thesis are as follows:

> How do Norwegian parents describe and understand their own experiences with transnational gestational commercial surrogacy?

To answer this, I invited six individuals who had sought surrogacy arrangements in the USA to come talk to me about their journeys. Three women and three men were asked to participate in a two-part interview process guided by the principles of free association narrative interviewing (FANI), which assumes a psychosocial subject whose experiences and meaning-making processes are influenced both by societal discourses and their own personal histories and feelings. In order for such experiences to be excavated and presented, a set of sub-questions were formulated:

1. What discourses and experiences do they draw on to construct a personal narrative that is whole, complete, and justifiable?
2. What competing norms enter to threaten the validity of their feelings and experiences?
3. What ideas do they draw on to repair this sense of disruption?
4. May this effort of repair also - potentially - lead to gradual changes of the cultural norms and discourses about kinship and parenthood?

The thesis is built up around the answers they gave me in their narratives. This introductory chapter seeks to provide useful information about family and surrogacy, as well as some theoretical background that will ease the reading of the analytical chapters. In the second chapter, I focus on FANI as a method and methodology, and describe how I proceeded to gather and analyze my material. In order to familiarize the reader with the persons and stories that form the basis of my analysis, I present six vignettes, before I present my analysis in three parts:

4. The first analytical chapter deals with the way the parents of my study understand surrogacy to be the key part to a *family creation* process. It shows how they each

experience the use of surrogacy as a norm violation, and showcases some examples of how such violations were dealt with emotionally and narratively.

5. The second analytical chapter concerns how the parents make use of different understandings of kinship to redraw boundaries between kin and non-kin. Parents creatively drew on established notions of kinship to prove their rightful and exclusive relatedness to the child.
6. The third and last analytical chapter concerns the threat of money, and how the parents negotiate the intimate and the commercial aspects of surrogacy. It shows that as a kinship project, the integrity of the activity was upheld by focusing on the intimate aspect of surrogacy, while the parents found different ways to accommodate the commercial aspect into this narrative.

To understand their answers, it's necessary to have some background on involuntary childlessness and on surrogacy. I will thus now move on to describing how family life is a valued form of life, and how involuntary childlessness might push someone to explore the reproductive market.

1.3 Background

1.3.1 Family and involuntary childlessness in Norway

For me, this thesis started in a classroom, where the phenomenon of surrogacy was introduced to me, and sparked a curiosity that still hasn't left me. For my respondents, however, "It starts with wanting children," like Ulrikke points out. For adults of a certain age and in certain (stable) life situations, experiencing a desire for children is not unusual - in fact, it is so common it has become the norm (Melhuus, 2012).

Norway, with its generous and family-oriented welfare policies, makes it possible for most citizens to combine working life with having a family (Kristensen, Ravn, & Sørensen, 2016; Ellingsæter, 2012). A family without children is barely considered a family (Andersen, 2014, p. 14). Though birth rates are relatively low, around 1,76, most people both expect to and do have children at some point in their lives (Kristensen et al., 2016; Ravn & Lie, 2013). Beyond simply being one possible way to live your life, "reproduction in today's Norway can be understood as a cultural imperative, in that having children is not only seen as possible, but *natural*" (Kristensen, et al., 2016, p. 17). Wanting children requires no explanation, while *not* wanting children does - it is seen as anomalous and as turning down "the meaning of life"

(Fjell, 2008). In Norway, it is expected that one not only wants children, but tries everything in one's power to get them (Kristensen et al., 2016; Howell, 2001; Andersen, 2014).

The intense social pressure to have children might be one reason why infertility is so stigmatized (Helsør & Magnussen, 2001; Sundby & Guttormsen, 1989; Stanton & Dunkel-Schetter, 1991). Medical infertility, (often) resulting in the experience of involuntary childlessness, affects both men and women, can have a multitude of reasons, and often leads to experiences of loss, grief, shame, and relationship issues (Lindsey & Driskill, 2013). One is considered infertile when one has not achieved pregnancy after a year of trying to conceive (Tanbo, 2008). Today, infertility doesn't automatically mean that you'll stay childless: there are multiple options for those who want to seek parenthood through means other than "natural" procreation, and often, there exists an expectation that such means will be pursued. Andersen (2014) writes that due to increased individualization and the pressure to self-actualize, women in particular are expected to "construct a self-reflexive identity which also should include motherhood, partnerhood, and [family]" (p. 9). Whereas infertility was once considered fate, it is now more an obstacle to the parenthood project than an end to it (Andersen, 2014, p. 9).

Adoption is a historically common road to parenthood. While Norwegian adoption laws stipulates that singles and couples of all genders and sexualities above the age of 25 can apply for adoption (Adopsjonsloven §2, §3, §5), domestic adoption is very rare, and adopting countries come with their own set of rules, making it very difficult for singles and same sex couples to adopt (Førde, 2017). In general, transnational adoption has become increasingly difficult and time-consuming over the years (Førde, 2017, p. 87; Melhuus, 2016). Thus, many turn to technology and assisted reproductive technologies, abbreviated ART. Through the Biotechnology Act, Norway offers publicly financed insemination and *in vitro* fertilization (see explanation under 1.3.2) to heterosexual and lesbian couples; ART and insemination is unavailable to gay couples and single women. Sperm donation is allowed as long as the identity of the donor remains known, but egg donation is not allowed. Spilker and Lie (2016) assert that this might be a result of protecting what Melhuus (2012, p.113) calls "unitary motherhood", namely an alignment between the social, genetic, biological, and legal status of motherhood. It's been stated that the intended function of the non-anonymity principle of sperm donation, is to protect children from "build[ing] one's life on a lie"; this suggests that in Norway, knowledge about one's biogenetic origin is understood to be a primary source of identity (Howell, 2006). This reflects Norwegian family ideals, which privilege

"heteronormativity, marriage, and knowledge of one's biogenetic origins" (Petersen, Kroløkke & Myong, 2017, p. 85; see also Spilker, 2008).

These ideals are under attack. Over the last few decades, new family forms have sprouted up and challenged the nuclear family ideal. New terms, like "star families" (*stjernefamilier*) and "rainbow families" (*regnbuefamilier)* have appeared to describe blended families (step families) and families headed by single or queer parents, family forms that are gaining an increasing amount of social and legal recognition (Andersen, 2014; Kristensen et al., 2016). For example, same-sex marriage laws have extended the rights of marriage to lesbians and homosexuals; they are also allowed to adopt, though as just mentioned, this right remains a symbolic gesture rather than a practical possibility.

While the emergence of star- and rainbow families might seem a radical departure from the heteronormative nuclear family, it also *simulates* the ideal quite closely. For example, the non-hetero, nuclear family is simultaneously positioned "within the bounds of normalcy, while at the same time challenging and reworking the heteronorm" (Hanssen, 2014, p. 21). Petersen, Kroløkke, & Myong show how even as same-sex couples challenge the heteronorm, parenthood becomes a "symbol of inclusion into mainstream (heterosexual) culture"; the queer family may thus be reproducing normative ideals rather than just simply challenging them. Just like Andersen mentions, ideas about individual choice and the responsibility to explore all available options in order to create a family (that remains as close to the ideal as possible) also applies to same sex couples (Petersen et al. 2017).

As such, pursuing parenthood and family life becomes not just an option, but an imperative to both the medically and the so-called "socially infertile" (see Houseknecht, 1987). Melhuus shows how involuntary childless couples make a series of reproductive choices in order to obtain a "child of one's own"; over time, the content of "one's own" may change, as one moves from "natural" conception, to considering adoption, to ART, etc. (2012). The individuals I interviewed for my project were all involuntary childless, experiencing a shrinking pool of reproductive options here at home. With adoption and ARTs either unavailable, unwanted, or exhausted as options, they decided to pursue surrogacy. Surrogacy is illegal in Norway; as such, they were thrust into the reproductive market. According to the six individuals, surrogacy was neither their first nor the easiest choice they made as intending parents. (Transnational commercial gestational) surrogacy is a legally and ethically complex reproductive phenomenon. Legislation varies immensely between countries, and has sparked a heated international debate; the following provides some

information as to why and how Norwegians are "pushed" into the reproductive market and "pulled" into the immense global reproductive market.

1.3.2 Seeking surrogacy: Medical, legislative, and commercial context

The word "surrogate" means replacement or substitute, and in this context it refers to the maternal work performed by women who gestate an embryo and birth a child to commissioning intended parents who assume all legal parental rights to the child. In so-called *altruistic* surrogacy arrangements, the surrogate receives no monetary compensation, whilst in *commercial* arrangements she does. *Traditional* surrogacy, which has been practiced since biblical times, the surrogate provides her own egg, making her both biologically and genetically related to the child. Today, especially in commercial surrogacy arrangements, *gestational* surrogacy is the norm. Here, egg and sperm from intended parents or donors is fertlilized *in vitro* ("in a glass", often referred to by its abbreviation IVF and distinguished from *in utero*, meaning "in the womb"); the embryo (fertilized egg) is then transferred to the surrogate's uterus, and gestated for nine months like any other pregnancy. IVF involves hormone treatment, and can be experienced as uncomfortable, painful, and stressful; it also involves medical risks (Deonandan, 2015; Qin, Liu, Sheng, Wang, and Gao, 2016)

Two laws restrict the use of surrogacy in Norway: the Biotechnology Act (Bioteknologiloven) and The Children Act (Barneloven). Unlike sperm donation, which is legal, egg donation is prohibited under the Biotechnology Act (Bioteknologiloven, 2003, §2-15 and §2-18). Since gestational surrogacy requires *in vitro* fertilization of either intended mother's or donated eggs, gestational surrogacy becomes a legal impossibility within Norwegian borders. Private persons are exempt from legal penalties, but medical professionals may serve up to three months in jail or be fined, should they aid someone to complete a surrogacy arrangement in-country (Bioteknologiloven, 2003, §7-5).

Further, the Children Act states that agreements to birth a child for another (woman) are not legally binding (Barneloven, 1981, §2). In addition to gestational surrogacy, then, traditional surrogacy is also prohibited by law. The Children Act, which establishes legal maternity and paternity, also states that the biological mother, i.e. the woman who births the child, is the child's legal mother by default (Barneloven, 1981, §2). It is based on the roman principle *mater semper certa est*, which means that the mother is always certain (Syse, 2012). Paternity is established either by affiliation (marriage) with the mother, by acknowledging paternity, or by submitting to DNA testing to prove genetic connection to the child (Barneloven, 1981, §3). Lastly, legal parenthood can be obtained via adoption laws. For

example, a legal father's wife may adopt the child as a stepmother; a child may also be adopted according to the rules of national or transnational adoption (Syse, 2012).

Since activities that have taken place outside Norwegian borders do not fall under the purview of the Biotechnology Act or the Children's Act, Norwegians are free to seek surrogacy arrangements in other countries. While this is not illegal per se, the activity is legally (and, as we shall see, ethically) complex, and involves a "circumvention of [Norwegian] law" (Stuvøy, 2016, p. 200). It also involves entering the so-called reproductive market. Reproductive tourism, also called procreative tourism (a term coined by Knoppers and LeBris in 1991), fertility tourism, cross-border reproductive care, or reproductive exile, is a critical term that describes the activity of crossing borders to seek assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) such as IVF, procurement of gametes, or gestational surrogacy (Deonandan, 2015; Knoppers & LeBris, 1991; Martin, 2016; Spar, 2006; Wittaker, 2011). The market is driven by "a hypermobile, economically privileged segment of the world population" whose reproductive choices are constrained, either by restrictive policies or high cost of treatment in their home countries (Martin, 2016, p. 98).

The multi-billion dollar global industry pulls clients toward international hubs such as India, Thailand, Ukraine, Russia, Mexico, Nepal, Poland, Georgia, Canada, and the US, where unrestrictive laws and low cost are the most oft cited "pull" factors (Deonandan, 2015; Martin, 2016). The surrogacy industry in the USA, the destination for all the respondents of my study, is one of the world's largest (i.e. most profitable): in 2008 it was worth over $6 billion annually (Smerdon, 2008). There is great reason to think that a decade later, the number is far higher, as estimates for 2020 show that the American fertility industry in total will have almost doubled in worth since 2010 (Deloitte, 2008). While legislation varies between states, on the whole the US offers "[relaxed] regulations, reputation for high-quality reproductive care, clarity of laws regarding parentage, commercial egg and surrogacy market, and status as a global destination" (Martin, 2016, p. 115).

For a long time, the fertility market has remained largely unregulated (Spar, 2006; Deonandan, 2015; Harrison, 2014; Majumdar, 2014). This fact is slowly changing. In 2015, Thailand banned foreigners from entering into surrogacy contracts after an infant was abandoned by its intended parents (Australian Associated Press, 2015; Deonandan, 2015). In 2013, a bill intended to "protect the rights and welfare of all players in the ART industry" was drafted in India; a closer look, however, indicates that its primary focus is rather to ease disputes over legal parenthood, "thus lubricating the industry as a whole" (Deanondan, 2015, p. 115). India has for a long time held the position as one of the world's "biggest markets for

commercial gestational surrogacy," likely for its attractive combination of nearly nonexistent regulation and competitive market prices on surrogacy services (Majumdar, 2014, p. 278)

The Indian bill came in the wake of intense international criticism of a surrogacy industry that has been deemed callous, exploitative, and degrading in both media, politics, and academia. The surrogacy trade in India in particular, but also (gestational, transnational, commercial) surrogacy in general has been a controversial subject for decades. Much of this debate has centered the surrogate, and her well-being and freedom. In order to situate this thesis, and to provide further context, I contend that it will be necessary to review some perspectives on surrogacy. The following section is thus meant to introduce some of the most prominent perspectives, as articulated in (mainly feminist) research literature.

1.3.3 Perspectives on surrogacy

Like Ravn, Kristensen, and Sørensen (2016) write, reproduction is inherently gendered, as much of our cultural understandings of gender builds on the binary character of biological reproduction (p. 33). Transnational gestational surrogacy, situated in the reproductive market, is an effect of reproduction being "enterprised up", i.e. becoming subject to market forces and "an increasingly globalized and capitalist logic" (Petersen, et al., 2017, p. 87). As a phenomenon that is dependent on women's reproductive capacities and in turn, on their bodies, and that further is embedded in global structures of power and inequality, it is no wonder that surrogacy has been heavily debated among feminists. The surrogate, and her welfare and agency, is at the core of these arguments, but they inevitably come to touch on the role of the intended, commissioning parent(s) as well.

The debate around whether or not surrogacy is an expression of women's agency or of their exploitation, is perhaps the most well-known feminist conundrum presented by surrogacy. While some argue that surrogacy should be treated as other forms of freely chosen work, others point to the inherent inequalities to problematize this assertion. Surrogacy as predicated upon social inequality between women traces back to Biblical times and the book of Genesis, where the barren women Sarah, Rachel, and Leah command their subjugated servant women to bear children for them (Genesis, 16, 1-6; 30, 1-24). In modern times, issues of class and gender collide with racial and post-colonial dynamics in an increasingly globalized market, and raises concerns about the exploitation of "(poor, nonwhite) women by their richer or more indulgent sisters"(Spar, 2006, p. 82).

Like Harrison (2014) writes, "reproductive tourism is often a deeply racialized endeavor that relies on class disparities between those who provide reproductive services and those who consume them in order to build a family built around genetics" (p. 145). Some

worry that surrogacy becomes a form of reproductive outsourcing, and a marketized activity that leaves women of low socioeconomic status in post-colonial and developing countries vulnerable to exploitation (Stuvøy, 2016; Harrison, 2014; Pande, 2011; Cheney, 2018). While the image of the Indian surrogate is often mobilized to drive this point home, economic coercion may be experienced regardless of location, and thus applies to commercial surrogacy in general.

In addition to expressing concerns of constrained agency at the intersection of class, race, and gender, surrogacy is also criticized for marketizing the bodies of women and children. Expressions like "rent-a-womb" and "baby selling" brings associations to Gena Corea's early critique of surrogacy as "baby farming" (Corea, 1985, p. 213). She was concerned that surrogacy and other reproductive technologies would be used as tools of patriarchal oppression to further subjugate women and create a class of "breeders" - reminiscent of Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel The Handmaid's Tale, wherein Corea's nightmarish predictions of extreme patriarchal subjugation and dehumanization of a "breeder class" have become true. More recently, Menon (2012), for example, argue that surrogacy "dehumanizes women" and treats them as "human incubators" and "reproductive machines" (p. 192). The criticism expresses a desire to keep the economic and the intimate separated, so as to "protect women from exploitation, from (others') capitalization of their bodies; a [well-known] praxis in a patriarchal world" (Stuvøy, 2013, np).

Altruistic surrogacy may here seem like an appropriate and more woman-friendly alternative. Yet scholars have argued that altruistic surrogacy only serves to reinforce gendered norms about women as self-sacrificing, and may in the context of family or friends involve a non-economic and more subtle, emotional form of coercion (Anleu, 1990; Anleu, 1992; Raymond, 1990). Raymond writes:

> The cultural norm of the altruistic woman who is infinitely giving and eternally accessible derives from a social context in which women give and are given away, and from a moral tradition that celebrates women's duty to meet and satisfy the needs of others. (Raymond, 1990, p. 8)

Regardless of payment, surrogate pregnancy remains physically and emotionally taxing, and involves the sentiment that women's caring comes naturally and in endless supply. As Stuvøy (2013) remarks, feminists have long fought for the recognition and adequate compensation of labor that has been relegated to women and the realms of the intimate and private. The bodily and emotional intimacy of for example nannying, sex work, and surrogacy involves "unclean" bodily functions like feeding, intercourse, and birth, which makes this type of work, dubbed

"intimate labor," heavily stigmatized (Boris & Parrenas, 2010). On the one hand, this stigma might funnel women who are already disadvantaged and vulnerable to exploitation, into these forms of labor (Harrison, 2014). On the other hand, the stigma and strict enforcement of the intimate/private boundary might also make our understanding of work so narrow that we make "the surrogate mother's effort incomprehensible as labor," which in turn makes it more difficult to demand fair working conditions in a capitalist market (Stuvøy, 2013, np).

Even so, it seems fair to ask what can and should be marketized. While arguments for profiting off one's body might be constructed as an exercise of agency and a "woman's right to choose," surrogate mother-work nevertheless challenges our boundaries for what we are willing to commercialize: "Motherhood as the sacrosanct construct of a pure relationship of love and biology is diluted in the commodification of motherhood to which surrogacy ultimately leads" (Majumdar, 2014, p. 284). When ARTs split motherhood into gestational/biological, genetic, and social components, surrogate pregnancy as biological motherhood represents a form of aberrant motherhood wherein a mother gives away her child for money (Majumdar, 2014, p. 285). This makes the child the commodity - that which is traded for profit. It is generally agreed upon that children "have a more complex moral status than mere property" as individual persons, whose basic human rights involve the freedom from slavery and trafficking (Murphy, 1996, p. 18). A mother that sacrifices the child she has born for money acts in opposition to the best interest of the child, and violates both norms of motherhood and "eternally giving" femininity (Raymond, 1990).

Surrogacy thus challenges us to think about what belongs in a market, and what doesn't. It also challenges out notions of kinship and motherhood as inviolable, unitary, and exclusive. But does it only expand our definitions of motherhood and kinship, or does it also work to reproduce old notions? Gondouin (2014) argues the latter: when motherhood is compartmentalized and thrust into the reproductive market, it creates a hierarchy between different types of motherhood. It is argued that transnational gestational surrogacy is inherently *genecentric*, offering those with purchasing power the privilege to pursue forms of reproduction that affirms normative understandings of kinship as built on DNA (Harrison, 2014; Majumdar, 2014; Gondouin, 2014). Surrogacy can be said to have both normative and transformative potential: parents of children born through surrogacy are forced to do significant boundary work, reconfiguring kinship and navigating claims of exploitation while handling the stigma of infertility (Andersen, 2014).

As such, I contend that research on surrogacy could benefit from being expanded to include research on the intended parents, and the choices they make as consumers in a

reproductive market. Like McKinnon (2015) argues, ART, hereunder surrogacy, has not only influenced the way we conceive of "natural" kinship, but the way we understand kinship has also been the basis of how we conduct new forms of business, and sparked the creation of a whole new, global market. Strathern points out that "procreation can now be *thought about* as subject to personal *preference* and *choice* in a way that has never before been conceivable" (1992, p. 34, emphasis added). Anindita Majumdar (2014) and surrogacy research pioneer Elly Teman (2008) call for research on surrogacy that hones in on this choice, but that strays away from explanations of choice that rely on dichotomies such as altruistic/commercial or purely psychological/purely social subjectivity. Majumdar in particular has suggested that surrogacy research would benefit strongly from a better understanding of the choices and motivations of intended parents, "who often get identified with the structures of coercion but are unable to articulate their own choices within the arrangement" (2014, p. 296).

1.4 Previous research

My goal for this thesis is to get a better understanding of the complex series of choices and experiences parents of children born via surrogacy has made in their reproductive journeys. Like Teman and Majumdar write, research on intended parents that avoid simplifying their experiences is needed. Much of the current body of research on intended parents' experiences tend to be situated within the discipline of psychology. I will quickly summarize some of those findings, before discussing three ethnographic accounts of surrogacy that I contend capture the experience of the parents in a more satisfying manner.

A prolonged struggle with infertility or the lack of other reproductive options, are the most commonly cited reasons for using a surrogate (MacCallum, Lycett, Murray, Jadva & Golombook, 2003; Greenfeld, 2014). In heterosexual couples, the average span of trying to conceive naturally was 7.5 years (MacCallum et al. 2003). Genetic connection to the child is usually considered important for parents (Kleinpeter, 2002; Söderström-Antilla, 2016). This also goes for gay male couples (Riggs & Due, 2014; Murphy, 2013b; Dempsey, 2012). 97-100% of parents intend to tell their child about the surrogacy (Blyth, 1995; van den Akker, 2000; MacCallum, et al. 2003; Readings, Blake, Casey, Jadva, & Golombok, 2011). Most couples tell their families and friends, and feel supported by them (Kleinpeter, 2002;), but a majority of gay couples report feeling scrutinized or discriminated against in their quest for parenthood (Riggs & Due, 2014; Murphy, 2013b). Overall, "no major differences in the psychological states of mothers who were the product of surrogacies, mothers of children

conceived after other types of ART and mothers of children who were conceived naturally" was found (Söderström-Antilla et al., 2016, p. 260). Overall, commissioning couples experienced the surrogacy arrangement positively (MacCallum,et al., 2003).

This literature provides some basic insight, yet falls a little flat. For example, the finding that most parents cite biogenetic connection as a positive when choosing surrogacy is minimally contextualized and elaborated. Three ethnographic accounts provide us with a more holistic understanding. Helena Ragoné (1994) did extensive research on traditional American surrogacy programs, and writes empathetically about the profound challenge of being labelled infertile in a pronatalist society. In order to repair the sense of brokenness the taboo of infertility instills in those seeking surrogacy, intended parents use adaptive strategies to make the surrogacy arrangement more palpable as a kin-making processes. They emphasize intent and the way surrogate and intended mother came together in a "shared pregnancy" that transgressed the material body, in order to normalize the pregnancy (p.125). She finds that "changes in kinship ideology were declared by some to be inevitable, yet in spite of these advances, the central symbols of American kinship ideology have remained unchanged" (p. 109). Elly Teman (2010) similarly identify how, in Israeli surrogacy arrangements, surrogates and intended mothers engage in a *dyadic body project* whereby the the surrogate distances herself emotionally from the fetus using a *body map* that for example separates the pregnant belly from her identity and relegates it to the intended mother's. The intended mother assumes a pregnant identity, lived vicariously through the surrogate, which sometimes manifests itself physically through symptoms of pregnancy like contractions, weight gain, or even lactation.

These examples show how complex the interplay between surrogate and intended parent or mother can be. Kristin Engh Førde provides a more recent and geographically relevant example, with her doctoral thesis *Intimate distance*: *Transnational gestational surrogacy in India* (2017). Remaining empathetic and with an eye for relational dynamics, she aims to also expand our understanding of the complex power relations of transnational surrogacy beyond the now trite *win-win versus exploitation* dichotomy. She shows how surrogates and intended parents alike partake in complex processes of moral sensemaking, whereby the point of departure for both sides is their experience of being marginalized. Her title is derived from the multidimensional distance and closeness that affects how the surrogacy arrangement unfolds and is experienced. She shows how "distance in effect was produced, maintained, enhanced or minimized in ways that quite consistently prioritized the interests of IPs and clinics over those of the surrogates and their families" (2017, p. 336), thus connecting microprocesses of relating to the structural inequalities that also define

transnational surrogacy - this despite intended parents' sincere efforts to address the moral complexities inherent to the process.

My research builds off these groundbreaking and nuanced depictions of surrogacy. I am inspired by their complex understanding of motivation and identity, and by their sensitive approach to the morality of surrogacy. The dichotomies between family, love, and intimacy and money, markets, labor, and the public are questioned rather than taken for granted. I will, however, focus on the intended parents' stories, and how they alone deal with these questions. To help provide a useful backdrop for such exploration, I will now turn to theoretical perspectives of kinship and the (non-)commodity.

1.5 Theoretical perspectives on kinship and non-commodities

To begin, I have chosen to use a working definition of "kinship" as "the ways in which individuals are organised into social groups, roles, categories, and relatives based on particular forms of social relations created through narratives of affinity and ancestry. Moreover, (...) this rendering of kinship encompasses the concept of the domestic family unit" (Murphy, 2013a, p. 42). In a Norwegian context, these narratives of affinity and ancestry have roots in what David M. Schneider (1980 [1968]) famously called the Euro-American *folk belief* of kinship. According to Schneider, kinship is founded on two ideas: the first idea, is that kin share substance *(blood).* The second is that kin relate to each other through "diffuse, enduring solidarity" *(love)* (Schneider, 1980, p. 51). *Coitus,* i.e. heterosexual marital sex, bring the two together, and is what creates kinship. With intercourse a key symbol, kinship is figured as "an aftereffect of the natural facts of sexual reproduction" (Franklin & McKinnon, 2001, p. 3). The folk belief insists that "kinship is defined as biogenetic" and that "both mother and father give substantially the same kinds and amounts of material to the child, and that the child's whole biogenetic identity (...) comes half from the mother, half from the father" (Schneider, 1980, p. 23).

Such a view enables us to see how kinship is not *a feature of* or *equal to* biology, but as "connected to biology through systems of meaning and knowledge" (Spilker, 2008, p. 30). This poses a problem for our understanding of how kinship is created, because it conflates the material with the symbolic properties of biology. In everyday use, we speak of biology without distinguishing between biology as matter (the physical body, for example), as science (what we know about the body, a non-neutral knowledge system), and as ideology (with

value, "meaning, direction, and function") (Spilker, 2008, p. 44). Kinship thus rests on an analytically unstable term, and adjusts in accordance with what we *understand* to be so-called natural facts. This is evident in my material, where different understandings of what exactly is "natural" serves as the basis for "proving" a kinship connection with their child. For example, when there is a genetic link between parent and child, it is thought to be the only link needed to "prove" parenthood. It is the only "natural" connection, and it is thus the most valued one.

This is what researchers talks about when they say that technology has become likened to nature. Though technology disturbs the key symbol of kinship, namely coitus, it simulates nature, and we often talk about technology as 'assisting nature' or 'giving it a helping hand' (Carsten, 2000; Franklin, 1997; Smedal, 2001). We have *naturalized* technology by likening it to natural processes of reproduction. At the same time "reproductive biology is *denaturalised* - it can be assisted by technology. Instead of a naturally given sequence of events, reproduction becomes an 'achievement'" (Carsten, 2000, p. 11-12, emphasis added). This process shows how kinship is flexible, because our ideas about what constitutes 'facts of nature' are flexible, too.

Charis Thompson (2005) focuses specifically about the extent of this flexibility, and on how kinship is creatively constructed within infertility clinics. Her work shows clearly how understandings of for example 'the natural' is mobilized in subtle and complex ways to construct kinship ties. She calls this specific maneuver *strategic naturalization*. Thompson discovered that parents using ARTs emphasized different procreative elements, like intent, genes and gestation, and assigned them with value and meaning in relation to their individual family projects (Thompson, 2005; Førde, 2017) This points to a more general point about kinship, namely that "all kinship has to be constructed, including the ones we are used to thinking as 'following from birth' "(Førde, 2017, p. 250). Norwegian anthropologist Signe Howell terms such a process 'kinning', defined as 'the process by which a foetus or newborn child is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people, and the connection is expressed in a conventional kin idiom' (p. 63). The second analytical chapter concerns these processes of emphasizing and de-emphasizing certain elements in ways that confirm ties between parent and child, and denies kinship ties with surrogates and potential donors.

Collier and Yanagisako (1987) show us that while 'facts of nature' are not as unflinchingly rigid as we thought, its use implies and strengthen boundaries between nature and culture. Kinship ties gains significance when we appeal to nature, because it is constructed as being in complete opposition to culture, i.e. not susceptible to human

tampering and thus "untouchable" as truth (p.29). This gives discursive and symbolic nourishment to other dichotomies, such as private/public and production/reproduction (p.16, 20).

Much of surrogacy research grapples with the paradox of the commercial surrogacy arrangement being conceptualized as an act of altruism, whereby the child is explained as the "ultimate gift". The child as gift is less prominent in my material, but I still discover a strong aversion to talking about the commercial aspects of surrogacy. I believe one reason for this that we view kinship-making as deeply intimate and personal, and money has the symbolic power to remove "personal element from human relationships through its indifferent and objective nature (Simmel, 1978, p. 297). As Collier and Yanagisako claim above, kinship is built upon dichotomies that precludes love and money from coexisting as the basis of relationships. It has to be one or the other. This is reminiscent of what Schneider himself writes, about the private and intimate: "what is done is done for love, not for money! And it is love, of course, that money cannot buy" (1980, p. 46).

The distinction between the gift and the commodity was first theorized by Marcel Mauss (2002 [1935]). Like commodity exchange, the gift exchange says something about the relationship between giver and receiver; the gift is used to form and strengthen alliances and social bonds, and implies an enduring, non-calculated relationship (2002). Recall that for Schneider, "diffuse, enduring solidarity" was a key ingredient of kinship. Carrier writes that for Euro-Americans, it is gift exchange and not market exchange that best characterizes family relations (1990, p. 24). Though the literature below focuses on *gifts* as the opposite of commodities, I will in my third analytical chapter rather speak of *non-commodities*, following Rus' assertion that "'commodity vs. gift' is (...) often used as metaphor for 'market vs. non-market'" (2008, p.83).

Gift ideology draws on two ideals. The first ideals, is of the perfect gift "priceless, transcending its material expression and economic worth"(Carrier, 1990, p.23). The second ideal, is of the perfect gift as "free, unconstrained and unconstraining" (Carrier, 1990, p. 23). There is thus a marked difference between commodity exchange and gift exchange: gift exchange entails "the exchange of inalienable objects between people in a state of reciprocal dependence" while market exchange the exchange is of "alienable objects between transactors who are in a state of reciprocal independence" (Gregory, 1980, p. 640). Behind all this jargon is a simple idea: that the relationships formed through gift exchange are personal and involve a level of emotionality and obligation that the personal, calculated, and profit-maximizing market exchange does not.

The thing about ideals, however, is that they don't always correspond with reality. Godbout and Caillé (2000) argue that gift exchange is not diametrically opposed to business relationships, governmentality, and even the operation of nation states, but that they rather are an integral part of it: how could our society function, they ask, if "employees did not give more than their salary required, if bureaucrats did not show some sense of public service, and if an adequate number of citizens were not ready to die for their country" (2000, p. 367).

While gift ideology functions to keep up the categorical separation between people as autonomous/obligated on the one hand and objects of exchange as gifts/commodities on the other, the real life gift giving Godbout and Caillé speak of functions to provide people with motives for action beyond utilitarian and Machiavellian quests for capital and power (2000). They suggest that the most meaningful distinguisher between gifts and commodities are the *motivations* behind the act attached to the object or service: "the drive to give is as important to an understanding of humanity as the desire to receive – (…) giving, transmitting, reciprocating, and compassion and generosity are as essential as taking, appropriating, keeping, and appetite or egoism" (2000, p. 366).

In re-introducing favors, conversations, service, and the like as gifts, they make the point that gift exchange and market exchange might better be understood *together*, and that our actions most commonly comprise "a mix of egoism and altruism" (2000, p. 369). Further, they state that in order to understand society, one must strive to understand how people are personally and emotionally motivated by the joy of giving, not merely by the drive to receive (2000). In order to understand human action, it is not enough to view individuals as subsets of an economic or political superstructure (we'd run the risk of being reduced to mere epiphenomena of culture). A reminder is thus issued: to understand people "not just a conglomerate collection of particular roles or functions but autonomous units endowed with at least a measure of coherence all their own" (2000, p. 371).

It is in this gap, between structure and the agency that is allowed under it, that I situate the experiences of parents of children born via surrogacy. Though ideologies concerning family and kinship are strict, and commercial surrogacy is to a degree a moral minefield, I want to understand the parents' experiences as neither totally determined by these norms, nor entirely free of them. In the next chapter, I describe my choice of method and the psychosocial subject that lies at the basis of such a choice

2 Methods

> *In order to succeed in representing lived experience in its dynamic, multifaceted, complex and conflictual wholeness, words have to be used in such a way that they are not stripped bare of the emotional, sensuous, desiring and embodied life that they are available to represent. This requires imagination but this word should not be opposed to facticity. If words cease to retain their vivacity — in the social work case report, in the case interview, in the research interview — they will not succeed as meaningful communications from and of people's lives: they will not succeed in moving the recipients of the communications and without this e-motion (literally 'movement out of'), meaning is depleted.* (Hollway, 2009, p. 462)

2.1 Doing qualitative research differently

My research question, *How do Norwegian parents describe and understand their own experiences with transnational gestational commercial surrogacy?* center parents' experiences and the sensemaking processes that occur around them. Experience concerns the way we relate to the world and is intimately connected with language, knowledge, and discourse, but also with our individual biographies and patterns of psychological response. I knew from the outset that I was dealing with a complex and thorny subject, so I went searching for perspectives that would fathom this complexity. Like Majumdar (2014) urges, I wanted to examine their experiences and choices in a light that treated the subject neither as isolated and neutral, nor as an epiphenomenon of culture and discourse.

I have used Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson's (2000) book *Doing qualitative research differently* as a point of departure. Searching for theories of the subject that were non-reductive and opened up for empathy and complexity, their theory of the defended subject proved a good place to start. In brief, they

> work with a theoretical premise of a defended, rather than unitary, rational subject. The methodological implications (...) are twofold: this subject can best be interpreted holistically; and central to this interpretative process are the free associations that intervierwees make. (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, p. 296)

It is an inattention to the complex nature of subjectivity and to the presence of unconscious defences, that sparks Hollway and Jefferson's criticism of traditional

qualitative research. They lament the inattention to how "respondents' meanings are related to circumstance," which translates into poor quality of data and results. One main criticism is that traditional ways of doing qualitative research "assumes not only transparency to the other but self-transparency" (2008, p. 298, 299).

This resonated with me. Infertility can be a sensitive subject that inspires strong feelings over a number of years; like Naveen (2013) writes, involuntary childlessness changes you, your principles, and your perception of things around you in profound ways. Surrogacy, both illegal and morally suspect, can be said to be tabooed. Before I started researching, I thought about friends and family in my own life who I knew dealt with stigma in their daily lives - people who lived with everything from alcoholism, mental illness, HIV/AIDS, and drug addiction, to learning disabilities, chronic illness, and crippling debt. I thought about how they variably treated stigma with silence, with self-deception, with fighting back against stigma and reclaiming their truth, or with holding multiple truths all at once. Some seemed very affected by stigma; others completely unfazed. This anecdotal evidence suggested to me that there are many responses to stigma and taboo, and that this variation would show up in my material. I also expected that strong positive feelings of desire and love to be integral parts of their experience, thus complicating the whole picture. I wanted a theory and a method that could fathom that complexity.

Jefferson and Hollway provided this. In the following, I will go on to elaborate their theory of the defended, psychosocial subject, explain the methodological implications of such a theory, and describe how I employed the lessons Hollway and Jefferson had to offer in my own research project.

2.2 A theory of the psychosocial, defended subject

The psychosocial subject is, as its name suggests, a theory of the subject that combines perspectives from social sciences and postmodern theory, with perspectives from psychology and psychoanalysis to describe a subject that is beyond the rational, coherent subject. Lynne Layton (1999), for example, resents theories of agency that imply either extreme voluntarism or extreme determination by culture or discourse. She boldly combines lessons from postmodern discursive theory with psychoanalytical theory to propose an understanding of the subject that moves beyond these extremes. She contends that the subject is both a

> position in discourse (sub-jected to the multiple and contradictory discourses of culture, including family) and a multiple and contradictory being whose negotiation of early relationships will shape the meaning that these discourses take on and so shape the discourses themselves. (1999, p. 26).

Her definition of subjectivity is one that entails a "fluid, agentic, heterogeneous self" whose agency is shaped, but not erased, by social structure (p. 31). We are shaped by our biographies, by each interaction and relationship we enter into, in ways that are not always apparent to us on a conscious level. The social world, the interpersonal, and the psychological are thus intricately related, and feed into each other through our (inter)actions.

Hollway and Jefferson's methodology is built upon an idea of the psychosocial subject as *defended* (2000). The theory builds on Kleinian psychoanalysis, and its most central lesson is that threats to the self creates anxiety, which the subject will want to protect itself from. This process happens on a subconscious level, and has implications on how we experience, react to, and remember situations. They write that "if memories of events are too anxiety-provoking, they will either be forgotten or recalled in a modified, more acceptable fashion" (2008, p. 299). This means that defenses will "affect the meanings that are available in a particular context and how they are conveyed to the listener (who is also a defended subject)" (2008, p. 299).

The psychosocial, defended subject is a radical departure from the coherent, (self-)transparent, rational subject that is often assumed in qualitative research. A significant strength of this view of the subject is that it allows for a reintroduction of *feelings* as a meaningful element of experience, which can only work to enrich our understandings of social phenomena. Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen neatly sums it up:

> first, feelings are understood as a kind of personal and embodied *meaning* which lingers between the conscious, the preconscious and the unconscious, and between inner and outer objects. As such, they are central to human creativity and agency. Second, feelings stem from our *relationships* with others, and from how this relational experience is processed by the subject who comes into being and is continuously reshaped by these relational processes. Thus, feelings have a temporal dimension connected to the historical and social context of the relational experience, as well as to the subject's life course in time and space. Feelings live in socialised subjectivities. Third, this means that feelings, even though they are

always personal, may also display *social patterns* characteristic of a certain class, gender or generation. (Nielsen, 2017, p. 23).

This view of feelings as meaningful, relational, temporal, and potentially patterned according to social characteristics is valuable to my project, as it accounts for "both [the] political economy and psychodynamic of social phenomena" and helps us understand "the powerful affective forces and and embodied, visceral nature of these phenomena - the mad, often crazy side of our lives if you like" (Clarke, 2002, p. 1161). This lets me look at the norms and structures that facilitate the choices that the parents make, without discounting the affective, emotive sides of what "happens to you when your boundaries explode" like Naveen writes (2013, p. 16).

2.2.1 Methodological implications

The defendedness of the subject implies that we all engage in "at least two interlocking forms of emotional work: the 'internal' work of coping with contradiction, conflict, and ambivalence, and the 'external' work of reconciling what goes on inside with what one is 'supposed' or 'allowed' to feel" (Craib, 1998, p. 113). Hollway and Jefferson (2000) propose a method specifically tailored to researching the defended subject, one that is guided by two concepts: *free association* and *gestalt*. "The main theoretical principle," Hollway and Jefferson explain, "is the idea that there is a Gestalt (a whole which is more than the sum of its parts, an order or hidden agenda) informing each person's life which it is the job of biographers to elicit intact, and not destroy through following their own concerns" (2000, p. 34). If we are able to see the meaning frames of the respondent, we are also better suited to understand what happens within the meaning frames. Free association, whereby the respondent is allowed to recount their experiences (relatively) free of interference from the researcher, is intended to keep this meaning frame as intact as possible.

Their method, which they call free association narrative interviewing, hereafter FANI, draws on several research traditions, including biographical interpretive methods, feminist research, clinical case study approaches, and narrative inquiry. Open-ended questions (as open as possible) are asked in order to elicit narratives, which are then analyzed with a rigid attention to 'the whole' of the story. Since my research question encircles experiences, this centering of narrative is beneficial. Narratives are excellent sites for exploring experience, as narratives are part of how we make sense of the world: there's a "fundamental homology between 'the lived life' and 'the storied life'", which means that we can access knowledge about the lived life through stories (Bo, Christensen

& Thomsen, 2016, p. 20). Through narratives, we make sense of and ascribe meaning to our experiences. "Personal narratives do not only describe experience, they give shape to that experience: narrative and self are thus inseparable" (Andrews, 2000, p.77). Importantly, narratives don't reflect the truth, but rather are reflections *on* truth (Denzin, 2000, p. xiii).

Though some differentiate between stories and narratives, I find such a distinction unnecessary for this thesis. The most general way to define a narrative is as a temporal construction, where past, present, and future is connected in a meaningful way (Andrews, 2000; Bo, Christensen, & Thomsen, 2016; Elliot, 2005). Stories have a beginning, middle, and an end, and a selection of events and characters are made in order to provide coherence and consequentiality (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, 2008; Riessman, 2008). The benefit of FANI is that it recognizes the inconsistency between the coherence of narratives and the inherent incoherence of subjects, and applies a systematic and holistic analysis of "all we [can manage] to accumulate relating to a particular person who [takes] part in the research" (2000, p.69). Crucially, this 'whole' is not the *person*, but what we are able to gather from this person: the told story, recorded on paper and in digital audio files, notes, memories, impressions, etc. They write:

> To grasp a person through the 'whole' of what we know about him or her does not have to imply that he or she is consistent, coherent or rational. The form of a person's accounts (or whatever other data we have about his or her life) may become visible by concentrating on these 'fractures'. (2000, p. 70)

Such fractures in narrative might inform us of the person's *gestalt*, or more accurately: the wholeness of their stories might give clues to how the details should be read. The clinical case study principle free association is intended to allow for unconscious motivations to surface as the patient speaks. In a research setting, we can apply the same principle to narratives, as a way to examine how feelings – as conscious, subconscious, or unconscious, verbalized or not – might affect the way we speak about and make sense of our experiences (2000).

The most pronounced benefit of FANI is that it is specifically tailored to examining (told) experiences as affected both by the ruling norms and discourses of society, but also by personal histories and feelings that may or may not be conscious, understood, or verbalized. It is this attention to feelings as meaningful that makes this methodology particularly fruitful. Hollway and Jefferson have specific suggestions of how to apply the principles of FANI practically in a research situation; I will now proceed to discuss how I did just such a thing.

2.3 FANI as method

2.3.1 Gathering participants

The planning phase of my project consisted mostly of me shyly telling people I wanted to interview parents of children born via surrogacy, and excited-yet-worried faces going on to suggest discourse analysis or survey research instead. They were excellent suggestions, but I wanted the personal interaction, so my advisor (thankfully!) said: "If that's what you want to do, then I think you should do it." So I did.

I believe the main concern of those friends, fellow students, and seasoned researchers, were related to time and access: finding individuals who wanted to speak openly about their semi-illegal ventures in a tabooed market might be difficult and time consuming. Of course, they were right. Before starting my research, I had spoken to a number of people who eagerly agreed to put me in contact with friends or family who had started a family by way of a surrogacy arrangement. I was confident that I could use the snowball method, and forwarded a blurb to those who said they knew someone, asking if they would be OK with being contacted by me so I could formally ask for their participation.

Yet the ball stopped rolling after only one couple. All of a sudden, people grew afraid to ask, and both potential respondents and those who could put me in contact with them, stopped responding to my messages. I hadn't quite expected that. In response, I turned to the internet, and contacted admins on parenting forums, like Foreldreportalen.no, Familieverden.no, Babyverden.no, sub-threads on Klikk.no and the forums of Onskebarn.no, the organization for involuntary childless individuals in Norway. I wanted to recruit participants via the forums, so I explained the scope of my project and laid out details of how the process would proceed, and posted as soon as I had admin permission. In addition, upon the clever suggestion of an accomplished researcher, I emailed individuals who had already gone public with their stories. The idea was that if they had already gone public under full name, they might be interested to share more. Yet both these trails wound up cold.

I was, to put it bluntly, bummed out, and about to give up, when I stumbled upon a closed Facebook group whose title suggested its members would have been involved in surrogacy. The group had around 300 members from all over the country, and was described as a forum in which to share information and experiences around surrogacy. I contacted the admin, who posted a message on the private wall, which resulted in the recruitment of the last four individuals I needed. Again, a few people stopped responding after a few emails and vanished out of thin air. I thought perhaps they changed their minds about participating

because it felt scary, or emotionally exhausting - or maybe, as most of these people were families with small children, they simply could not afford to donate the time. Due to repeated difficulties with recruitment, the first interview was conducted in April of 2017, while the last took place in July that same year. I interviewed six individuals, all middle to upper middle class, ages ranging from early 30s to early 50s. Everyone had been involved in surrogacy arrangements in the USA between the years 2012 and 2017. Most of the interviewees lived in Oslo or in the surrounding area, whilst one couple lived more rurally. A brief introduction (which may be used as a quick-guide when reading the analysis chapters) follows. All names are pseudonyms.

- Husband and wife **Henrik** (30s) and **Eline** (30s). Live in a rural area with their daughter Vilde, age 1. Eline provided the egg, Henrik the sperm - they are both genetic parents. Due to Norwegian parenthood laws, Henrik is per today the sole legal parent, while Eline is still in the process of adopting Vilde, formally as a step-parent. Their surrogate's name is Heather.
- **Marianne** (50s), single mom to daughter Thea, age 3. Lives Oslo/surrounding area. Used both donor egg and sperm, but successfully adopted Thea and is now her legal parent. Never says the name of her surrogate, but this is consistent with how she generally speaks of people in terms of how they're related to her (ex. my ex-boyfriend, my sister, my friend….).
- **Ulrikke** (30s) is married to Espen (40s), whom I did not speak to. Lives in Oslo/surrounding area. They are anticipating the birth of their daughter Kaja in five weeks from the interview date. Since they both contributed their own genetic material, the process for establishing legal parenthood will most likely resemble the case of Henrik and Eline. Espen will thus likely be granted legal parenthood by virtue of his genetic ties with Kaja, while Ulrikke will have to adopt. Ulrikke and Espen's surrogate's name is Dana.
- Husbands **Thomas** (50s) and **Christian** (40s). Live in Oslo/surrounding area with their twin sons William and Noah, age 3. Used a donor egg, and contributed sperm for one twin each. Were immediately recognized as their genetic sons´ legal father, but had to adopt their partners´ genetic son after-the-fact. Today they are both legal parents to both twins. The surrogate's name is Amber.

These six individuals cannot be said to be representative of our population, and it is uncertain how well their experiences with surrogacy correspond with other (intended) parents'. Six individuals can never accurately represent the experience of a large and diverse group of

people. On the one hand, they represent quite different trajectories to surrogacy: I have one heterosexual couple, one gay couple, one single woman, and one heterosexual woman who had not completed her journey yet. In the beginning I wondered if I should narrow it down, interview only women, for example, or gay men. In the end, I decided that a varied group of people wasn't necessarily a bad thing. Noting similarities across from social affiliations might make it less tempting to attribute findings to social factors, for example. Yet it should also be noted how similar they are. They are all white adults of the middle to upper middle class. As mentioned in Ch. 1, those who partake in the reproductive market are privileged, both compared to the surrogates they hire and compared to other people in their country of origin.

In addition, the selection process was hardly randomized, and relied on the participants volunteering themselves to the project. Many expressed that they felt eager to share their experience. It is therefore possible that these stories thus represent the views and experiences of people who are more comfortable with their involvement in surrogacy than others, and that their reflections potentially differ from those who feel less eager to share. Generalizability can thus not be decided. Nevertheless, the selection shows breadth, and (as will be demonstrated) demonstrates a variety of experiences surrounding surrogacy.

2.3.2 Conducting the interviews

FANI has clear directives for how to conduct interviews, which I followed. Two interviews were conducted with each individual, one week apart. The first interview consisted of only one open question. The openness of the question is meant to facilitate free association, and to avoid structuring the narrative after the researcher's own agenda. It is important that it therefore is constructed to be as open as possible. It was formulated with the intention of eliciting a story, as "eliciting stories has the virtue of indexicality, of anchoring people's accounts to events that have actually happened. To that extent, such accounts have to engage with reality, even while compromising it in the service of self-protection" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, p. 307). When the interviewee is made to tell a story rather than give an answer to a question, they are forced to make choices about style, what events to include, the level or detail, what parts are considered important through emphasis, and what morals can be drawn from the story – these choices reveal quite a bit, often far more than the narrator would think. I formulated the following question to elicit such narratives:

Why did you choose surrogacy, and can you please tell me about the process from the beginning, up until today?[3]

I requested to interview the individuals in their homes, that they set aside plenty of time, and that children and other distractions be kept away: I imagined this to maximize the feeling of safety and comfort in the interviewee, and thus facilitate free association in the best possible manner. Of course, this was not always possible. For example, I interviewed Ulrikke at a café in the middle of the city, upon her (dire) request (she felt stuck at home, and needed to get out and about). My first interview with Marianne also comes to mind. Though we were in her home and her daughter was at day care, she practically vibrated with tense energy from the moment I met her. She was late, and apologized profusely for the mess as I entered her apartment. She sat on the edge of her seat for almost the entire interview, interrupted herself frequently, got lost in her own story, and once interrupted our interview to answer her phone. The interview also ended with her rushing up to leave. I remember the event, and her interview, as stressful, disorganized, and disappointing. I was also left with the impression that even if we were in her home, the research situation made her nervous, as if I were some intellectual judge just waiting for her to say the "wrong" thing.

That's perhaps one of the reasons why FANI requires a double interview. The second interview is aimed at elaborating, clarifying, and fleshing out the theory of the individual's meaning frame. After each first interview, I would take notes on what I had experienced during the interview, such as my perception of their personality and mood, if they seemed stressed or relaxed, if we had had conversations outside the recorded interview, etc. I then transcribed each interview. I then listened and re-listened to the interview, took notes, and jotted down hunches and questions I had. I took note of inconsistencies, word use, tone, selection of events, and their ordering in time. This means that the process of analysis starts here, before the second interview even takes place. I immersed myself in the material in search of meaning frames, and noted discursive positioning in order to come to the second interview with (usually five or six) questions that center around the initial narratives. FANI encourages using the respondent's ordering and phrasing, in order to keep the meaning frame intact. The second set of questions should remain as open as possible, and function to elicit

[3] Hollway and Jefferson actually discourage the use of 'why' questions (2000, p. 35-36), as they believe it encourages intellectualism/rationalization. Yet my question was two part, and I discovered immediately that my respondents were more interested in telling the story "from the beginning up until today" rather than directly answering my 'why' question. Not surprisingly, their reasons 'why' became enmeshed in their stories anyway.

narratives. The intention is to "test" the initial analysis, and to get clarification and seek further evidence for your final analysis. They state:

> Since our theoretical starting-point neither takes respondents' accounts at face value nor expects them to be able to understand completely their own actions, motivations or feelings, we decided early on to have a double interview. The first interview would enable us to establish a preliminary symptomatic reading: to interrogate critically what was said, to pick up the contradictions, inconsistencies, avoidances and changes of emotional tone. The second interview would act as a check in various ways by allowing us to seek further evidence to test our emergent hunches and provisional hypotheses. It also gave interviewees a chance to reflect. (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 43)

The second interview provided invaluable resources in interpreting and analyzing my respondents' narratives. After our first interview, I had insisted that Marianne set aside more time for our next interview. When I came, we started with just chatting for a bit, had some fruit, and got comfortable. Before the interview started, I told her I had five questions for her, that she should not worry about repeating herself from last time, and that there were no "wrong" answers – I was here to learn from *her*. The result was not only a great conversation, but a great interview, by which I mean the information I received provided clarity, depth, and a much-needed supplement to the disorganized and rushed first interview. It also allowed me to dig deeper into the places in her first interview where I detected tension or avoidance, and to see which omittances or oddities were meaningful, and which were merely a result of trying to rush through her tale.

In the end, I was left with a total of almost 12 hours of recorded interviews, lasting between 35 minutes and 1 hour and 45 minutes. This resulted in 152 pages of single spaced typed transcripts. In addition, I had my notes and memories that I drew from when I now turned to the continued analysis.

2.3.3 Analyzing the data

What I am specifically searching for in the texts, are what discourses the narrator seems invested in, and the emotional subtexts that might shed light onto these investments. Hollway and Jefferson's working understanding of the word 'discourse' is broad, and refers generally to the types of ideals and norms that are appealed to in the narrative. Analysis of this kind requires a constant and painstaking going back-and forth between parts and the whole, and requires intense investment on the part of the researcher. Fragmenting the data, for example by coding it, is discouraged - the integrity of the whole is prioritized (2000, p. 68).

FANI requires you to immerse yourself in the material, and as yourself

> What do we notice?
>
> Why do we notice what we notice?
>
> How can we interpret what we notice?
>
> How can we know that our interpretation is the 'right' one?
>
> (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 55).

At first, I found it hard to answer the questions. I desired a coding scheme, a step by step guide. In search of clearer directives, I reviewed a lot of psychosocial research à la Hollway and Jefferson, which tended to rely on psychoanalysis I was completely unequipped to perform. Narrative analysis usually relied on fragmentation of data, and biographical interpretive methods required more material than I had collected. While frustratedly looking for more simple and clear instructions for analysis, I read and read and listened and listened to my material, compiling a pile of notes with each run-through. When I finally felt the pressure of time, I did one final lap, went through each interview and meticulously and systematically took notes on the sequence of events presented, the language used (like tone, word choice, metaphors, active/passive positioning, etc.), and what I imagined the intent to be (Barusch, 2012). I noted themes and investments in discourses within each interview, and tried to look for links and themes across and between interviews.

It was right about now that I understood that I had inadvertently been following Hollway and Jefferson's method. I had immersed myself in the material – a highly time consuming and sometimes exhausting exercise. Like Clarke (2002), a psychosocial researcher with a background in sociology, writes: "immersion allows researchers to start thinking in a theoretical way about the material that has been transcribed and to note themes and issues which emerge from reading the whole text" (p. 179). I used the theory of the defended subject, along with the notion of feelings as meaningful, to flesh out observations of common themes and experiences within and across each narrative.

What I noticed, unsurprisingly, was that all the narratives revolved around surrogacy as a family creation process. I also noticed that while the surrogacy was what enabled this process, it also functioned as a disturbing element: It made the reproduction possible, but it also made it different from the norm. I also noticed two areas of tension, one relating to kinship and one to money. Tensions appeared in the context of what I read as an over-abundance of "evidence" provided to prove or describe the kinship ties between parent and child, and the stark lack of acknowledgment of the significant monetary investment and commercial relationship surrogacy implicates. I found that they had different and sometimes

conflicting discursive investments, and that these investments were held up by feelings of fear, love, desire, and ambivalence. I explore these findings in three analytical chapters, where I often use case examples to illustrate the personal investments, as well as general themes that occurred in my material. I am informed by the theory of the psychosocial subject when I show how parent's experiences were facilitated and understood both by prevailing discourses on kinship, and by personal meaning frames informed by feelings.

2.4 Ethical considerations

The American Psychology Association lists three general ethical principles for ethical scholarly research:

- To ensure the accuracy of scientific knowledge
- To protect the rights and welfare of research participants
- To protect intellectual property rights (American Psychology Association, 2010, p. 11)

My research has been performed in line with these ethical guidelines; in the following, I will elaborate how.

2.4.1 Accuracy of scientific knowledge

I have striven to "ensure the accuracy of scientific knowledge" by applying the principles of FANI as rigidly as possible. As discussed above, the intent of FANI is to avoid the *inaccuracy* of traditional qualitative research by assuming a more complex and realistic subject in research that takes both the social and personal meaning frame of the researched into consideration. In my analysis, I systematically reviewed emergent meaning frames and emotional investment, and checked and checked again to see if other interpretations were possible; this is meant to reduce the risk of "wild analysis" (Clarke, 2002). This term refers to theorization around a person's meaning frame and feelings that isn't properly anchored in a deep, repeated, open and honest reading of the text. For example, having a hunch and selecting quotes as evidence that your hunch is a fact is unacceptable. It takes a long time, painstaking and detailed attention, and several rounds of analysis, to form an accurate analysis.

Yet I also want to point out that such "accuracy" has required what might at first glance seem unscientific, namely imagination. This brand of imagination resembles C. Wright Mills' sociological imagination, the ability to look at everyday occurrences with an eye for context, in order to give it meaning beyond the taken-for-granted (1959). This kind of

imagination encourages looking at the familiar anew. Like Hollway writes, creativity and imagination are necessary tools for researching lived experiences, but "this word should not be opposed to facticity" (2009, p. 462).

The principle of reflexivity, the constant awareness of one's own subjectivity (including personal defenses) as a researcher, has thus been an important 'check' on this imagination. Reflexivity "can serve both to guard against bad interpretations and to assist with good ones" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 65) My subjective experience of the world has provided me with a tool box for noticing clues in the text that require further investigation, and has alerted me to inconsistencies, ambivalences, and possible defenses that has warranted deeper analysis. I have, however, had to consistently ask myself if I am providing the most accurate analysis. In the end, reflexivity can never replace theory, and an analysis must always be grounded in the empirical material.

2.4.2 Protecting the rights and welfare of research participants

I have interpreted this principle as avoiding harming the participants unnecessarily, which includes getting their informed consent as well as providing anonymity. Once potential participants emailed me to join the research project, I responded with an email that provided them with information about project. I detailed the theme of the project, and explained that I would collect their stories in a two-part interviewing process which would revolve around their experiences with surrogacy. I told them my findings would be published in my Master's thesis, and that it might be available online after. I provided assurance that they would remain anonymous, and assured them that they would call or write if they had any questions about the project, how their information would be handled, or other concerns. I provided the same information verbally during interviews, and gave them an informed consent form to read over in peace before signing (see Supplement 1).

It is a general principle that research subjects must give their informed consent before participating in a research project (Thagaard, 2002, p. 23). I wanted to be sure my interviewees and I were on the same page. I wanted them to feel prepared for the interview experience, and to feel as safe as possible in the situation. This included knowing what topic we would discuss, the form of the interview, as well as knowledge about in what form excerpts from the interviews would become available. Some individuals expressed concerns about anonymity, as they told me they had received warnings that being too liberal with their critique of the government could result in bureaucratic backlash. I therefore ensured everyone that according to rules of the Norwegian Center for Research Data, I had to provide

information about my routines for securing and anonymizing information to a satisfying degree. I was required to have NDS approval in order to perform my research, and thus *had to* anonymize accordingly. I explained I would immediately transcribe all recordings with pseudonyms and that I would have to anonymize all identifying information, including information that could suggest or indirectly identify the informant, such as names of places, exact occupation, or exact age. I locked recordings of interviews with passcodes, and deleted them after the project was finalized. The same goes for transcripts, emails and notes: they were stored on a safe, password protected computer that was locked in a room one needed a key to access, and will be destroyed after the thesis and exam are completed.

I also want to address a concern I raised earlier in the chapter, namely that I was going to be dealing with sensitive information and that my informants might feel affected by stigma. I was especially concerned about those individuals of my study who had struggled with medical infertility; I didn't want to traumatize them. I tried to reduce this risk by repeatedly informing them about the topics we would be talking about, not asking questions that seemed to be crossing a line, and reminding them they could retract their consent at any time of the interview. I also tried to provide a space to "breathe," so to speak, both before and after the interviews.

I always opened the second interview by asking: How did you think it went last time? Or, How was it for you? It was meant as a warm-up question, but also, I was curious! Turns out, most people found it quite pleasant, and many said it felt therapeutic. Some said it made them feel heard, some said it made a lot of emotional memories well up again, and reminded them to be grateful. Most interviewees thought of the interview as a positive experience. This told me that difficult and painful memories and emotions isn't necessarily an impediment to the safety and well-being of a research subject – sometimes quite the opposite.

2.4.3 Protecting intellectual property rights

In order to protect intellectual property rights, I have provided proper citations according to the American Psychological Association guidelines (specifically, their 6th edition manual). Where I have used sources written in Norwegian, including quotes from my material, I have done my utmost to present an accurate translation to English.

2.4.4 Honesty, sympathy, and respect

According to Hollway and Jefferson (2000, pp.100-103), the most important ethical principles guiding psychosocial research, is honesty, sympathy and respect. They write that

> For us, honesty entailed approaching data openly and even-handedly, in a spirit of enquiry not advocacy, deploying a theoretical framework which was laid out and justified, making only such judgments as could be supported by the evidence and not ignoring evidence when it suited us. It also involved interrogating our responses to data. (2000, p. 100)

Further, they insist that sympathy is a resource in research, as it "shows a deep and courageous understanding of a fellow human being" (p. 100). They write that sympathy aids in approaching an understanding of "inconsistencies, confusions, and anxieties" and that it prevents accusations of "evil or disreputable motives" and treating your research subject as "blameworthy, alien, or other" (p. 100). This is also a sign of respect, a last ethical principle. All human beings are entitled to being treated with respect; this should also (if not especially) apply in a research setting. They write: "to respect in the sense of observing carefully is to notice what normally is overlooked, what might be too painful to notice" (p. 101). Respect, honesty, and sympathy thus all feed into the general principles of avoiding harm and providing accuracy. I have, with vigor and passion, tried to keep these ethical principle abreast during my research. I believe they preserve the best interest of everyone involved, those of both researcher and researched.

I want to add a final observation, before moving on to the analysis, namely that such analysis, even when strict ethical and methodological principles are applied, may never provide a complete and full picture (see, for example, section 2.2), and may further not even represent the view of the interviewee. The individuals I interviewed may not agree with my analysis of their answers. On a personal level, this has caused me great anxiety. I sometimes imagine their angered faces, and their regret for participating in the project. I would truly hate to disappoint the people behind the narratives, the generous and kind people who opened their homes and their hearts to me so that I could do this project. I owe a lot to these people, and to think that I could have made them angry or disappointed is, frankly, gut-wrenching.

Yet for one, my thesis builds on a theory of the subject as defended, which means that meaning isn't always obvious even to its beholder. Psychological defenses may work to subsume certain elements of the truth in favor of a more accepting, less anxiety-provoking version. It is possible, then, that my reading is correct, but not apparent to the person behind the story. Importantly, I am not serving as anyone's mouthpiece; it is not my purpose to give anyone voice. Rather, I am concerned with how experience is communicated and told through narratives; I glean insight from their *telling*, not from the actual person/subject, or the real events they tell me *about*.

This serves as an additional point: I am not analyzing my respondents, but rather the materials that were produced during the interviews. My interpretations are based on an honest, sympathetic, and respectful analysis, which involved painstaking and repeated reading of the text; they remain, however, just that: *interpretations*. They exist as one out of many possible ways to read the text, one thoroughly grounded in the material but one that might still be just as "correct" or "incorrect" as other, differing readings. This is something I've had to remind myself of several times throughout the process of doing this research. My fear of disappointing my respondents have been a constant reminder to analyze with humility and care, but as Røthing writes about the centrality of analytical freedom in research, "this knowledge [that they might be disappointed, hurt, or angry] shouldn't paralyze analytical creativity" (2000, p. 391)..

The remainder of this thesis will largely revolve around this analysis,
but first, I have provided a summary of sorts of the material I collected, in the form of six vignettes. These vignettes are intended to familiarize the reader with the interviewees, and to provide some background for reading the analysis that follows.

3 Vignettes

3.1 Ulrikke

Ulrikke is in her mid 30-s. She's a small business owner, and lives with her husband Espen. When I ask her to tell me about surrogacy, she says a lot of people ask her about that, but that it doesn't start there, with surrogacy: "*It starts with wanting children, and then you try and try, and nothing's happening. And you get sadder and sadder, because you don't know what is happening.*" Ulrikke and her husband, whom I did not get a chance to speak to, try to conceive on their own for a year before Ulrikke is diagnosed with unexplainable infertility. Accepting that she needs help was a major hurdle for her, but she does, and starts IVF treatment. At this point, she expects the hardship to be over. That turned out not to be the case.

Ulrikke does not handle hormonal treatment well, and she feels it makes her ill. She mourns each unsuccessful IVF attempts as a death; she tells me she cries every single day for a year. Eventually she suffers a mental breakdown. She uses the common Norwegian metaphor "*meet the wall*" to describe how it felt: all of a sudden, boom. "*Pitch black*". Yet pausing treatment is not an option. She is desperate and depressed, and it doesn't help that medical professionals make her feel like a burden rather than a patient. It's "*unbearable*". Waiting, not knowing, and mourning takes over her life.

At this point, her Espen's parents calls it: it's time to try surrogacy. Adoption is ruled out quickly: it's time consuming, and her husband might be too old to adopt by the time they eventually get accepted. Espen's parents provide the emotional and financial support needed to go forth with surrogacy. They first apply to Canada, but Ulrikke "*cries and cries and cries for three days*" when she discovers that wait times in Canada can get quite long. Her father in law tells Ulrikke plainly that now they'll just apply in the US too. They do, and get connected almost immediately with Dana, the surrogate. In a lab, Ulrikke´s own eggs are fertilized using Espen´s sperm, and the embryo is successfully transferred into Dana´s uterus. Ulrikke humorously describes Dana as her "dark angel", more seriously as her savior, and occasionally as her best friend. She tells me she will be forever grateful for Dana's invaluable contribution to "*helping me out of my depression*". At the time of our interview, Dana is nearing the end of her pregnancy, and Ulrikke is preparing to travel over there for the birth.

I experience Ulrikke as guarded, and she later explains that after receiving the news that Dana was pregnant with her baby, Ulrikke and Espen both experienced "*the most insane*

feeling of happiness ever," but that she immediately afterward went into what she calls a shutdown. She explains that neither of them have been able to joyfully anticipate the child (glede seg), because "*the moment I want [my daughter] to arrive I get terrified something [bad] is going to happen*". She feels guilty for not being able to let herself be excited, and knows that most likely, everything will be fine… but somehow, she can´t pry herself out of her fear that it will go wrong. She ends, matter-of-factly, here: "*Mhm. So that's where we are today. And then we get our child in five weeks.*"

3.2 Eline

Eline is in her early 30s, and lives with her one-year old daughter Vilde and her husband Henrik in his rural home town. She has previously worked as a careworker, but resigned to stay home and raise her child. I find her humble, comfortable, and genuinely funny, and she begins her interview immediately on a vulnerable note: When Eline is 20, she visits the gynecologist to find out why she has still not gotten her period. Her gynecologist sits her down and tells her she has not achieved menarche, because she does not have a uterus. She is shocked and devastated, but young and carefree enough to put it aside after a few weeks and stubbornly move on. It doesn't bother her too much… until she meets Henrik.

In love with a man she now realizes she wants to make a family with, Henrik supportively and plainly tells her not to worry, we'll figure this out. As the desire grows stronger, they weigh their options: Should we become foster parents? Should we adopt? That didn't feel right, they wanted their own biological children, so they start researching surrogacy. They connect with an American agency, and travel to the US for testing of Eline to map the extent of her reproductive problems. It turns out her ovaries are perfectly healthy. This means that Eline can supply her own eggs. If fertilized with Henrik´s sperm and gestated by a surrogate, it would produce a child that it genetically related to both Eline and Henrik, so they decide: "*let's just go for it*."

Now in contact with an agency, a liaison, a therapist, and a lawyer, they write a profile and get matched with a woman named Heather. Eline's gut reaction to seeing Heather's picture is tears of joy: "*That's her*," she thought. The women and their husbands meet over Skype, and Eline goes over to meet Heather in person. They prefer meeting without a liaison from the agency - a third party just makes things awkward. They share a sense of humor, have a lot in common, and bond quickly: their families go well together, and they feel very comfortable with each other.

Eline goes through hormonal treatment before egg retrieval, and is exhausted by it, but it produces 3 viable embryos. Back in Norway, Eline and Henrik follows Heather on chat and video chat; they speak several times a day, video chat through Heather's seven weeks of hormonal treatment, are eager spectators to the embryo transfer, and a few weeks later, to the positive pregnancy testing in Heather's bathroom. They keep up the close contact, and visit as often as they can. They pay for a cleaning service for Heather, and Eline comes over to help babysit and clean her home so she can afford some self-care time and "*go get a mani-pedi or whatever*."

The day of delivery, Heather shows up at the hospital in a fuschia cocktail dress and a full face of makeup; Eline laughs as she shows me pictures, and tells me what a badass Heather is. The C-section was successful: Eline is present for the birth of her daughter together with Heather's husband Adam, while Henrik hears his baby's first cries from a chair in the hallway. They stayed in adjacent rooms in the hospital, before Eline and Henrik moved to an AirBnB for a week, where they got lost in the "bubble" of newfound parenthood. After a week, they visit Heather and Adam, have dinner together, exchange gifts, and all cuddle with Vilde like "*one big, happy family*". At the same time as she loves the closeness, Eline feels strongly protective of her baby daughter.

On the eighth day, the bubble bursts: the return home is pending, and papers and legal issues must be resolved. On the final day, the families must say goodbye to each other. Eline remembers crying, thinking all they want is to bring them back home. Yet as Heather and Adam's car pulls away, Eline and Henrik are left with a sense of relief: "*Oh my god. It's over. We're going home. It was insane*".

Today Eline is staying home with Vilde while Henrik works. She speaks to Heather and her family about once a month, and they are about to come visit them to celebrate Vilde's first birthday. She hopes it is the first of many to come. While Henrik is a legal parent by virtue of their shared genetic makeup, Eline is still in the process of trying to adopt her daughter as a step-mother. The time, money, and emotional toll this project has cost her is immense, yet she looks well-adjusted, balanced, and in control. She calls the first year of Vilde's life the happiest days of her life.

3.3 Henrik

Henrik is Eline's husband, also in his 30s, living in the town he grew up in where he works as a manual laborer. A no-nonsense man, he is both descriptive and opinionated, and

no stranger to rambling digression. When friends and other folks around them started having kids, Eline expressed she was ready to start a family too. Henrik is a straight forward man, he says, built the way that he understands that for every problem there is a solution. If they could have a child that was biologically related to both Eline and Henrik they would; now they just had to figure out if they could.

Before going to the US to perform tests, they try to get a full assessment of Eline's reproduction system in Norway. Henrik is enraged and disappointed by the treatment they received. From the minute they walked in, he felt a silence in the room, as if people were whispering about them, knowing what kinds of problems they had. Not taking his wife or her pain seriously, humiliating her with invasive tests, and treating her like a burden made him very angry. It contrasted vastly with his own experience in hospitals, being treated for his own bout of physical illness. They didn't treat Eline with the same respect, and he is bitter to this day.

As they started doing more research, he saw his wife grow more and more stressed and depressed. It didn't rob him of his sleep, but it did rob Eline of hers. It was frustrating not knowing where to turn, not being able to talk to a doctor about how to move forward, and eventually, once the paperwork started pouring in, feeling lost in legal jargon. He considers the paperwork and the legality of it all to be the most frustrating thing, and later tells me that dealing with this issue in particular might be one of the most educational experiences of his life. He'd put it on his resumé.

With a minimal amount of detail, he tells me of connecting with an agency, with lawyers both in Norway and in the US, of financial uncertainty and of connecting with their "*extended family*". They went over five or six times to visit; sometimes Eline would go without him. The day of delivery, Henrik waits outside during the C-section. He recalls hearing the cries. After staying in the hospital for a few days, they leave to stay in their AirBnB. It was new and strange, but all is well: "*The surrogate is healthy and the kid... that was, it was full speed from day one*."

Back home he has had to deal with a lot of prejudice. It is especially frustrating to think that after all the difficulty they had to endure (Eline in particular), that peers, politicians, and healthcare providers don't understand what surrogacy is about. He is perplexed by the law, appalled at Norwegian infertility policy, and upset at the ignorance of the "*coffee drinking, gossiping hags*" in his home town, who have "*not bothered to ask themselves even the simplest of questions*" regarding surrogacy. All in all, though, his experience proves yet again to him that every problem has its solution. The rest is just politics.

3.4 Thomas

Thomas is in his early fifties. He is a highly educated medical specialist, is married to Christian, and together they have two toddler twin sons, William and Noah. He is quiet and reserved, and speaks slowly, pausing to think or rephrase frequently. As a gay man, Thomas never thought he was going to have children: that was just a fact of gay life. In addition, he was getting older. So when Christian brought the subject up, Thomas gave him time to contemplate it, to be sure this wasn't a whim or an impulse, and said, patiently, that if he wanted kids he'd be there for him and support him along the way. Turns out, Christian was for real.

The options were few. Adoption wasn't really practically possible as a gay couple, and Thomas thought planned shared custody with another couple or individual was a less than optimal. But surrogacy wasn't an easy choice to make either. They were heavily skeptical of surrogacy, of entering into an agreement with a woman who potentially had limited options. They had seen and heard things about surrogacy in India that made them feel iffy. They were also very concerned about the welfare of their potential future children: what are the (social and psychological) ramifications of growing up with two dads?

After seeing their friends start a family through surrogacy, Christian made the first move and contacted the agency their friends had used. They sought help in the US - they just felt more comfortable doing it there. They Skyped a representative from the agency, who provided them "*with a sort of an education*", after which they were sure they wanted to do this. They were relieved to know that surrogates had to go through extensive psychological testing, had to prove financial independence and stability, and had to go to group therapy during their pregnancies. When they hung up, Christian had made his decision. Then, Thomas throws him a curveball: He wants to be a (genetic) dad too. They aim for twins.

With the decision made that they will both supply sperm in order to make twins, whereby Thomas will be genetically related to the one twin and Christian to the other, they start the search for an egg donor. It turned out to be difficult, especially for Christian, who had to endure the disappointment of having two donors not work out for them. But third time's the charm! They write a profile, and with the help of the agency psychologist, they get matched with Amber. They click well with her and her family, and have "*an idyllic process*", which includes frequent communication over Skype and several visits with the funny, caring family.

The days before birth gives them all a scare, as Amber experiences complications and is put on bed rest. They feel strongly that they've risked her health: IVF is risky, twin birth is

risky, C-section is risky. To think that she did all of this for them is overwhelming, but also lovely. Fortunately, Amber was fine, and the twins were delivered successfully. They spend happy days in the hospital, and none of them can get enough of the precious twins. When the time came to return to Norway, Amber's sadness is palpable. She was sad the process was coming to an end, her era of helping was over. But it wasn't sad for Thomas. He was excited for a new beginning, and very ready to move back home. He was ready to release Amber back to his family, physically and emotionally, and for her to "*let us go, kind of. And start a friendship, really.*"

Back home, life has been "*pink*" as he says. Legal works went fine, and they both got to spend plenty of time with their boys when they came home. Having one father and one daddy creates some funny situations, for example at day care, but for the most part they're just like any other family, dealing with fevers and dirty diapers and the dreaded time when your child learns the word "no". Thomas and Christian had to make a lot of (difficult, ethically complex) choices that those who conceive the conventional way do not have to make or even really contemplate; yet Thomas thinks that their family, save a few details, is just like everyone else. "*All of a sudden,"* he says, "*we were normal*".

3.5 Christian

Christian is a creative performer in his early forties, living with his husband Thomas, and their two young twin sons William and Noah. Ever since he came out of the closet at 23, his homosexuality has made him feel alienated in many ways, but not being able to create a family of his own was particularly hard to accept. Thomas had accepted childlessness as a natural part of gay existence early on, but said he'd join along the way and help Christian should he be unable to put the desire behind him. As friends turned up with surrogate babies around them, tucking the desire away became increasingly difficult, and one day, upon coming home from an indulgent vacation, the emptiness of their home strikes Christian, and he just knows: we have to try.

Sad that adoption wasn't quite an option for them, they were worried about the ethical implications of surrogacy. Were they really going to *pay* someone to give them a baby? But a Skype-meeting with the agency their friends had used calms his worries. The wonderful representative on the other end explains the process, and about all the steps that are taken to ensure a safe and good experience for everyone involved. They talk about the idealization of motherhood, and what it can mean to have two dads. Upon being asked to choose the

biological father, Thomas turns to Christian to tell him he wants to be a dad too. Thomas, by virtue of his age and upbringing, had seen gay identity as much more limiting than Christian. Now he saw the possibilities.

They are told to find an egg donor, and choosing among several profiles was overwhelming. There was a ton of information to consider. Christian needed to find "someone I could fall in love with"; that's difficult enough one time around, but Christian had to do it thrice. He remembers it as one of the most difficult part of the process, but also as the part where he realized what a great team him and Thomas were.

Luckily, they were matched with Amber very quickly, and meet both over Skype and in person for the long and serious talk about expectations and boundaries. They get close very quickly. They are enamored by the lively, kind, and open hearted Amber, her husband Aaron, whose humor and involvement was a blessing, and their sweet and funny girls - they feel like extended family. They visit often, have fun outings at Disneyland and Sea World, and chat and video chat with Amber at her home and at doctor's appointments. They feel very much like they're "there" for the pregnancy. Before the birth, they all cohabitate for a few weeks, and spend evenings playing board games and taking turns icing Amber's swollen feet.

One of the twins was breech, and together with the doctor, they all decide to plan a C-section. Due to complications, they perform the C-section earlier than planned, but all goes well. Aaron goes in with Amber to perform the double duty of supporter and videographer, while Thomas and Christian wait outside. At the hospital, a night nurse tells them their sons are so lucky to be *so* wanted: "*It doesn't get larger than this*" she says. That remark stays with Christian.

Back in Norway, there were lots of paperwork to be done. Lots. Establishing paternity and adopting each other's genetic sons was a hassle, and Christian wish they never had to go through it: they were already a family, all the paperwork and "mine" and "yours" business felt unnecessary. In addition, papers got lost, they received mixed or vague messages all the time, and in general, things took time. But today, that is mostly past them, and they live happily with two talkative, beautiful boys. Amber and Christian speak several times a week on Facebook, but he wishes they could video chat more often. Every now and then, she'll ask: "Don't you want me to carry a few more for you?" to which he'll laugh warmly and shake his head. They are perfectly happy being the four of them. "*We're the worlds luckiest*" he says.

3.6 Marianne

Marianne is an energetic marketing consultant in her 50s, and a single mother to Thea, three years old at the time of our interviews. Marianne always thought she'd have a traditional family just like everyone else. Yet men came and left: it never felt natural to start a family with any of them. She cries as she tells me how long it took her to muster up the courage to pursue parenthood alone. When she finally took the step at 41, she went to Denmark for insemination, thinking that this huge step was the final one. She had terminated a pregnancy in the past, so she knew she was fertile. But alas... It took almost two years of waiting, doctor's visits, clinic switches, and several tries of insemination and later IVF before Marianne gives up. It's emotionally difficult, and she has run out of money.

At this point, Marianne meets a man, Leo, and falls in love with him. He has recently left the mother of his children and his wife of seventeen years, and considers Marianne a rebound. When she tells him she wants to be a mother, he is supportive, but asks her not to tell him should she get pregnant. So when she does get pregnant, she does not tell him. She miscarries early, and tells him about it after-the-fact; though still not open to calling Marianne his girlfriend, he convinces her she should not give up on becoming a mother, and to pursue surrogacy in the US. He'll even supply the sperm!

Though he ends up retracting his offer and leaving Marianne for another woman, Marianne, now single, travels to the US with a substantial financial loan from a friend and renewed hope. The gynecologist at the clinic encourages her to go for a few more rounds of IVF, which fail, and she eventually sets out to find a surrogate, an egg donor, and a sperm donor. After her doctor tells her the egg donor she chooses can't be used (it is revealed she is a smoker), she lets him choose, and picks a sperm donor online. With eggs and sperm secured, she just needs to find the last missing piece: the surrogate.

She is quickly matched with a Californian surrogate. Marianne is fond of the family, and she tells me they bonded quickly over mutual interests: dogs, nature, and skiing. She visits the family early in the pregnancy, and feels very welcomed by the big family. The children are friendly and inquisitive; the surrogate and her husband open and willing to share from their life. They remain in close contact via Skype throughout the pregnancy. After proudly sending friends and family cards with storks, babies, teddy bears, hearts, and American and Norwegian flags reading "I'm going to be a mother!", Marianne brings a friend and they travel to the US for the surrogate's C-section and the birth of Thea.

The aftermath is hazy, and she recalls being both terrified and overwhelmed with joy. She is scared and ecstatic at once, and so excited to bring her daughter home. Though most of the practical details are smoothly resolved, she is left losing much of the parental leave she

was entitled to due to lack of legal clarity, bureaucratic mess, and an uncooperative workplace. Though still bitter about losing this precious time with Thea, she is focusing on the present. Both endlessly proud of her young daughter, and exhausted by the challenges (single) motherhood presents, she concludes: "*It's *so* rough. But that's how it is. You just have to try to handle it as best you can*."

4 Surrogacy as a reproductive opportunity

4.1 Introduction

The main question guiding this thesis is: How do parents of children born via surrogacy understand surrogacy? I interviewed six individuals, and asked them to tell me why they chose surrogacy, and if they could please tell me about their experience from the beginning up until today. "Take your time," I encouraged. Straight from the horse's mouth, here's where they all started:

Ulrikke: Yes. That's a long story. (...) No, a lot of people ask me that, how did I decide to do that. And then they say, wasn't that a difficult decision? But it doesn't start there. It starts somewhere completely different. It starts with wanting children, and then you try and you try, and you don´t understand why it doesn't work, and you just get sadder and sadder and sadder.

Eline: Yeah. Ehm. I found out when I was 20, that I couldn´t.... Because I hadn't gotten my period, and I thought that was really weird, so I went to a gynecologist. And she said that... I don't have a uterus. And that's... Well. You´re in the start of your adult life and you imagine what things are going to be like, and then it just gets pulled out from underneath you. Cause there´ll be no children, then.

Henrik: Eh. We met, I guess... I´m not good with dates, but we met around... 2011, I think. Back then I didn't know anything, at first, so it went a while before she said she couldn't have kids. Or, have children. And then I thought that, well, it´ll work out. Like, nothing to worry about, kind of. And then... Yeah, wasn't like... a lot more to discuss, but then, eh, yeah, people around us started to have children, people we knew, this and that, so then... Then we started to talk about possible ways to get a kid. And it was... If we had the option to get out own biological one, then we'd do that.

Marianne: Yes, I, eh, was a little... Well, I´ve been alone, without many boyfriends, kind of, for most of my life. Had a, eh, a few boyfriends, like, now and then, but not so that it was, eh, natural... Been together enough to... kind of feel like you could start a family. And then, when I approached 40, ehm... I´d been thinking back and forth for a while about, yeah, they are having children, and.... And then a friend told me about Denmark.

Thomas: Yeah, ehm... Actually we already have some friends who... I have never actually thought that I would be a parent as a gay man. And I´m a little older than Christian, whom I´m married to. Ehm. (pause). So yeah, it's really Christian who has initiated it, so while he was thinking about it for a long time, eh, I've basically just told him I´ll come along for the ride if you´re sure about what you want.
Christian: Mhm. Right. No, well, this is about us having, for a long time, eh... I can actually start with myself because this has sort of... from I... From when I had that coming-out situation, eh.... When I was, like, 23, it was one of my biggest difficulties, was, was kind of to get past this thing of not having kids. Basically. And that I, yeah. That I kind of felt so, like, outside of society in all those areas, and especially because of that. Eh... So... That desire has been there for... for all those years.

When I started interviewing, I didn't quite realize how versatile my question or prompt was. But look at the variety contained just in the first few sentences, and the remarkable similarities as well! I find the opening sentences to illustrate an important observation about the stories I collected, namely that when I ask about surrogacy (a phenomenon with a multiplicity of connotations and ways of being defined, understood, articulated), they tell me about overcoming involuntary childlessness and starting a family. When I ask them to take it "from the beginning", I ask them to contextualize their experience with surrogacy, and what the above quotes show is how they collectively weave a backdrop from stories about medical and social infertility upon which surrogacy is placed and viewed. Here, on this backdrop, surrogacy takes the form of a reproductive opportunity. Put another way, as stories of surrogacy they say the same thing: surrogacy was only or the best way to overcome involuntary childlessness, become a parent, and start a family. As stories of family creation, they are more varied.

Throughout their narratives, they build upon the foundation of involuntary childlessness to present a version of the truth that is believable, justifiable, and sympathizable. The narrators draw upon different strategies in doing this. Some events are imbued with significance, others ignored. The same goes for characters, observations, feelings, etc. This selection is, as discussed earlier, not a calculated ploy constructed to trick an audience into believing a certain twisted version of the truth. Rather, it is both a practical and necessary narrative selection based on conventions of storytelling, memory, conscious and unconscious processes.

As suggested by the introductions of each narrative, the stories I collected were centered around the family creation project. Ingvill Stuvøy (2016) observes this as one of four

ways Norwegian political actors give meaning to surrogacy. LLH and Ønskebarn are examples of actors who primarily speak about surrogacy as a reproductive opportunity, often articulating surrogacy as an extension of ARTs (2016). This position is evident in all of the stories I collected. Here, the subjects appeal to the normative ideal of family life, which includes the idea that family life itself is the most valuable and natural form of life (Ravn & Lie, 2013), and that a natural family is one with children (Schneider, 1984). This opens up space for the subjects to represent themselves as reproductively marginalized. Such a victimized position can be one avenue for legitimation: "There are reasons for believing that the Norwegian authorities will hear, and in the long run, also incorporate the rights of the counterpublic positions" (Andersen, 2014, p. 54)

Discursively, surrogacy as a reproductive opportunity is in competition with other ways of understanding and speaking about surrogacy. Stuvøy identifies three additional articulations: as marketization of bodies and persons, as sources of exploitation of poor women of color in the Global South, and as a matter of a woman's autonomy and agency. The latter includes ideas both about a woman's right as an individual to "make independent choices, also in a market, and about freedom from exploitation, coercion, and violence" (2016, p. 216). These articulations shifts the center of attention from the (intended) parents over to the surrogate (and the child).

When you study the opening phrases of each narrative above, you deduce that the telling subject wants children, but is somehow unable to have one. As family creation narratives, this is the starting point: the unfulfilled desire. The surrogate character enters to fulfill this desire, but in doing so, she also destabilizes the family creation narrative. By virtue of introducing a third reproductive party into the story, the story is now placed outside the norms we define family by. The presence of the surrogate also is a potential threat to the subject as marginalized or victimized (if she is the victim, the parent is the exploiter, and thus no longer the victim; see Andersen 2016), and as an ethically responsible consumer and moral subject (see, for example, Førde, 2017). These ruptures requires narrative repair, and what follows are three examples of ways that interviewees sought to reconstruct their narratives as legitimate family creation narratives.

4.2 Eline: Normal desire, abnormal fertility

In chapter 5, I interrogate the different understandings of kinship that informs the parents' narratives. In it, I show how intent is a key ingredient in discerning kinship. In other words, it legitimizes their parenthood. In this section, I look into how desire, which I understand to be a prerequisite for intent, is spoken about as something given. Through the example of Eline, I show how desire justifies the *family quest*, the decision to pursue the desire, specifically through surrogacy. Eline gets quite explicit when talking about why they chose surrogacy as a means to procreate:

> *Why we chose surrogacy, is because we can! The possibility is there, for us to have our biological child. Why can't YOU adopt, why should YOU....? I mean, not you [nods towards me], but... Say, my friend, for example, who had a baby. Why did she have a baby? She could have just adopted! People say, why did you do that, you could have just adopted. Yes we could have. That would have been great. Sure. But we had the opportunity to have our own child, so we did that. And people say, that's very, very selfish. But then it's [expletive] selfish for everyone else to have children, too. Yes, I mean that. It's just a natural desire to procreate and have your own child, spawn. That's the way people are. That's the way all animals are.*

Eline here speaks of the desire as something natural. Her husband Henrik, whom they both say on several occasions didn't quite have that strong desire that Eline had, provides explanations of the desire that locates its origin both in the natural and in the social (*"Society kind of demands it")*, often with a gendered element (*"Men don't get broody the same way women do").* Whereas Henrik offers multiple (compatible) theories of where the desire comes from, Eline sticks to one: naturalized desire.

The effect this has on her story, is that it gives her a reason for pursuing surrogacy altogether. For Eline, the desire was unavoidable. She claims "*That's the way people are*" and "*that's the way all animals are*". I interpret this as meaning that Eline thinks her desire to have been inescapable, hardwired into her. *Not* pursuing children becomes the odd thing to do in this light. By naturalizing her desire, she normalizes her quest for a family. The quote above further helps legitimize surrogacy as a reproductive method, the means by which she can achieve her goal. Though she has other options, even claiming that adoption "*would have been great,*" it's clear that the promise of biological (i.e. genetically related) children ultimately wins out. Surrogacy is the preferred method, because it satisfies the "natural" desire for not just children, but biological children.

At the same time that naturalized desire places Eline with the rest of the general population, her desire also spotlights how she's *not* like everyone else: though she is like everyone else by virtue of having a desire for children, she is *not* like everyone else, because she can't fulfill this desire herself. The first reference to her desire for a child came during the opening sentence. In it, she explains that it felt like the future she had imagined for herself got pulled away from underneath her, because being infertile meant that "there'll be no children" in her life. When I, in the second interview, ask her about the "broodiness" she experienced (a word that continues to place her desire within the realms of the natural and animalistic), she says that she started to feel it in her late 20s, and reminded me that it wasn't abnormal to feel like that at that age. She further tells me about the way she felt when other friends became pregnant:

> *Eline: I got really happy when they told me they were pregnant... But I was kind of TOO happy, too, because I am so happy they can get pregnant, if you know what I mean.*

She also tells me about when she told Henrik she couldn't bear children:

> *Eline: But it wasn't fun. I cried every day, the world was like a roller coaster. Yeah, I don't think I've, like, always been the world's greatest girlfriend. It's painful to be the one who can't give the other one a child. Right? It's my fault. But as Henrik says, it's not your fault, it's your mom's fault, because my mom's a drug addict, right, and full of herion when I was made. And the doctors thinks I'm malformed because of that. And my brother is... is... brain damaged, and... As a consequence of that. So I'm lucky, right. But, but... Yeah, it's not a good... feeling. Really crappy, actually.*

In just a few simple sentences, she moves from feeling guilt ridden, to victimized by her mother, to lucky in the big scheme, to "*really crappy*", about her infertility.

This is knotty stuff. Not only does her infertility make her unable to bear children even though she really wants to, but it can look like it highlights her norm violation in a very painful way. The exaggerated excitement she shows towards her pregnant friends further suggests she is keenly aware of what they have that she does not. Perhaps she even feels a little jealous, deep down? From her opening statement it can look like Eline had always imagined that she'd be a mother, or at least that she'd have the option. In her opening

sentences, she says she feels like her imagined future is being "*pulled away from under*" her. It's not her fertility, but rather her imagined future self, that has been taken away; the culprit, it is later identified, is ultimately the addict mother. This is quite rational: she's infertile because her mother took drugs when she was pregnant with Eline. But Eline has to be reminded of this, because sometimes she feels like it's her fault alter all. Maybe because no matter who caused it, it is ultimately *her* infertility. We also see that she feels bad not just for *being* infertile, but for feeling troubled by it at all: after all, her brother's got it far worse. I read Eline as guilty and ashamed. She feels guilty for not being able to give Henrik a child. She also feels guilty for obsessing over what may seem like a non-issue when compared to the fate of her brother. Ultimately, I sense that she feels shameful about her infertility alone.

Eline's account of the desire for a child of her "own" normalizes both the desire itself, and justifies the surrogacy, claiming that the desire for a biological child is something that everybody will follow if they have the chance. Yet her desire is also the thing that makes her infertility more than a medical abnormality, makes it a problem in need of solving: it makes her unable to be who she has imagined herself to be in the future, and it also makes her different from the brunt of women who can bear children themselves. Working so hard to justify the choice of surrogacy might, then, in addition to dispel what she perceives as an unjustified accusation of "egoism", also give a healing sense of normality and legitimacy as a procreator where infertility has threatened to take that away.

Eline's example illustrates how the desire for parenthood generally was understood to be something normal and in some cases natural (all respondents but Marianne make suggestions about the desire being connected to nature, biology, hardwired instincts and the like in their interviews). Family life is a highly valued form of life, and not being able to choose that life leads to social ostracization and deep feelings of lack. The desire has a double function: it both highlights their inability, as well as justifies their pursuit for a family. For most of my respondents, surrogacy was the only way to do go about just that. Eline and Henrik admit they have other options, but justifies choosing surrogacy by saying that it was the *best* way to do it, because it was the *most natural* way. Surrogacy is thus justified as an alternative reproductive method.

4.3 Ulrikke: Victimized and reproductively marginalized

Ulrikke's case is quite similar to Eline's. She says she feels *"of little worth,"* like *"oh my god, you can't do the one thing you came here for: to make children.*" On several occasions, she recounts how difficult it was to accept that she was infertile, and that she needed help. She told me she started surrogacy because surrogacy was their last option. Adoption was out of the question, because "*My husband is 43, which means that he'll probably be over 50 when we get [a child to adopt], and in many countries you can't be over 50 when you adopt"* before she adds that waiting another eight years in adoption queues seemed "*unbearable*". She says that she went into surrogacy "*to accept that I couldn't have children*". She says:

> *I wanted to just say, I have a dog, I have a husband, this is nice. I have friends, I can do without. But I couldn't let go. So... This sounds absurd, but I didn't really go into surrogacy to have children, I went into surrogacy because I was sure I could not have children."*

Most of Ulrikke's first interview is spent detailing her deeply felt pain, caused by infertility. Below is a quote that illustrates the shame, disappointment, and hurt suffered by Ulrikke during infertility treatment, prior to her in-laws calling it quits and steering her towards surrogacy:

> *It's like running the Norseman. And then you get to the finish line, and then they kind of say there at the finish line that no, you're not allowed to cross it. You've done this for what, two months, in hormonal hell and all, and it just amounts to nothing. And I experienced each and every [failed IVF attempt] as a death. It was... It was like, as if... Some person, say your mom or your dad or whoever is absolute closest to you, died every time. It was so unbearably painful. And I kept those feelings all to myself. No one really knew about them. No one. Not even my husband, I think. Because I feel like, even to this day, that, like, now... Now, I have it at arm's length, so I can talk about it, but it's... It's a pain so immense no one can handle it, not even yourself. And the moment you start talking about it, it becomes too much to handle. So in the middle of all this, I didn't even want to live. I was done. Didn't feel joy at anything, and I like to think of myself as someone with a lot of joie de vivre, but I just lost myself completely. And my frustration in all of this is that there are two ways to do this, and you probably know this by now, but there's long and short procedure. And the Norwegian health care providers prefer long procedure, because then they don't have to work Fridays and weekends, without giving anyone the option and without*

informing anyone of how harmful it is to your body, what you're doing, and the long term effects of that, and look at those long term effects of that, look at the social issues of sick leave, rehabilitation, divorce, suicide, all that stuff... And that's probably what's made me want to deal with this, change it. At the same time as all other disease- Infertility, in fact, is, according to the World Health Organization, a disease. All other diseases, when you get to the hospital, you get treated like a patient. With infertility, you are treated as a burden. It's exclusively the feeling that you should be so lucky to even receive help for this.

Ulrikke's narrative's is dominated by accounts of pain and disappointment related to failed fertility treatment. I understand the purpose of the Norseman simile to be to give the listener a sense of the extreme exhaustion associated with IVF. The Norseman Xtreme Triathlon is a long-distance triathlon race, completed by a few very fit and strong individuals - it's not for the faint of heart. It illustrates the injustice and disappointment she feels: going through all of this hard work, only to discover that the reward - the end of the struggle - is being withheld, sounds extremely frustrating. She also says she experienced each IVF failure as a death, and says "*It was... It was like, as if... Some person, say your mom or your dad or whoever is absolute closest to you, died every time".* This last sentence asks me to imagine that one of my parents died - Ulrikke is inviting me to feel some of the deep, intense pain she felt. I feel sorry for her, and I think that's the purpose.

She also tends to, at large, to treat new events as something that just happens to her, rather than framing in in terms of choices she's made. For example, she tells me it was her in-laws who made the decision to try surrogacy. While they provided both emotional and financial support, she must have been part of making that decision, no? Though she assumes more active positions in some places in her narrative, her position is strikingly passive. Taking away a subject's agency is a disempowering move, so I read Ulrikke's combined focus on pain and misery, and her passive positioning, to signal that she perhaps feels a lack of control over what is happening. It makes her, in effect, the victim of her story.

Returning to the quote, after describing her pain, she makes a switch about half way in. Infertility and her (lack of) treatment moves from being a personal problem to a social problem. She assumes a more rational position by citing a highly credible source, the WHO, and listing ills which I can only assume, from the context of her argument, she is suggesting hurts the infertile disproportionately as compared to the rest of the population. Since she on three occasions during her interviews tells me she has decided to be vocal for the sake of the

women who cannot manage to fight themselves, I understand that Ulrikke sees herself as a mouthpiece for the reproductively marginalized. Her victimized position is now anchored both in her medical and her social condition: in the middle of her quote, she shifts her position from a victim of circumstance and medical infertility, to a victim of an uncaring state and reproductive health care system.

She also says that "*those in pol... politics, on a higher level, they're *old men*, very often, who have no idea what they're doing*". She further says that "*it will be like me going on the news talking about the war in the Middle East, which I know [nothing] about,"* suggesting that "*if you don't know it or have been there or have studied it, then shut up*". I read these quotes as attempts at establishing epistemological privilege (by virtue of "having been there"), and at delegitimizing critics of surrogacy, including a number of important gatekeepers. Suggesting that politics are full of ignorant "*old men*" only strengthens her position as marginalized: if they are the privileged, she is the marginalized in this situation.

During our first interview, I experienced a contrast between Ulrikke's highly assertive tone and confident body language, and the sense of victimhood and despair contained in her story. She said early on that it felt nice to talk to someone who wanted to hear "our" story. I tried to make it clear to her that it was not my intention to "give voice" to anyone's cause, but to do research; she accepted this. Yet she continued throughout her narrative to link her personal struggles with a wider community of suffering and mistreated infertile (women in particular). The victimized position can be a useful strategy to promote your interests. Like Andersen remarks, Norwegians have a huge amount of faith in their government, that they will be sympathetic to the voices of marginalized communities, and that "in the long term, they will incorporate the rights of the counterpublic positions" (2014, p. 54).

Yet, I imagine that the political mouthpiece role also served a more personal purpose. I got the impression that Ulrikke is a strong and proud woman, and she recalls herself as someone who has a great lust for life before involuntary childlessness took over her existence. She says that accepting that she was infertile and needed help was "the most [difficult] part of the entire process," and that she has experienced both infertility and surrogacy as being tabooed to the point where it silences a lot of people. She's decided to stay open and vocal about both infertility and surrogacy precisely because of this. She has stated that involuntary childlessness has made her feel worthless ("*of such little worth*"), crazy ("*cuckoo*"), lonely, depressed, and even suicidal. She recounts her transformation with agony: "*I just lost myself completely".* Though she never specifically says she has been ashamed of her infertility, I wonder if that might still describe her feelings. I wonder, then, if positioning herself as the

mouthpiece of a voiceless group, helps to instill her with some sense of agency where she feels like agency is lost, and purpose in a time that makes her feel like a sisyphean triathlonite? As a spokesperson for a marginalized group, she can confirm that she is not crazy (given that her story shares some semblance to other members of the group), that she is not alone, and most of all: that she no longer has to feel worthless. Her story, which for her personally has been a tragedy, gains a sense of purpose in the context of marginalization and the cause of infertility care.

In some sense or another, each interviewee emphasized the obstacles of being infertile in Norway, with experiences ranging from individual feelings of sadness, to ostracization, to marginalization. Henrik employs a similar strategy to Ulrikke when he criticizes "*people*" for "*not even considering the simplest of questions,*" and the state for turning its back on principles of equality and welfare by treating infertility patients as burdens, and those using surrogacy as criminals. He says:

> *You can't choose the sex you're born into, and you can't choose... diagnoses you get throughout your life, or where you come from. And it's so crazy that society gets to... discriminate the sex you're born into or what kind of diagnoses you get. It doesn't get... Well, this is purely political, but... For every thousand bucks you pay taxes on, we pay the same amount of those thousand, as long as the standard is a thousand. And we don't get the same benefits from it.*

Again, the state is being criticized for refusing treatments of its citizens, as the gatekeeper with the option to give or withhold treatment (hereunder ARTs and surrogacy understood as ART), but hypocritically chooses to withhold despite its principles of equality and welfare. The allegation of discrimination is supposed to point to a logical flaw within the government, and to justify surrogacy as a treatment of infertility.

Though Henrik sees himself and his wife as victims of an unfeeling health care system and an unfair law, his position is far more agentic than Ulrikke's. He repeats his mantra "*everything can be solved*" multiple times; he even explains to me that "*the only thing that is impossible is to pull the hair of a bald man*". He says he would put this experience, and all the challenges it brought, on his resumé. Where I have interpreted Ulrikke as finding restoration in the position as a mouthpiece for the unjustly treated infertile, Henrik finds restoration in his being on "the other side" of his struggle: he completed what he set out to do, despite hardship. Whereas Ulrikke doesn't have that personal outcome to lean on yet, Henrik can be the

underdog of his own story, fighting against all odds and come out the other end a success story. This, of course, makes the state (hereunder the healthcare system and laws and policies concerning parenthood and infertility) the villain.

In general, the victim position is detectable in some form or another in every narrative: the state, the media, or local community (members) made the parents I interviewed feel unfairly treated to such a way that it impacted their freedom and wellbeing, but it greatly varied to what degree such a position permeated their stories. Ulrikke, Eline, and Henrik utilize this position most heavily; Marianne, and especially Thomas and Christian, do this less so. A possibly related detail, is that Marianne, Thomas, and Christian speak about parenthood as an unexpected bonus in life, while Ulrikke, Eline, and Henrik seem to have had a lifelong expectation that they would have a "normal" family and come about it the "normal" way. The latter three fall neatly within the constellation of the heteronormative, two-parent family ideal.

I've wondered if perhaps persistent socialization and heterosexual privilege has had something to do with their expressed sense of entitlement. Medical infertility might also come as more of a surprise than social infertility: Thomas and Christian's point of departure was that they would never have a family (since gay equaled no kids, though Christian always looked for proof otherwise). Marianne always dreamed of having a family like everyone else, but was quite aware of her position as a single woman when she started trying for one. Even though it took her nearly ten years, she rarely positions herself as a victim, and when she does, is mostly as a victim of a less-than childhood and a cruel mother (which influenced her into thinking she might not be able to be a mother alone), not as a victim of the state or media. Ulrikke, Eline, and Henrik, on the other hand, met infertility as a disruption to what they had considered to be a normal life. It's also possible that time factors in: Ulrikke, Eline, and Henrik face vastly different battles for legal parenthood than do Thomas, Christian, and Marianne, who are three years into their parenthood, their dealings with bureaucracy safely behind them. Whatever the reason, the victimized position was an important avenue for legitimation in all the narratives, but was used most frequently by Eline, Ulrikke, and Henrik.

4.4 Christian: The non-exploiter

The flip side of the victim position is the exploiter. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the political debate on surrogacy concerns not only the infertile, but the surrogate as well. The potential for exploitation, marketization of bodies and persons, and an issue of a woman's self-determination are in competition to the reproductive opportunity narrative, and

versions of all three pose serious threats to the integrity and justifiability of the narratives I collected. My respondents were all keenly aware of the controversies regarding surrogacy, and this awareness showed up in explicit and implicit references to these debates. Oftentimes, a new and anonymous character, like a neighbor or an uneducated tabloid journalist, would pop up in their stories to present an uninformed view of surrogacy. This provided the person telling the story the opportunity to debunk their misconceptions. At other times, the storyteller would bring their own doubts and ambivalence into the story, in order to explain how they overcame their moral qualms about surrogacy. Christian, for example, treads carefully when he tells me of his initial skepticism towards surrogacy:

> *Christian: Eh, so... that desire has kind of been there during all these years... Ehm. And then it hasn't, hasn't been possible for us to, eh, not possible and not up for consideration and we haven't seen them, you know, the solutions and possibilities anywhere. And I've thought for a lot of years that the... say adoption enters the picture then, then we'll choose that. Eh, and Thomas has been kind of clear about this, that - we talked about this for years, and he was pretty clear on this that, that he sort of, in his process, came out of it with, uhm... he put the whole idea of it behind him. But if I couldn't get over it we'd have to figure something out. And then it became, sort of, my job to do something about it. And I have actually been very sad that the adoption thing hasn't worked, that it hasn't been possible and legal and all that, and then... It came in, that, eh, my best friends, eh... Called me and told me they were going to, they decided on surrogacy. And that's where that whole ball started rolling. Because at first, my reaction was... Eh... That I thought, whoa, this, this... isn't right. Are we supposed to *use* someone for our own happiness? Are, are, are we going to have any... Are we going to* pay *for someone to, eh... And it was maybe this money on top of it all that was extremely difficult. And, ehm... We had.... Then we did that, and then we had... It was kind of in the same process, we had three friends of ours who did it. Two in India. And it was just in this process where India sort of got closed, that option. And we had tremendous difficulty with that side of it, because we thought it was so very, yeah... It was difficult to see, ehm... If we were exploiting someone or not, kind of. So it was very important for us, then, that if this, if this process was going to happen... and then of course, it is a very selfish thing, you can't escape that, but... on the other side, there's... [pause] You can turn it the other way around and say that... everyone who gets children does so for selfish reasons. So we've let that kind of... adjust. And then,*

eh... They used an agency in the US and we were kind of there, on the sidelines, in that process and the... eh... And then, more and more, we kind of... started to realize that this is.... This is actually the solution we have... To be able to become parents.

Christian first contextualizes their decision to go for surrogacy by reminding me that both Thomas and Christian faced practical, legal, and conceptual difficulties when starting a family. They had a hard time even imagining themselves as parents because of their homosexuality, but Christian still very much wanted to start a family. He uses the word "sad" to describe the way it felt to not be able to adopt, and signals that adoption would have been a fine and preferred choice, had it not been for the fact that adoption is a practical impossibility for most gay couples in Norway. He also mentions that it was *his* responsibility to make the initial choices in the process, because it was primarily his desire for a child that drove the quest in the beginning. The turning point came when his friends entered a surrogacy arrangement. He now switches from using the pronoun "I" to "we". He expresses that they are scared to "use" someone for their own gain, and that they found the involvement of payment to be "*extremely difficult*". Going to India did not feel "*right*"; they feared they might unwittingly end up exploiting someone. He interrupts himself to interject a fear of egoism, which he quickly dismisses (in the same way as Eline in the example above: by saying that selfishness characterizes *all* parenthood projects), before concluding the segment with the realization that surrogacy was the only way for him and his now husband to become parents.

Christian has previously mentioned that he felt ostracized by his homosexuality, and that the childlessness in particular made him feel like he was "*outside of society*". In the original transcript Christian says that he has "*gått rundt og vært trist*", which I translated into "been sad" for readability, but whose direct translation is "gone around and been sad". His original phrasing suggests he has been sad about the impossibility of adoption for an extended period of time; this highlights his desire and makes the only option, surrogacy, all the more important.

His reservations towards surrogacy can be linked to Stuvøy's three alternative articulations of surrogacy. When Christian says he felt weary about "using" someone for his own happiness, I believe he is grappling with ideas about a woman's self-determination. He doesn't elaborate, but refrains from using the word "use" in conjunction with surrogacy again. Rather, he focuses on the help that the surrogate is freely offering to them. It reminded me of an episode with Eline. At one point, she says "use a surrogate" before she quickly catches herself "*Use, I think that word is so ugly... *get help from* a surrogate.*" To give or receive

help is different from using or being used. While helping connotes voluntarism, using does not. Conventionally, one uses an object, but can only get help from a subject or person; being used requires a passive subject, while helping requires an active one. Christian's fear of *using* someone might signal his fear for inadvertently treating someone like an object. The solution is to highlight the help she is voluntarily offering, and the wonder that "*someone can be so selfless as to do a thing like that for another person"*. This highlights the surrogate's agency, and helps to cast doubt on surrogacy as an infringement on a woman's self-determination.

His *extreme difficulty* with the money involved, signals his worries concerning surrogacy as a praxis which marketizes bodies and babies. It is not easy to say what specifically makes him queasy, but it is safe to assume it is somehow connected with the strict divide between bodies/persons and money I discuss in the introductory chapter. Except for a note on insurance costs in a U.S. health care system, he doesn't bring up money unless directly asked. His avoidance is remarkable: if it was "*extremely difficult*" to overcome, why do we not hear about it until I ask the last question in my second interview? My guess is that this is still an unresolved issue for Christian. The ethics are admittedly difficult, but he avoids dealing with it in a direct way by emphasizing Amber's help and kindness throughout his narrative. Continually framing surrogacy as an intimate act of altruism helps redirect the audience away from concerns about marketization of women and bodies. This strategy is uniformly employed by every interviewee; it re-establishes the speaker as a morally responsible person.

Lastly, he brings up fear of exploitation, specifically related to India. As Stuvøy remarks, one persistent problematization of surrogacy concerns the specific relations between Indian surrogate women and wealthy Westerners entering into contract (2016). She writes that India's surrogacy marked is described as "cold" and "ruthless", and that economically deprived women are particularly vulnerable to such an "uncontrollable" market (2016, p. 212). Christian says *"It was difficult to see, ehm... If we were exploiting someone or not, kind of",* so their choice of a U.S. based agency felt more "*right*". Perhaps the USA offered a more familiar cultural context, and more transparency? Throughout his narrative, Christian tells me of phone calls and Skype-conversations, some in the doctor's office, some in her home. He tells me of family vacations and inside jokes, of massaging and applying cold packs to Amber's feet when they are swollen. By relocating the surrogacy project to a site that feels more familiar and comfortable, and in addition emphasizing the intimacy and close contact that they had, Christian bridges the theoretical gap between surrogate and intended parent,

reducing charges of exploitation and leveling the field. This move was also performed by every other interviewee I spoke to.

By bringing up fears about surrogacy early in the project, he manages to position himself as a good, moral subject. A moral subject is someone who can act with reference to right and wrong. By showing the audience he justified surrogacy despite initially being apprehensive, he proves he can identify right from wrong and pursue the right choice. Put another way: he shows he knows the potential pitfalls of surrogacy, but avoids, and implicitly counteracts them throughout the rest of his narrative. Through his choices of words and emphases on for example the caring, altruistic aspects of surrogacy, he both dispels his own fears and justifies surrogacy as a reproductive method.

Narratively, he (mostly) solves the moral dilemmas by shifting the focus from exploitation and marketization to altruism, voluntarism, and intimacy, and by avoiding money-talk altogether. Yet I sense ambivalence. His switch from "I" to "we" in the quote above might suggest solving these moral puzzles were a joint project between Christian and Thomas, or it might diffuse responsibility, should Christian harbor any guilt. The couple started their reproductive journey in the midst of the media frenzy surrounding surrogacy in Norway. They couldn't possibly have avoided the negative coverage, and it must have been difficult to navigate. Christian speaks slowly and pauses often when he talks about his fears. It seems as if he chooses his words carefully. Whereas some other respondents treated potential threats to surrogacy as a morally justifiable method of procreation as ignorant or even ridiculous, Christian does not. When I ask him about payment and money in the second interview, he tells me it's uncomfortable to talk about. This suggests to me that his initial fears have not necessarily been completely resolved; but I believe he still feels that he has done everything he could, and that both he and Amber had a good experience.

Christian is a good example of a widely observed tendency to position oneself as the good, moral subject. Like many others, he showed he was not ignorant, but well aware of the potential pitfalls of the method. While keeping within the format of a family creation narrative, he weaved in pieces of information that served to dispel the initial fears he reported he had. His fears were connected to using and paying, and to the image of the Indian surrogate, and ultimately to his image as an (unknowing) exploiter. By avoiding talk of money, and highlighting the good, close relationship with the surrogate - the kind and caring Amber, whom they spoke to often and had so much in common with - he paints a picture of surrogacy that directly contradicts his initial fears. Further, with the surrogate decidedly *not*

the victim, the victim position is up for grabs! Vacating the victim position the necessary step that makes the victim position available to the narrator.

Each and every interviewee wrestled with the moral quandaries associated with surrogacy. Christian solved it by emphasizing the aspects of commercial surrogacy that are *not* cold, calculated, and exploitative; he avoided being an exploiter and victimizer, and could instead position himself as a responsible, moral subject. Others handle the potential threats to the self as a good subject by dealing with it head on, for example by referring to a newspaper article and refuting its points, or explaining in detail the agency's procedures of psychological screening, testing, and counselling as harm minimization implements.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed three ways to explain and justify the choice of surrogacy by providing three examples: I showed how Eline normalizes both the desire to procreate and the choice of surrogacy as a reproductive method, even as the surrogacy itself in some ways highlighted the *ab*normality of the situation. This was expressed through moments of pain and hurt; the presence of these feelings might explain her investments in the naturalized desire and kinship, as it justified her choices and relieved a sense of disruption. Ulrikke similarly draws on the victimized position to show how surrogacy is an opportunity out of reproductive marginalization. I showed how this narrative choice, whereby she positions herself as a mouthpiece of the socially downtrodden, helped not only to justify surrogacy, but perhaps instill her with a sense of agency and purpose in a time where she feels robbed of this. Lastly, I showed how Christian carefully and empathetically considers some fears related to the ethics of surrogacy, and how he solves this moral dilemma by focusing on his information gathering and the result of the surrogacy, which was the happy, intimate experience of two families coming together in one extended family. His discursive investment functioned both to dispel allegations of exploitation, but also to ease what might still exist in him as ambivalence about the morals of surrogacy.

5 Surrogacy as a kinship project

5.1 Introduction

That family would be such a central theme to this thesis came as no surprise. When I started my interviewing process, I asked individuals to talk about their experiences with surrogacy. The answers invariably sandwiched surrogacy between the intense desire to become a family, and the beautiful mess of finally being one. My asking about their experience with surrogacy was like asking a baker about her experience with flower, when all she wants to do is talk about the cake.

What I noticed early on, was the sheer force of these stories. I still have vivid memories of the interviews, and remember the stories, their voices, what they wore, in detail. Ulrikke, for example, had this regal air about her – she entered the room confidence first, with an elegance that was almost breathtaking. When she spoke, I immediately felt pulled in. It's the only way I can describe it. Perhaps the memory has swelled during the time that has passed, but I did feel sucked into her story with a force that surpasses everyday conversation, the way it feels when you surrender to the steepest, curviest water slide in the entire water park, when you have no choice but to let go and be carried away. I thought, first, that it was all about her personality, but in retrospect, I believe it was also the subject matter. The *pulling in* with this force reminded me of something I had read, about what infertility sometimes feels like: like "being drawn in, but not by [your] own volition" (Mehluus, 2012, p. 29).

The words are Marit Melhuus', a Norwegian social anthropologist who around the turn of the millennium spent time with involuntary childless Norwegians, who spoke to her about "family and what it means to be family, and about kinship and what it means to be kin" (p. 26). She noted a seeming paradox: While the individuals, the women especially, "described the process if it was driven by its own momentum (…) the same women (and some of the men) are extremely articulate about what they are doing and why. They are reflective and the producers of a self-conscious kinship" (p. 29).

Kinship concerns relatedness, about "mutuality, responsibility, longing, and affection" (Howell, 2001, p. 203), yet it is also built on understandings of "natural facts," biology, and law. Marshall Sahlins contends that kinship is a purely cultural phenomenon, and that what binds us together is a feeling of a *mutuality of being*. He writes that "kinsmen are persons who belong to one another, who are members of one another, who are co-present in each other, whose lives are joined and interdependent" (2011, p. 21). Yet the Schneiderian ideal of law

and code, the married heterosexual couple who contribute their own sperm and ova in coitus to create an individual who is related to both parents equally, seems to stand strong. Norwegian involuntary childless couples use the biogenetic, bilateral kinship ideal when they talk about what it means to have a child that is 'your own.' Ideas about what is "natural" about reproduction influence discussions of relatedness, and Melhuus shows how those using so-called "alternative" reproductive methods (like IVF or adoption) tend to express an idea of desiring that the parents have the "same" connection to the child. In "natural" procreation, mother and father contribute the same, namely biogenetic substance; the mother, in addition, contributes the biological element of gestation.

Since the use of ART necessitates an interruption to the "natural" model, it is a great place to investigate how parents "kin" their children, and how a child comes to be seen as "belonging to" its parents. Like Melhuus shows, though he point of departure is the biogenetic model, details of what is truly "natural" and "true" kinship change over time, as minute and major decisions are made, and as the desire for a child finds its own momentum altogether. As such, feelings of love and desire, for example, are crucial elements in the changing of such understandings; like Howell states, kinning is "achieved by the parents through the emotional loadings that constitute their understanding of the category of parent/child and that are brought to bear on the relationship from the moment of the child's 'birth'"(Howell, 2001, p. 207).

This chapter concerns the norms, the violations, and the narrative repair that happens around kinship, and the role of feelings in constructions of kinship that have been (or are) under modification. I show how my respondents draw boundaries between kin and non-kin, but how these boundaries are sometimes blurred or require flexibility as the available cultural scripts fall short of describing the relationships that are formed during a surrogacy experience. I show how feelings such as love, fear, jealousy and desire form the emotional momentum that mobilizes different understandings of kinship, and how it is ultimately a mutuality of being that serves to both aide and complicate the kinned relations that result from surrogacy.

5.2 Eline: The hierarchy of motherhood, and extended families

During our first interview with Ulrikke, she tells me about being afraid of "them" (Bufetat) not allowing her to "adopt my own child". I remember being thrown off by the sentiment. The phrasing suggested that she needed to apply to have legal rights to something

that was already hers, and I believe that was what she was suggesting too, that that is illogical and unkind. Henrik brings up the same issue, and phrases it the same way: he thinks it extremely unfair that Eline, like Ulrikke, has to adopt her own child. Because of the gendered nature of Norwegian parental law, he is granted legal paternity on basis of a DNA test that proves a genetic connection to his daughter Vilde, while Eline needs to adopt the child as a step parent, since she did not give birth herself. Henrik seems rather angry, actually, that a child who in his mind is so clearly and unequivocally Eline's will have to be adopted by her. He says:

> *Henrik: You actually have to step-adopt your own biological child. Something's up with that. It should be five minutes, a stamp on a piece of paper. We have all the papers that say... those over there in the USA have signed away their parental rights. But in Norway they're so smart that the woman who birthed the baby is the mother. So now she's getting that final slap across the face from Norway Inc. that no, this is... you have to apply.*

In Ch. 4, I show how both Henrik and Eline frame their reproductive choices in terms of what is natural for humans to desire and do. Eline understands her desire for (genetically related, or "biological") children to be a natural fact, thus unescapable and requiring pursuit. Since surrogacy was the only way to pursue such a desire, that's what she did. It hints at an understanding of reproduction as a natural event, directed primarily by unchangeable facts of nature rather than human instrumentality. Henrik understands procreative desire to also be aided by social pressure, but like his wife, tends to ground his answers about reproduction in the realms of the natural.

When Henrik says "*You actually have to step-adopt your own biological child. Something's up with that"*, he is likely speaking from an understanding of "biological", by which he conceivably refers to the genetic connection Eline shares with her child, as a natural *fact*. Henrik is enraged at the government for refusing to recognize Eline's unmistakable parenthood; he thinks it illogical that the person birthing the child is automatically considered the mother, when the birth mother first of all signed away her parental right, and Eline secondly shares the same connection to Vilde as Henrik does, namely a genetic one. Henrik considers himself a rational and straight-forward man, which is probably why he is so appalled at the law, which is shaped after the *mater semper certa est* principle in a way that it fails to recognize a true "biological" parent when it sees one. By this logic, the law contradicts the facts of nature when it gives parental rights to the biological, and not the genetic mother.

His logic is rather consistent with the folk ideology of kinship, which stipulates that "kinship is defined as biogenetic" and that "both mother and father give substantially the same kinds and amounts of material to the child, and that the child's whole biogenetic identity (...) comes half from the mother, half from the father" (Schneider, 1980, p. 23). But this folk ideology has roots in a past that didn't allow for fragmented motherhood, for the biological and genetic mother to be two different people. It is therefore interesting that the old adage "blood is thicker than water" doesn't quite apply to the same degree today in situations like Henrik and Eline's. Perhaps it should go something like "genetics are thicker than water" or even "genes are thicker than blood," as the surrogate mother transports hormones, oxygen, and nutrients from her blood to the fetus via the placenta. This *biological* contribution to the child is obviously central to the child's creation, but doesn't seem to have an impact on the child's identity and kinship ties as much as genetics do. For Henrik, what is upsetting is the inconsistency that his paternity is immediately recognized on the basis of genetics, while Eline's legal status as mother isn't recognized by the same principle. Henrik thinks it illogical and unfair, and perhaps even insulting, that Eline has to sit tight and wait to adopt what in his mind should be as much *her* child as it is *his*.

Eline shares her husband's definition of her 'own' child as based on her biogenetic connection. The couple says that you must choose what is right for you as a parent, that making reproductive choices is a matter of personal preference, and that what's right for one person might be wrong for another. They both agree, however, that in terms of parental rights, a genetic connection should require no further inquiry; it warrants automatic legal recognition. Genetics become the answer to end all questions about parenthood. Surrogacy should pose no issue, Eline claims, when the intended parent is also the genetic parent:

> *Eline: When the issue is as crystal clear as our case, I think [surrogacy] is fine. I don't mean that those who use donor ova are of any less worth of any less deserving or whatever, it's just... a little different. [Vilde] can see that she looks like me. She can see that she has my eyes, for example. She even has my temper! [laughs] And she's very stubborn, and so am I. We can already tell she's like us, you know?*

Eline here connects the use of own gametes to a form of parenthood that is "crystal clear," as requiring no further explanation. In Norway, there is a common conception that an awareness of your biogenetic background is a primary source of identity. Eline also brings up something important here, namely the idea that such knowledge becomes materialized in appearance.

Vilde *looks like* Eline. Further, she *is like* Eline and Henrik, in terms of personality. Resemblance affirms the thought that reproduction is just that: re-producing parts of yourself to make a new person that contains something of you.

That is something I believe many people can understand: the desire to see some version of yourself reflected in another. Likeness unifies, makes separate parts one whole. I believe many of us have both heard and said "oh, you have your mother's eyes"; I was often told that I had "the Agnalt chin," for example. Sameness, both in being and in looks, signals belonging and shared identity. Perhaps that's why identical twins sometimes adopt vastly different personal styles - as a way to establish a personal identity when it is assumed that their identity is shared? Eline's emphasis on affinity seems to suggest that Vilde will find it easy to establish an identity based on what they share (looks, personality, and genes), and emphasizes that she will be able to *see* how she belongs to Henrik and Eline. The *idea* of genetic parenthood can thus be visually observed, or experienced, in the likeness that results from it.

It is no wonder, then, that a flash of panic erupted in the hospital when Heather's (the surrogate) husband Adam held the baby and noted how similar newborn Vilde looked to his own children.

> *Eline: And he's just like, oh my god, she looks just like ours! And he's like shit, is this our kid or what? Cause he thought it looked like, that she looked like their kids. So he was worried, then, because, imagine... Oh, no, you know? And then I went over to Heather with her, and then... Oh, she's so cute. But she's not mine. No. But she's so cute. Aww.*

Adam is concerned that the baby is his and Heather's, so Eline carries the newborn over to Heather, who takes one look at her before deciding that she's not hers. In terms of likeness, she sees none, and can confirm that the child is not hers.

The surrogate's disavowal of any significant kinship ties to the child is an important part of establishing kinship. In my material, there are numerous examples of parents bringing up how the surrogate confirmed that she was not the child's mother. In Ch. 4, I described how desire was a central part of the parents' stories, and how it was understood as something that was hardwired into you and that required pursuit. This transforms into intent, and intent is a key part of establishing rightful parenthood when it becomes contested. In my material, intent overrides biology (gestation), and sometimes genetics, too (in the case of Marianne, who

shares no genetic connection with her child). The articulation of intent involves pointing out the surrogate mother's *lack of* intent: her intent is located elsewhere, like in helping someome to start a family, for example. Thomas and Henrik also brought up how the surrogate mother's lack of intent was manifested in the contract, and a prerequisite for entering the agreement altogether, as further evidence that the surrogate was not the mother, because/and she didn't want to be.

In the scenario Eline brings up, Adam perceives a likeness between himself and his wife, and the baby, which suggests that it might be *their* child – Heather does not recognize herself in the child, and can confirm that no, this is not my child. Eline probably brings it up because it's a funny incident, but I almost regret not asking about it in the second interview, because I wonder how she felt during those seconds. Did she feel relieved when Heather said no, this is not my baby? Eline retells the story animatedly, holding her arms out in front of her with a bewildered look on her face as she recalls rushing over to Heather to double check that there hasn't been a mix-up. The hilarity of the moment lies in the panic of 'what if,' though of course, it wouldn't have been funny if Adam was right. This situation is quite unique to surrogacy: usually, the woman birthing the baby will *want* to say that yes, this is my baby.

The public discussion around surrogacy is wrought with these 'what ifs'. Claims about the power of a mother's instinct, the primacy of biological motherhood, and stories of surrogates who feel so deeply connected to the child that they refuse to relinquish it to the commissioning parents case doubt on surrogacy as a reproductive method that works for all parties. Surrogacy programs are specifically designed to reduce the risk of such occurrences; parents are informed of this, and this knowledge might be reassuring, or it might also draw attention to the presence of the risk altogether. In Eline's case, the 'what if' caused a funny incident, but in the context of her "crystal clear" understanding of motherhood, what actually happens when it is split into genetic, biological, and social? Even if Eline understands her own motherhood to be "crystal clear", who's to say Heather or other people might not think differently?

I am interested in this: does Eline perceive Heather as posing a threat to her own motherhood, and if so, how does she handle this? Fortunately, Eline is very open about her ambivalent feelings surrounding Heather's status as Vilde's birth mother. Though she doesn't say so specifically, she experiences some difficult emotions when they are about to leave the hospital with Vilde, that suggests that Heather's reproductive contribution is at least not altogether meaningless:

Eline: When we were leaving to go home, I had a little breakdown. It was so... It's, oh... Heather has had Vilde in her belly for nine months, and we've been together, right, all of us. And then we were supposed to take our baby and just leave her. And coincidentally two of her friends were there, and I had met them several times, they had been there when we had visited. And I just start bawling, and, yeah... I start bawling, and then I say... And then Sarah came, [Heather's] best friend, and she holds me. She... Heather was in bed, couldn't even stand up. So Sarah said that... It's going to be OK, Eline. We're here, and you guys are here, too. But now it's time for you to go home with your baby. And... I can't remember the other friend's name. But now, we are... we will be here with Heather when you leave. Like, she won't be alone. It's going to be OK. And then I said that... I feel as if... I feel that it's my baby, but that I'm kind of stealing it, you know. It was very, very, very, very strange. And it was horrible to leave that room and know that, we're leaving now, kind of. Home to our apartment. And I mean, we were going to see each other, we were going to spend several weeks there. But it was so strange. And I felt like... It was so wonderful, too. I was so excited to go home and... care for my own baby, you know, but then... that baby came out of Heather's belly, right. It's so hard to fathom that that's our baby. So I... No, that was very difficult.

Eline: It was odd, it felt like we took someone else's child, at the same time as I had that maternal feeling [morsfølelse], like, in the thousands. And we knew that it was, that it is our child. But it was just... It's not natural. That someone else births your baby. It's a kind of... a boundary in your head, kind of. It's not natural. So it was kind of hard to fathom, that it was our child, and that we could just take her and leave.

Eline recalls the episode as strange and difficult, even as the idea of finally being able to bring home her child felt "exciting" and "wonderful". It demonstrates a feeling that isn't unique to parents with a third reproductive partner, that familiar human experience of knowing something or wanting to believe it, but your feelings haven't quite caught up. Eline feels conflicted, perhaps because she would *like* to just take her baby home and be the family she dreamed of, but there's this third person here, who wasn't part of the dream to begin with. What to do with her? Eline has obviously come to care for Heather, but there is no script for how to handle a situation like this.

While the first quote illustrates the emotional intensity and ambivalence Eline felt, the second concentrates the issue: "*it was kind of hard to fathom, that it was our child, and that*

we could just take her and leave." Eline points to a "boundary" in her head that makes it hard to understand that it's really her baby, one related to how reproduction should go "naturally". I take it to mean that "natural" reproduction means unitary motherhood, and that it is perhaps the fragmentation of motherhood Eline struggles with. When motherhood is split into genetic, biological, and social motherhood, they are arranged in a hierarchy (Goudin, 2014). Eline draws on the biogenetic ideal when she places genetic motherhood on top; when combined with intent it makes her motherhood undeniable. The biological contribution is pushed to the background, since there can only be one mother, and Eline is that mother. In her narrative, and in my material in general, genetics are considered unchangeable codes that, following this metaphor, will produce the same outcome regardless of what computer it's plotted into. In Eline's case, since she can't use her own uterus, genetics is privileged on the discursive level; like I mentioned earlier in this section, which uterus the fertilized egg goes into is almost arbitrary as the child derives its identity primarily from genetic information embedded in the gametes. These ideas must be seen in the context of the deep and often prolonged desire the parents experience, one where they have been denied parenthood for a long time; when they finally get that much longed for child of their own, the one that they have cried and fought for, it's understandable that any threat to this relationship is unwelcome.

That the uterus is "replacable", so to speak, doesn't mean that it is arbitrary who the surrogate is. It is important that the adults get along, that they respect each other, and that they both have each other's best interest in mind. For example, it was generally agreed upon that the surrogate should have as much freedom of choice as possible, but it was also generally well-received that she extended the same freedom to the intended parents. In other words, mutual generosity was expected; so was friendship. This reflects the idea above that the surrogate should have an articulated intention to create a relationship with *the intended parents* (i.e. not with the child). However, respondents also unanimously reported that it was important that the child knows about the surrogate, and that they hoped they would have some sort of relationship with each other in the future. Eline, for example, say:

> *Eline: We are going to be one hundred percent honest and open, when she starts to understand things. And say that you've been in aunty Heather's tummy! Because mommy couldn't have you in her own tummy. Oh, okay, I assume her reaction will be. Because she knows her, she's heard her voice since she was created. You know? (...) Want to go on vacation for three months to Heather? Go ahead! It's kind of... There*

shouldn't be any stress, or dishonesty. And that's why it's so important for us to have Heather in our lives, so it's normal for Vilde that she's there.

I interpret this to mean that while gestation doesn't have an effect on kinship ties, the surrogacy is a meaningful part of the child's becoming and origin story, perhaps even that the parents' expression gratitude entails extending it through the child, who is supposed to know (and appreciate) the important part this person has had for his or her existence. Eline even brings up how Vilde *knows* Heather from the time she spent in her womb – there's a connection there that traces back to the nine months they were part of the same body. Eline brings up the issue of bonding a few times, saying, for example, that she hasn't been allowed to bond with Vilde until she came out of Heather's belly, that she hasn't had those nine months to connect like mothers usually do.

In terms of her own motherhood, then, Eline has at one point stated that her case is "crystal clear," on the count of genetics, but she nevertheless sees the biological contribution Heather made to be not just the missing puzzle piece of Eline's own motherhood, or the road she walked to get there, but that the pregnancy also is meaningful in terms of who Vilde *is*. About surrogacy's impact on a child's identity, Eline says:

Eline: They say that the child can get identity issues and stuff, when it gets older, like, a teenager... Because the child doesn't know where it comes from. That's not an issue here. She comes from me, she comes from Henrik, and she comes from Heather's tummy. And she'll know that. No bullshit, to put it like that.

The idea that Vilde "comes from" Eline, Henrik, and "Heather's tummy," and Eline's recurring talk of "bonding" sheds light on her feeling of "stealing" her own child. 'Stealing your own child' sounds as contradictory and wrong as 'adopting your own child' does – it implies a transfer of something you already have, an impossible act. Eline "knows" that it's her child, as she knows she contributed her own DNA and that who the child is is primarily based on biogenetics. But "natural" reproduction would entail that Eline also gave birth to her child; that's the one contribution Eline could not make. In Ch. 4, I showed how not being able to carry the child herself caused Eline pain, guilt, and perhaps even shame and jealousy. She does not hide the fact that she would have loved to be able to give birth to Vilde herself, and to have those extra nine months to bond with her baby.

That's probably why it is so hard to find the right way to react when they are going to leave with Vilde. It sounds to me that Eline feels guilty for taking Vilde away from Heather,

like she's afraid of what she cannot see or understand, namely exactly how Heather feels or doesn't feel connected to the child. Perhaps Eline fears that Heather connected with the child like she connected with her own children when they were in the womb; it is also possible that the sadness of not being able to carry has inflated the value of prenatal bonding for her.

Like I said, there is no script for how to handle a situation like this. Even if Eline's understanding of biogenetics to be the primary way of establishing kinship, it is clear that she feels like the bond between Vilde and Heather is meaningful and worthy of some recognition. On the one hand, Heather and Vilde "*know*" each other in a significant way; on the other, there can only be one true mother, and Eline is, at least on a rational level, certain she is. Eline's case illustrates how emotionally difficult it might be to have another person carry and give birth to your child. Eline's understanding of motherhood as first of all based on biogenetics and exclusivity; but the desire to also want to carry your own child resulted in what I have read as jealousy, fear, and guilt – a fear of harming Heather, but also fear that she is 'stealing' a child that isn't actually as much hers as she wants it to be. At differing points she refers to Vilde's birth as a result of nature (as a result of their naturalized desire for "biological" children), and as an unnatural event (due to the breaking up of unitary motherhood and Heather's presence as an "unnatural" third reproductive partner). It is understandably difficult to reconcile those two understandings of nature and parenthood without a script that allows for more than two "true" parents. In the end, what guides Eline is her love for her baby, and her gratitude for Heather, to whom she wants to show respects. Feelings like jealousy aren't always the most flattering, nor do they always correspond with what we *want* to feel.

A general struggle for the parents I interviewed, was how to find new ways to describe these sometimes difficult feelings of both wanting to assert exclusive parenthood to their children, whilst recognizing the contribution of the surrogate. In Eline's case, she firmly asserts that Vilde will not have identity issues because she'll know where she comes from: Eline, Henrik, and "Heather's tummy". I believe Eline makes the distinction between Heather and Heather's tummy, because of what I mention above, namely that since there can only be one mother, Eline might want to make sure that she is that mother. But she also includes Heather in Vilde's origin story and imagines that it will be a part of her identity as she grows up. Vilde wouldn't be who she is without Heather – in fact, she wouldn't *be* at all.

Moreover, Heather didn't just help make Vilde, but she helped make Eline and Henrik parents. The relationship between intended parents and surrogates are experienced as close, and parents consistently express gratitude towards the surrogate. I wonder if the use of the

word “extended family” is a way to describe the surrogate an her family as kin, without implying parental bonds between surrogate and child? Since it was used so consistently among my respondents, and they often used the English word rather than the Norwegian, I believe that using this way of thinking about the surrogate’s family was encouraged by the agencies. Yet I also believe they use it because it somehow fits. While I believe Eline to want to be taken serious as Vilde’s (only) mother, it also looks like she lacks a language to speak about Heather as an important part of who both Vilde is, and who Eline is as a parent. “Extended family” might be a way to recognize the surrogate’s contribution as the kind of kin Sahlins talks about: as “persons who belong to one another, who are members of one another, who are co-present in each other, whose lives are joined and interdependent” (2011, p. 21). This seems to fit with the way Eline, though resistant to calling Heather Vilde’s mother, sees the two persons as fundamentally conjoined forever.

Importantly “extended family” not only describes how the child and surrogate are connected, but how the surrogate, her family, the intended parents, *and* the child are all part of each other’s lives and important to each other’s being. At least for the parents, they wouldn’t be who they are today without the surrogate. I also don’t believe I am exaggerating when I say that the parents somehow feel like they “belong” to the surrogate; their gratitude for her is so immense and their lives would have looked so different without her, that the impulse to call her “family” in a way that doesn’t suggest that she has parental bonds with the child becomes universal in my six person study population. To call the surrogate and her family “extended family” is to recognize that they are eternally bound together by the work the surrogate has performed for them, how she gave them a life as parents, and a family which they so long sought.

Generally, the parents would pull from the ideals to the degree that it “fit” with their experience; the closer to the biogenetic, two-parent ideal their relations with the child came, the easier it was to claim that their parenthood could not be contested. Ideas about what is “natural” was often a big part of this. Biogenetics was in most cases naturalized, while reproductive biology was denaturalized; technology was seen as *assisting* “natural” (genetic) reproduction. Yet as Eline’s narrative shows, these explanations of who is kin doesn’t always suffice in describing the kinds of relationships that are created through surrogacy. I have showed how I have interpreted Eline to both feel protective of Vilde as her daughter, while also respecting and honoring the intimate and valuable labor Heather performed for them. I have showed how feelings like for example jealousy made Eline protective of her own status as mother; it was important for her that she be recognized as Vilde’s mother, and her only

mother at that, which meant finding ways to draw on ideals of biogenetic parenthood that validated her motherhood even when the law did not. Yet there are also moments of uncertainty, where she doesn't know exactly how to feel about Heather's connection to Vilde, where she wants to recognize the bonding experience she has had without having it threaten her own motherhood, for example. Yet I believe the most important thing Eline's case illustrates, is how despite discursive limitations, parents are trying to find new ways to describe their relationships in a way that honors the surrogate as a kind of kin. "Extended family" might be a way to honor the significant, eternal bond between the individuals that was created when the surrogate gave birth to not only a child, but to *parents*. This formulation of kinship moves beyond normative formulations of kinship to a more inclusive one, and shifts the focus away from the biological connection between birth mother and child, and onto a more symbolic way of "creating" and sustaining each other through love, gratitude, and kindness.

5.3 Marianne: Origin, destiny, and other mothers

Discursively, my respondents "pick and choose among (…) cultural values about family, parenthood, and reproduction, now choosing biological relatedness, now nurture, as it suits their needs" (Ragoné, 2004, p. 359). These "needs" change over time as the parenthood project progresses. One of Melhuus' most important observations about the desire for a child 'of one's own' is that "time - or rather the passing of time - upsets the content of this desire and contributes towards the transformation of certain ideas of what kinship is and what it should be" (2012, p. 25). Above I show how Eline, who fits the heteronormative, biogenetic, two-parent ideal quite well, struggles to accommodate the surrogate and her biological motherhood into her understanding of "natural" kinship. I show how feelings of fear, guilt, but also love and gratitude, complicated her "knowing," and how she tried to reconcile these feelings in her narrative, most notably through her use of the term "extended family". Below I want to look at Marianne's case as a contrast. In terms of time, Marianne has been in the game, so to say, for quite some time. In addition, she strays from the ideal pretty radically, in that she is single, and has neither a genetic nor a biological connection to her child. This results in a different understanding of kinship than, for example, Eline.

Marianne's timeline is long - by far the longest out of anyone in my study. She tells me it took nine years of "trying" before she got Thea. This "trying" started with insemination of donor sperm when she was 41 (which means that she spent nine years in the reproductive

market, and years before that trying to decide if her desire was strong enough to try for a baby alone). Her first attempt at creating a narrative starts here, with going to Denmark for insemination, and ends about three minutes later. She spoke plainly: she tried this, but that didn't work, so then she tried that, but that didn't work either. I ask further:

> *Lene: Can you please tell me more about... everything, actually? [Both laugh] I mean, we have time, just take your time, and... think back to, what kinds of things were you thinking about back then... How was it to.... To... try things that didn't work out, to look for other options, and.... Get all these no's.*

Marianne begins a sentence, pauses, and starts to cry:

> *Marianne: It's completely exhausting, of course it is. Want it really badly, and then... It took me so long to get there, to feel like I had the courage to have a child alone, at all. Had always hoped it would be together with someone. A, like, a... a traditional family and stuff. So I thought it was very difficult to choose it myself.*

Though I'll admit that I was caught off guard by the need to re-formulate my question, and that I phrased the new prompt rather clumsily, it worked as intended. Marianne ends up talking for over sixty minutes about her trials and tribulations, until it becomes clear that she had to let go of a lot of preconceived notions of what it meant to have a family before she could make the little two-person family she is a part of today.

I don't ask her why she decided to first try IVF, but the facts are as follows: Marianne didn't have many options in Norway. ARTs were unavailable to her here, and adoption was practically impossible, she told me, as no adopting countries would let singles adopt at that time. When insemination, and then IVF didn't work, surrogacy seemed to be the only option left. She then needed to find eggs, sperm, and a surrogate.

Without saying anything about how she chose the surrogate, she tells me about how the first attempt at IVF with the surrogate failed. It was later discovered that the donor egg they had been using might have been the problem: the egg donor, it turns out, was a smoker. The fertility doctor tells Marianne to find a new one, but Marianne tells him that since he "*insisted that I had to switch egg donors, you have to approve her[the egg donor]... i'll make suggestions and you have to see if you have faith in this or that, look at her history and stuff... I don't know how they consider those things*." She says she didn't care much about what the donor looked like, but that she had a few wishlist items, like "*some kind of connection to*

Scandinavia would have been nice, because I thought that would be nice to tell a child afterward, right, that it... there's something in your genetic makeup that isn't mine, but there's still something from here".

The same sentiment of Scandinavian heritage appears a few moments later when she tells me how Leo, who had intended to donate sperm, withdrew at the last minute, forcing her to find a new sperm donor online - and quickly at that! She decided on one of the first profiles she viewed, noting his blue eyes and interesting background. Two things were emphasized: his mental strength and what Marianne interpreted to be a Scandinavian heritage.

> *Marianne: He hadn't always thought life was a breeze, you know. So he had also... he seemed incredibly stable mentally, and I thought, that was a thing that was important to.... If it were possible to get, I thought that... because, I believe... That's a good thing to bring with you in life. I, for one, haven't always thought life to be easy. I've had some rough and difficult times, I feel.*

She brings up his eight or nine years as a soldier in Afghanistan, and how he had "*endured that*". He was now going to school to study sociology, which Marianne thought was wonderful, a *"cool dimension to.... Yeah, a man who's not just all... all macho, but still very strong*." She also tells me the profile mentioned he was good at math; Marianne isn't great at math, and math skills "aren't a bad thing to have". She ends up concluding that it was destiny that exactly he was on the front page that day:

> *Marianne: It was probably meant to be, that he was on the front page, and was there just when I needed it. And it just clicked with... kind of that there were some genetics, probably, I would think, from... I'm thinking Norway, then. Maybe just cause I want to, but... But I think those are nice things to tell Thea.*

The reason she thinks he is of Scandinavian or even Norwegian heritage, she tells me, is because his eyes were "*extremely blue eyes*," and he had Scottish ancestry; Marianne put the two together and imagined that meant that somewhere down the line, there was Viking blood. Of course, she doesn't know if this is the case - she's just imagining it, and admits it might be from sheer force of will that she can think this to be true.

Her long and emotional detailing of his profile suggests that she thinks his contribution to be important to who Thea will end up to be as a person. It brings my thoughts back to Norwegian debates about sperm donation and anonymity, where it is suggested that

not knowing your genetic makeup constitutes living "life as a lie" (Howell, 2006). As such, knowledge about your biogenetic origin is understood as "truth", and as a primary source of one's identity. On several occasions she tells me she picked donors based on what she wanted to be able to tell Thea, assumedly about what her genetic background was, and thus who she, in a sense, is.

This value placed on origin stories resonates with the rest of the my material, where emphasis on being open about every stage of the surrogacy process was thought to be both morally correct and beneficial to the child. The child has a right to know, seemingly because one's origin story has bearings on one's identity. The child is imagined to be bound to the surrogate by virtue of her priceless help (importantly, her biological connection to the child is understood as temporary; the thing that actually connects them is her kindness in offering to help, i.e. a version of intent that doesn't imply kinned relations between surrogate and child). Yet where all the other parents in my study has the option to define kinship primarily according to the genecentric ideal, Marianne's thoughts on genetics, origin and identity deserves a closer look.

For one, I find her "wish list item" of Scandinavian heritage to be an interesting one. I could imagine one possible reason for wanting such a heritage, is the idea that it would result in an appearance that resembles Marianne's. That's not an altogether uncommon thing, to want your child to look like you? As I showed in Eline's case, likeness is an important part of establishing kinship. Yet I also believe that insisting upon Thea's Scandinavian heritage through her genes could be a part of wanting to instill Thea with a sense of belonging. In her second interview, Marianne repeats the idea that Thea and her were "*meant to be together*," and reveals she is planning to tell her daughter that it was always intended that exactly the two of them were supposed to be a family; they just needed some help. This idea of fate is also mentioned in the above excerpt. A Scandinavian heritage and identity infuses the mishmash of coincidences and directed actions that third- and fourth reproduction implies with a sense of purpose and direction, one which directs Thea home to Norway and to Marianne. Like she says about the potential Scandinavian heritage of her egg donor: "*there's something in your genetic makeup that isn't mine, but there's still something from here*". Genetics here implies lineage and belonging, and is a way for Marianne to tie Thea symbolically to herself, almost as if Thea's presence in Norway (with Marianne) is a *return home* for Thea. In this view, Thea's origin is not a sperm bank, but the place she is growing up: Norway. In any case, it is clear that Marianne wishes for Thea to know that she is not rootless, and that they were destined to be together, as she says.

In addition to seeking a touch of Norway in her donors, Marianne states that one of the reasons she picked that specific sperm donor, was because he seemed like he was mentally strong. I can certainly imagine that she wanted Thea to inherit his mental strength, but I can also imagine that this spoke to her for other reasons as well. Like she mentions, Marianne hadn't always had the easiest life. When Marianne was growing up, her parents, and her mother especially, were difficult and distant. They made Marianne feel small and unintelligent, and it sounds to me through her retelling like she felt like their love for her was conditional. This gives added meaning to Mariannes claim that it took a long time for her to take the leap into motherhood "alone": not only did she not have a partner, she also didn't know how much of a support system her family could provide once the baby was born. Mental toughness must be something Marianne has had to develop for herself; I read her emphasis on mental strength in this light.

I believe that Marianne might imagine or hope this trait to be heritable, and that she wants the best for her daughter. But it also seems to help her imagine the person behind the profile, and sets the stage for a sort of connection between the donor and Marianne. Intentional or not, this helps mimic the love connection that is part of the folk ideology of kinship. This is what Thomas and Christian do when they call donor-hunting "*high level matchmaking*". Christian says:

> *Christian: I kind of had to, sort of feel like I could fall in love with [the egg donor], for some strange reason. But it probably has... It probably has something to do with, might be something so fundamental like the procreation thing. That you kind of feel like... it has to be a person I can, kind of feel like... I can care about. [bli glad i]*

Here, Christian likens their alternative reproductive path to the "natural" one, by imagining that he is "falling in love" with the donor. What this shares with Marianne's retelling, is this sense of a special connection between donor and intended parent. Marianne doesn't say anything to make me believe she feels like she had to "fall in love" with the donor(s), but she does formulate the donor's procreative contribution as a link in a joint project:

> *Marianne: He [wrote] that, I hope [the child] will think life to be a gift [voice breaks, she starts to cry]. And I thought that was a lovely thing to be able to tell a child... that is created this way. I thought it was kind of... Like, he wanted to help me, or someone.*

Here, the emphasis is not on the donor's genetic contribution, or what that might entail for Thea's identity, but on his kind hearted offer of help. In terms of Thea's origin story, this is an important part of it: beyond being a product of sperm, eggs, and a nine month "lease" on a uterus, she is the product of Marianne's yearning for her, and the willingness of kind hearted people to help. In terms of intent as a key ingredient to kinship, it exists in this formula, too: Though it wasn't his intent(ion) to become a father, it was his intent to help Marianne become a mother to Thea.

So what about all the other people involved in creating Thea? The egg donor is barely mentioned, and one might wave this off as an effect of Marianne simply not knowing much about her. Yet interestingly, she doesn't spend too much time dwelling on her relationship with the surrogate either. I found it strange that in her first interview, she describes the surrogate and their relationship with only 300 more words than she does the sperm donor. This is noteworthy, as she has had a long relationship with the surrogate and her family, has visited their home, met her children, had long and intimate conversations with her, and still talk to her on a regular basis, while all she knows of the sperm donor was communicated to her in a limited information online profile. Whereas the other parents featured the surrogate as a main character of their stories, Marianne doesn't even mention her by name during any of her two interviews. Though she often refer to people as "my ex boyfriend" or "my sister," i.e. not by name, I still found this peculiar.

There might, of course, be a host of reasons for this, but I have read it as a sign of fragility. I perceive Marianne as a sweet and lovable woman, yet she has never been able to find a partner that would stick by her for the long haul, and even her parents have for the better part of her life been cold and withholding. Marianne tells me after our second interview that she feels insecure as a mom, partially because she doesn't feel like she has a great ideal to model her mothering on. From the pained, almost panic-stricken way she tells me about how Thea has begun to act out and call Marianne by her first name rather than "mom," (something Marianne was forced to do with her parents; they often would not respond to "mom" and "dad"), I understand how deeply she loves her daughter, and how desperate she is for this relationship to work. The thought of somehow being rejected by the most important person in your world sounds, to me, utterly terrifying. In any case, I understand that she loves Thea, but that she sometimes feel insecure about her role as her mother.

As such, even if Marianne is eternally grateful to the surrogate who made Thea's existence possible in the first place, one might read Marianne's dowplaying of her role as a way to mute the symbolic threat she presents to Marianne's motherhood. Though Marianne

acknowledges with gratitude that Thea's existence is the result of four people's joint effort, whereby Marianne provided the intent and directed action, and donors offered sperm, eggs, and a uterus, motherhood is still an exclusive category to the point where it is even written into law. There can be only one true mother; all others must abide by a prefix. Marianne, naturally, wants to be this one true mom. If this is the case, this could also shed light onto why, in addition to a lack of information, the egg donor's genetic contribution wasn't talked about much, while she goes on for a long time about the sperm donor. The sperm donor, in this case, poses no threat to her motherhood, and even strengthens it, as it offers a stand-in for the father and in a way brings Thea's creation closer to the two-parent, heterosexual family ideal Norwegians generally abide by.

Marianne's is an interesting case, as she is not only the only single person in my study, but also the one with the longest journey (measured in years), and the only person in the six person group who has no genetic connection to her child. This results in a slightly different way of understanding kinship, one that requires an emphasis on destiny and intent in order to anchor Thea's identity to her. I've shown how picking a donor was, for her, a process that involved both strategic choices (handing the decision of choosing an egg donor off to a doctors, to pick an egg most likely to succeed, after a failed first attempt), but also fantasies about tying Thea to herself through an imagined common homeland, as well as what I have imagined to be an emotional connection with the person Marianne imagined behind the profile. It is obvious that one needs to at least like one's donor, as it is understood that a piece of that person will live on in the child. I also connected Marianne's insecurity as a mother to the relatively small role she gave the surrogate in her narrative, and suggested perhaps she felt, on some level or another, that her identity as a mother was threatened by the presence of this "other" mother.

5.4 Thomas: Two dads

While I have interpreted Eline and Marianne to have struggled with how to understand kinship when the presence of a third (and even a fourth) "mother" is present, Thomas (and Christian) present a different case. In terms of their desire, their journey starts in a different place than the other respondents'. Christian explains that one of the most difficult parts of coming out and accepting his homosexuality as the thought that he wouldn't have children. He says that while he never expected to have children, the desire has always been lurking underneath the surface. Thomas is a little older than Christian, and grew up more

conservatively than his partner. For Thomas, being gay didn't just *suggest* that he would never become a father; being gay and being a dad were, fundamentally, mutually exclusive categories for him:

> *Thomas: You'll never be able to live a normal family life, because of your sexuality. And it becomes a kind of a.... Yeah, a kind of a truth, then, that has anchored itself in you. Yeah. So it's just not been possible up in my head to have children.*

A perhaps obvious, yet important observation in regards to time and desire, is that for the desire for a child to exist, parenthood must first be considered a possibility altogether. It took Thomas a *long* time to wrap his mind around fatherhood; during the time that Christian was gathering information about surrogacy, he had time to imagine himself as a father, and it wasn't until after the first Skype-meeting with the agency that he expresses that he "*wants to be a father, too*". Up until that point, the project has primarily been Christian's. It was *his* desire, *his* vision, *his* undertaking, but Thomas had agreed he would "*be in on it*" and support his partner all the way. During this time, a transformation occurred, whereby Thomas was able to imagine himself a parent, and realized that he wanted this, too. While he had agreed to be the resulting child's father from the beginning, I believe his statement signals the moment where Thomas understands that he wants to take an active part in the family project, in other words, where he realizes the parenthood project as a *joint* project, and vocalized his intent.

When he realizes he wants to be more actively involved, they decide to opt for twins, ensuring that both dads will have contributed the same to the family (sperm). They have one genetically related son each, and have adopted each other's genetic offspring so that they are both legal parents to both twins. They both sometimes speak of procreation as a "natural" event; Christian especially tends to liken his desires to the "*animalistic*" of human life, most notably the desires he can't rationally explain (like wanting to "*fall in love*" with the egg donor). Yet on the whole, their stories bear the mark of years of exclusion from mainstream society, and feeling different from other people and families.

A major concern for both dads, was the issue of bringing children into this world who would grow up with two dads and no mom. Before they took contact with the agency, they say they both felt very "*prejudiced*" against themselves, Thomas explains how starting a family meant both handeling potential flack both from mainstream society *and* from the part of the gay community who idealized the liberating potential of queerness and resisting the heteronorm. As such, they fell between a rock and a hard place, both too "normal" yet not

"normal" enough. Over the years, those issues have fell to the background. Thomas explains that he has realized that society is increasingly open to new family forms:

> *Thomas: There are more exceptions than… There are more abnormal families nowadays than normal families, so it evens out, I think. There are almost no normal family constellations left. So I think maybe, yeah, there are, like, lots of other challenges besides growing up with two gay dads. Keep thinking that, we try to tell them that aw you guys are so lucky to have two dads. We're trying to trick them a bit [laughs]*
>
> *Lene: [Laughs] Trick them?*
>
> *Thomas: Well, no, not trick them… You have to laugh at that, with the mom… Like… Traditionally… You always think that children need a mother. A mother's warmth, a bosom, kind of, and when they don't get that, they must lack something crucial. They can never become normal, those kids. And I remember when they started, like… The first… And then they say… No, I can't remember what it was, exactly, but it was something like "mommy, mommy, mommy". And we've, like, we've laughed a lot about that, because you can interpret so much from that. Like, oh, yeah, they probably do need a mom! [laughs] Yeah, fun things like that happens. We joke about it a lot. I think they will be affected by the fact that two men are raising them.*

I am struck by this fear of not being enough. Similar to Marianne, both of them express a fear of not being able to raise children because of who they are. While Marianne "lacked" a partner or another secure support system, Thomas and Christian was afraid they wouldn't be able to provide "*a mother's warmth*". Thomas has, however, come a long way. Though he is still certain that his kids will be affected by being raised by two fathers, there's little he can do about it, and all one can do is laugh. Humor is a useful way to make light of what is somehow painful, and even if the fear might still be there, that his boys will somehow be "hurt" by the absence of a mother, there is little else to do but laugh and live their lives.

As such, it is probably no surprise that Christian and Thomas seems less conflicted about their surrogate Amber, than the other respondents. The way I have read Marianne and Eline is in a way that suggests that the surrogate brings attention to a lack, and in a way threatens their motherhood. Thomas and Christian, however, are in a way having the opposite

problem, in that they both bring up issues around starting a family without a mom. When reading and listening to the interviews, I noticed, for example, how consistently Eline, Henrik, Ulrikke, and Marianne used the word *surrogate*, while Thomas and Christian are the only individuals who sometimes refer to their surrogate as *surrogate mother*. While this, of course, could be a coincidence, I believe it's also possible that the result of such strict norms concerning motherhood and its exclusivity makes using the word "mother" about a person one cannot afford to compete with (both in a legal, social, and emotional sense), difficult, if not impossible.

Yet exclusivity doesn't merely concern motherhood; it concerns parenthood in general, in that three parents is one too many. Norway does not recognize a third true parent, and I don't believe Thomas and Christian feel like they want or need one either. Even if they call Amber and her family their "*extended family,"* the two dads never speak of her as their sons' mother, because as their son Noah said, Noah and William "*don't even have a mommy!"* Starting a family with two dads rather than a dad and a mom, has been difficult, not just because of thei idea of two men raising children together, but more importantly, because of the idea of raising children without a mom. But as I said, there's no room for a third parent. The "normal" way to start a family is with two parents, who are equally related to the child (Melhuus, 2012). This comes up during a discussion about genes and legal parenthood, as each dad adopted the other person's genetic offspring. In order for the dads to adopt their sons, they had to prove paternity through a DNA test. Christian brings it up as a nuisance, and says he wishes they never had to do it:

> *Christian: I wish we- I really wish we didn't have to do that, as we are two parents, and they accept that elsewhere, so I wish we, we'd love to have… I know other people have said that before us, after us, too, that… That you have to go thorugh this gene thing. We probably didn't think too much about that before we got the answers. And there, it got so… Well, Thomas isn't as emotion… eeh… He doesn't- it's not that big of a deal for him. But I thought… I thought that it was difficult to all of a sudden know that he's yours and he's mine. The best part about it was that we kind of got the opposite result than we thought. So, eh, that was… It was so fun. Really. Because that… It just showed that attachment had nothing to do with that.*

Here, Christian is resistant to the idea of "mine" and "yours" based on the "facts" of gene-tests. One positive side of Thomas finally going "all in" and contributing sperm, too,

was that it finally became their joint project rather than just Christian's. In terms of their kinship ties with their children, the labels "mine" and "yours" is a threat to a unified parenthood, where each parent contributes equally. But the truth is, that while they contributed equally to the twin *pair*, parent A contributes *all* of the sperm to child X and parent B contributed *all* of the sperm to child Y. The impulse to want to keep the knowledge of who contributed what to which child, seems to be a rather understandable way to protect the jointness of their family project, and to keep symmetry intact. Thomas and Christian don't seem too concerned with genetics at all, and both talk a bit about how they both had wished adoption was available for them. In this case, their contribution *would* be equal, as none of them would have genetic ties to the child but both would have equal amounts of desire, intent, and love for the child. It seems that Christian feels that the emphasis on genetics is an unnecessary way to impose unwanted values of biogenetics on the family, when they value symmetry the most. That's perhaps why the realization that "*attachment had nothing to do with [genes]*" was so welcome – it was proof that it didn't mean that much after all.

What Christian and Thomas' examples show quite well, is the oscillation between feeling normal and feeling abnormal that all the parents share. Having children makes my respondents feel "just like everyone else," but the different reasons that have brought them to surrogacy (the reasons they can't have children the "normal" way), still stands, and continues to have an impact on how they speak about their reproductive experiences. Thomas and Christian have their own unique set of challenges regarding their parenthood, and show how the idealization of motherhood affect not just the narratives where there is a symbolic competition between different kinds of mothers, but also the stories where fathers take the center stage.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have shown how emotions of love, fear, guilt, and insecurity play an important role in the way parents to surrogate children structure their stories of family creation. In general, the discursive choices they made reflect the literature: Parents drew on the heteronormative, two-person, exclusive parenthood ideal that centers biogenetics as a "fact of nature," to the extent that this was possible. "Nature" functioned as an absolute definition of kinship, even as other elements of kinship were in the end considered to be more important. Such elements were first and foremost desire, especially as it translated into intent, the directed action taken to fulfill this desire.

I have demonstrated this using three example cases. I showed how Eline struggled to reconcile her understanding of kinship as "natural" with the presence of the "unnatural" third reproductive partner, and how a recognition of the bond between her child and Heather resulted in what I have read as insecurity. Marianne, who had little option to connect herself to Thea via "nature," relied on an understanding of fate as a key ingredient of kinship; nevertheless, she has many ideas about how Thea's identity would be affected by the genes of the donor. In Thomas and Christian's case, I showed how their status as a same sex couple gave them a different set of challenges than the rest of the group, and how the motherhood ideal, in particular, resulted in some difficult hurt that was handled through humor and emphasis on their symmetrical and loving relationship with their sons, and how their family actually made them feel quite normal. I find that even if there was an emphasis on biogenetics in determining kinship, experiences of love and mundane events like seeing oneself in one's child, or learning about the children as the individuals they turn out to be, outranked any consideration of biogenetics, lineage, or law.

In the end, I believe it is a feeling of "mutuality of being" that best describe how parents feel related to their children, yet which also point out the limitations of current cultural understandings of who can be kin. I show how parents recognized a child's mutuality with third and fourth reproductive parties, which were both understood to be significant, but also as in some ways threatening to their parenthood. They basically didn't know how to define such mutuality, if it couldn't be understood as kinship. The use of "extended family" was commonly used, and I have explained how I believe it might be the best alternative offered to parents as a way to recognize how they are eternally grateful for the surrogate, and how surrogacy isn't merely about making babies, but rather, making parents. An illustrative quote to end, would be Christian's. While he considers himself and Thomas to be William and Noah's true and only parents, the person who helped them get to where they are will always be part of Noah and William, and thus part of who they are as a family, as kin. He says: "*We can't see our children without seeing her. Every time we have, like, these grand happy moments with the boys, she's there, in our thoughts, pure and simple, our gratitude for her."* This, I believe, shows how kinship constructed in the context of surrogacy, is perhaps more complex than words can fathom, and how love and gratitude always wins out in defining who's family.

6 Surrogacy as an intimate commercial experience

6.1 Introduction

Christian: I was in [my hometown]. And then an acquaintance of my mother who have always adored me, and always has to stop and chat, always out with her dogs, [approached me].. So we stopped on a corner here, and then she says, But how are you, Christian? Very well, I say, I've become a father. You've become a father? Yes, I said, I have become a father to two twin boys. Oh, how wonderful, Thomas, children are a gift whether you got them or bought them! [slight pause] And I laughed, and then I stood there and thought: What did you just say? [laughs] Wasn't this terribly mean? Or, what... Should I... Should I get offended or should I... Should I... What do I do now? And then I thought that no, you actually can't get insulted by this. You know, she's actually so direct about it that I have to laugh. This is actually funny. So I laughed about it. But of course, she's onto something when she says... She kind of points to what we're so incredibly scared of, that we... That's so... That's actually pretty hurtful, because.... Because it has to exist.

Christian is an excellent storyteller. His background as a performer shines through in his storytelling, which is animated and steadily paced. He brings color and life to his narrative as he offers me a set of jazz hands, a pair furrowed brows, or a high pitched voice. When he claps his hands together and, donning his home town's charming accent, exclaims: "Oh, how wonderful, Christian, children are a gift whether you got them or bought them!", I let out a weird sound. It was a short oomph, a squelched laugh that, like Christian, begged the question: is this funny, inappropriate, or both?

The source of our mutual discomfort, is probably the blunt manner in which the woman brings up money into a conversation about family and newfound parenthood. She suggests that children are either given to you, or you can buy them, implying that Christian bough his sons. It's unsettling, perhaps because it commodifies the twins, and suggests that Christian's children's lives aren't priceless after all - all commodities have a price. Small wonder that market-based language, including words like "buying", but also "goods", "rent", "sell", "order", "import", etc., is a common way of exerting criticism against surrogacy, as is comparing it to forms of illicit marketization of people and body parts, like organ selling,

prostitution, and human trafficking (Stuvøy, 2016). Beyond accusing surrogacy of violating the more that humans are not for sale, more broadly, it signals the impropriety of bringing the marketplace into the intimate world of kinship and family altogether.

In our culture, we have different rules for who can act and what can be exchanged in a market as opposed to in a gift relation (Carrier, 1990). The ideology holds that gift exchange is of "inalienable objects between people in a state of reciprocal dependence" while what is being transacted in a market, is "alienable objects between transactors who are in a state of reciprocal independence" (Gregory, 1980, p. 640). Previous research on surrogacy has often focused on the seeming contradiction between defining the commercial activity as an act of altruism, and show how actors involved in surrogacy infamously tend to emphasize the non-contractual and non-commercial elements of the transaction, for example the surrogate's altruistic motivation and the child as the ultimate gift (see for example Ragoné 1994, 1996; Teman, 2010; Berend, 2016; Førde, 2017).

Yet the gift-commodity dichotomy is under fire. In modern capitalism, it appears that as opposed to "the traditional commodification of nature", the "new generation of commodities is different" (Smith, 2007, p. 2). The boundaries become increasingly blurred, and like Rus writes, modern commodities increasingly take on the characteristics of gift exchange: they can create social relationships, imply moral or social obligations, contain some quality or spirit of the giver, impose an identity both on the product and the receiver/buyer, and be forever connected to its producer (2008).

He further states that "'commodity vs. gift' is (...) often used as metaphor for 'market vs. non-market'", meaning that gift language is intended to remove the activity in question away from being classified as an "exchange of goods [that] is devoid of almost all social or personal considerations" and toward one "which creates or reinforces social relationships between individuals"(p. 83). What I observe of my respondents prove that the dichotomy (and the taboo attached to it) affect their narrative choices, but that since commercial gestational surrogacy is both deeply personal and a commercial venture, parents veer between the two poles when describing their actions and relationships. At the very least, it is an affirmation of McKinnon's observation that assisted reproductive technologies, hereunder surrogacy, "confound the separation between kinship and contract, love and money, the domestic and the economic" (2015, p. 472).

In what follows, I locate a tension between the acknowledgment of the commercial, and the heavily non-commercial aspects of surrogacy. While the parents don't deny the commercial aspect, defining their experiences using a language that traditionally belongs in

the commercial doesn't feel appropriate. Since the activity transcends boundaries between the commerical and the non-commercial, the parents were confronted with the task of reconciling the contradiction, and figuring out how to describe surrogacy in a way that both felt true to their experience of it as something defined by kindness, generosity, love, and kinship, even if those experienced occurred in a market. I believe this chapter demonstrates the transformative potential of these experiences, as they tread a new path of describing market relations mostly through language, ideas, and experiences traditionally understood as not belonging in a market.

6.2 Christian: The money taboo

The anecdote about Christian's mother's acquaintance came up after I asked Christian about money and payment. I clumsily asked him to talk about "money and payment and stuff", and he generously offered the anecdote. He goes on to say:

> *Christian: It feels kind of dirty. It felt very bad. That we were the ones that could pay ourselves to a thing like this. But as I said it disappeared pretty quickly. It actually disappeared our first meeting with Amber. That's really where it happened. And then the agency would tell us a great deal about, this money, they pay for the health care things, kind of that... And then she gets a tiny compensation to do it, but that at the same time is a compensation for the time that she, kind of, puts into it. And it's still that way, that when I hear... when i talk about it now I get a knot in my stomach because I think it... It's no fun to talk about it. And I have been consistent in not talking to anyone about it. We don't talk... And when someone have said in a jokey way but also in a veiled probing way, like, what did this cost and all of that. Then I've been very, very clear on that we don't talk about that. Look it up yourself, sort that curiosity out. You get to do that elsewhere. I can talk about everything else, but we won't talk about that. And in that process too, we had the psychologist between us. So in relations to everything with Amber and Aaron, we never talked about it. We weren't allowed to talk to each other about the economical stuff.*

Christian's discomfort is evident, and for me personally, contagious even a full year after the interview. He reports it makes him feel like he has a "*knot in his stomach*". I sympathize with his annoyance at voyeurs fishing for dirty details, and to some degree, I feel bad for even asking. The discomfort deserves attention, though. Like I suggested in the

introduction to this chapter, his answer correlates with a taboo concerning commercialization of the intimate: paying for children is a cultural no-no that threatens the legitimacy of their reproductive project as a kin-making one.

I find that the last part of his answer is reflected in the brunt of my respondents' answers, in that most find talk of money rather uncomfortable, and also that commissioning parents generally were asked not to discuss money directly with the surrogate. The agencies rather strictly enforce the boundary between the personal and commercial by relegating all talk of contracts and money to agency representatives and lawyers. The relationship with the surrogate is thus kept as clean from market language as possible; a personal, friendly relationship is heavily encouraged, and both surrogates and IPs are coached and interviewed beforehand to ensure both parties have the same expectations concerning communication and relative intimacy. As such, agencies rearticulate the indecency of mixing money and kinship. Whereas the commercial aspect is an inescapable part of the exchange, it is kept strictly separate from the relationship between surrogate and intended parents. This opens up for parents like Christian to view his relationship with Amber as practically void of commercial interests, and for surrogacy to be viewed primarily as an activity "which creates or reinforces social relationships between individuals" (Rus, 2008, p. 83).

In addition, the relationship truly doesn't *feel* like a commercial activity – one *buys* a thing, and Christian's children really aren't *things*. It also reflects how Amber's work, while compensated, truly felt priceless: she offered him, in a sense, a road to having a family. Money, conventionally, has no place in such matters. That is perhaps why when he brings up her compensation, he immediately feels "a knot in [his] stomach". He tells me her compensation is "tiny", a sign, perhaps of reducing suspicion of profit-making, or it might be a comment on the discrepancy between what she gives them (ultimately, a family) and what they can offer her. He also remarks that the money pays for Amber's "time," i.e. not a child. In my material, payment (which comes in addition to coverage of all related fees, from medical appointments to supplements and parking) is considered to compensate for the surrogate's time, service, or pain and suffering, thus separating payment from the exchange of the child.

This is not altogether unique to surrogacy arrangements: transnational adoption is often understood as a non-commercial activity, even as massive amounts of money is exchanged globally as a result of such adoption programs (Myong & Hansen, 2017). Surrogacy is thus not new in involving money in the exchange of children and creating parents, but the money part is made highly visible. Christian's feelings of discomfort are

palpable, and understandable, but what is interesting is how he creatively solves the commodity/non-commodity dilemma by defining the transaction as an acceptable form of transaction: the exchange of money for someone's time and service. We do this on the daily, like when we buy a massage or go to the dentist.

By designating the money they're paying to for example their surrogate's well-being during the pregnancy, as we shall see Ulrikke does below, or for lost time like in Christian's case, the money is allowed a free-pass into a relationship that is still mainly intimate, personal, and kinning. Like Christian shows, surrogacy did, on the one hand, pose challenging questions about

> *Christian: We've felt that it's been uncomfortable, quite simply. But then the process... It became so much more than that. And that's something I kind of hear from adoptive parents, they say that, in the beginning it can feel like... That they have the same feelings. And then... Then that dissipates.*

It seems like worries about money disappear once they meet Amber, and further, that the passing of time continues to minimize his fears connected to money. He says that *"it became so much more than that*", and here I am inclined to believe that he means that it became more than about the money, or more than a business relationship. A general finding is that for all the parents, a commercial logic was insufficient in describing their experiences with surrogacy: for them, there was an emphasis on love and mutual generosity, on friendship and most importantly: the truly priceless contribution the surrogate offered, even as she was compensated for it.

Christian's case foreshadows a conflict that is in one way or another present in all the narratives, namely the difficulty of understanding the often very lovely and generous friendship between surrogate and parents in the face of the taboo around "buying children". I believe the above shows the *discomfort* that was experienced when faced with the allegation that they had done something abhorrent and morally repugnant, when what they had experienced felt like an experience where children, parents, and surrogates alike came out the other end feeling connected and related to each other in a positive way. Bwlow I will pay closer attention to how Ulrikke, Marianne, and later Chrstian dealt with this discomfort and found better ways to describe what they had done, often by emphasizing the non-commercial, but not always. In a way, I believe they show some of what Levine (2003) calls the "emotional regime" that "aligns emotion, personal choice, and cultural values" in ways that make sense for the narrator (p.182).

6.3 Ulrikke: 'There has to be feelings involved'

Ulrikke: I think it's a shame that such an insanely lovely process - because that's what it is - can be spoken about as something, like, as [awful] as prostitution and those kinds of things. And just incredibly unreflective, because... Especially when you look at the USA and Canada, which is what we have to compare Norway to, none of the surrogates are allowed to be surrogates if they do it due to financial troubles, for example. The second you're caught doing this for the money, you're out. Eh... And anyone who have familiarized themselves with this, they'll understand that... that wouldn't have worked, because your relationship to the surrogate is so close all the way, it would have been a major conflict with the couple who have this person carrying the child. So there has to be feelings involved, on both sides, otherwise it wouldn't have worked. And then they talk about, oh, poor her, is she supposed to give up her child and such. But that's not why she's doing it, because it's not her baby. She doesn't have that feeling, that it's her baby. What's going to be hard for her, and I know this, is giving up me. I have pumped her full of endorphins and joy and told her how happy she makes me and that she has taken me out of my depression. And she feels like a superhuman because of what she's doing for us, in particular [for] me. That's what she'll miss. And us as a family, Espen and Kajsa [future child] and I. So that's what she'll miss. But people kind of... view surrogacy in an incorrect way. It's not about her and the child. It's about her and I and Espen, and the child that is saving me from my own demise, actually. And the first thing she said to me when I met her on Skype, I told her... I told her [voice cracks, starts to cry] I have no idea how I am ever going to thank you for what you're doing. And she said that the moment I hand you the child, that's enough of a thank you. That's the thanks I need. And that's what people don't understand, that that is surrogacy. And I am actually really happy that I get to pay her. To begin with, I was very sceptical of that, that's why we applied in Canada [for altruistic surrogacy]. But it's a huge relief for me. She's bought herself a dog, she's gone on vacation with her boys, she's gotten a personal trainer, she's seen a nutritionist... She's changed her life. And when her feet are swollen, it lightens my conscience, then, because I know I am giving her something, too. Now, en route, not just in the moment after when she gets to get high on giving me the child. But it feels very, eh... Yeah. It's a relief for me. And that's a feeling I wasn't prepared for.

In Ch. 4, I commented on how Ulrikke takes on the role of spokesperson for the reproductively marginalized. It is in this context speak of exploitation, money, altruism, and close relationships come up. She begins by dismissing a critique of surrogacy based on comparison to prostitution, an activity whose most immediate similarity perhaps is that it is perceived as a morally objectionable form of trade that marketizes women's bodies. She explains that in the US and Canada, places comparable to Norway (perhaps in terms of women's/human rights, right to equal protection from exploitation, or culture in general?), it is not possible to go through surrogacy as you would any other economic activity. The economic motivation can never be too big, and it can certainly never overshadow the altruistic. She also claims a personal relationship with the surrogate is mandatory, and inevitable.

Notice first how she says that "*There has to be feelings involved*". I understand this to be an attempt to show how surrogacy is fundamentally a relationship that centers around emotions, desires, generosity, and kindness, as a way to balance out the commercial aspect which often takes center stage in the public discussion. Ulrikke is still in this deeply vulnerable and desiring place (she has told me she won't be able to relax or consider anything for certain until she has her baby in her arms – in this sense, she is not quite out of the category of involuntary childless quite yet) and I imagine that a characterization of surrogacy which doesn't take into account the emotional significance of the exchange seems unfair or at least incorrect. Making a family is, regardless of the amount of money involved, still a highly intimate process, both for the intended parents awaiting their dream child, and for the surrogate who carries it. For Ulrikke, the intimacy of the transaction doesn't necessarily conflict with the money, as I will show further down, and it doesn't take away from the fact that her experiences are mostly defined in terms of feelings of desire and gratitude, for example. Without feelings there would be "major conflict," perhaps because without the intimacy and strong emotions involved, it would no longer be about making her start a family – the point of surrogacy at all for Ulrikke.

So there has to be feelings involved, but naturally, not all feelings are welcome. For instance, the feeling of a (maternal) bond between surrogate and child cannot happen, on the basis that the surrogate's primary relationship is with Ulrikke, and what she seeks out of surrogacy isn't a child, but the feeling of doing good. It's right about here that Ulrikke switches from speaking about surrogacy in general, to speaking about her specific relationship with Dana. She confidently asserts that *"She doesn't have that feeling, that it's her baby. What's going to be hard for her, and I know this, is giving up me."* She identifies the situation

as a win-win, where Ulrikke needs Dana, but Dana needs Ulrikke, too. Ulrikke's need for a child have provided Dana with joy, assumedly the joy of giving or helping, and with the feeling of being a person "beyond ordinary or normal human ability, power, or experience" (Superhuman, n.d.). At the same time as Ulrikke feeds Dana spiritually, Dana is referred to as Ulrikke's "*savior*", a fitting companion to her witty nickname for Dana, "*my dark angel*".

Ulrikke isn't the only one who underscores the surrogate as an altruistic superhuman. In some form or another, every respondent described their surrogate is of supreme moral quality, sometimes as so good that normal human beings can never understand it. Marianne shakes her head in disbelief and smiles as she calls her surrogate "*completely remarkable*", Thomas calls surrogates in general "*extremely special*", and Eline believes that "s*ome people are... ehm... So selfless and kind hearted that we can't ever understand it, actually.*" In her second interview, Ulrikke asks: "*Like, why do you think these women do this over and over again?"* The answer, is that altruism is addictive: "*You get hooked on goodness."*

These comments appear in the context of misconceptions about surrogacy, fear of exploitation, marketization, or of harming the surrogate. Like I suggested in Ch. 4, describing the surrogate as a kind, helping, agentic subject helps to downplay accusations of exploitation, re-establish the narrating subject as the good subject, and ultimately to eradicate threats to the family creation narrative. Yet I also read their descriptions in the light of the gratitude they are experiencing. The desire for a child isn't like a desire for a cookie or a boat – the child fulfills their desire to become parents and a family. It's not always easy to understand the desire and its depth, but I have understood is thus: these people are already parents; they are already a family in their hearts. So they truly do *need* the child, in order to feel complete. If this is the case, it sort of reflects the sentiment that birth "is a metaphor for the kinship system," i.e. that kinship precludes birth, and that kinned relations thus exist symbolically before they become attached to specific bodies (Shyrock, 2013, p. 273). This links back to my observation about the use of "extended families" as a way to describe each other as a kind of kin without implying parental bond between surrogate and child. In any case, I believe their emphasis on the extraordinariness of their surrogates is a way of expressing gratitude, by recognizing how she did not *have* to do this, but chose to anyways, and gave them, as complete strangers to her, the most valuable thing they could ever imagine.

This is also true for Ulrikke. In the midst of Ulrikke's sorrow and continuous disappointment, Dana provides relief and hope. It is clear that Ulrikke feels (perhaps almost overwhelmingly) indebted to her - her cool and confident tone must give way for a vulnerable tremble as she talk about the difficulty of "thanking" Dana for what she has given her (hope)

and what she is about to receive (a child). The Norwegian "takk", meaning thank you, is both an expression of gratitude and of repayment: altruistic Dana is repaid and thanked in the form of the joy she will purportedly experience once the "mission" is complete. "*That is surrogacy,"* Ulrikke says. She's nevertheless so happy she gets to repay her "*now, enroute, not just in the moment after when she gets to get high on giving me the child"*.

When payment is brought up, Ulrikke expresses that she is not paying for a child, but for the surrogate's comfort during the pregnancy. Like Christian, she separates the money from the gifting of the child, thus insulating Dana's altruistic motives from becoming besmirched by the presence of monetary compensation. It's also worth noting that the kinds of things the money affords Dana are things like vacations and a personal trainer. These are by no means essentials, things that Dana "needs". Dana doesn't "need" the money - her needs are still purely altruistic - but it provides comfort and pleasure. As such, Ulrikke has struck a balance with the payment that allows Dana to be compensated without being exploited, and without sullying the (intimate, non-commercial) family creation project. What makes this possible is Dana's and Ulrikke's complementary needs, neither of which can be fulfilled directly by money. At first glance the quote might seems to advocate that altruistic and commercial aspects can coexist, but I find that Ulrikke ultimately upholds the separation between the intimate, personal, kinning, altruistic elements of the surrogacy, and the global, impersonal, calculated, and commercial aspects.

Like Christian does with Amber, Ulrikke frequently highlights the close and personal relationship with Dana, emphasizes her altruistic needs to help her, and considers her a "*friend*", a "*sister*", and her "*savior*" at various points during her narrative. In terms of market and non-market elements signaling closeness and distance, Ulrikke's narrative treatment of Dana signals such intimacy between the two that I sometimes feel like Ulrikke speaks of herself *as* Dana, that the two shares so much that they kind of become one. In the second interview, I ask why she chose Dana specifically, and she responds by telling me she liked how she seems to have Ulrikke's best interest in mind. It needed to work like that: Dana needed to be guided by Ulrikke's best interest, and Ulrikke needed to be guided by Dana's best interest. Further, Ulrikke tells me she feels like Dana is being pregnant "*with rather than for"* her, and that the pregnancy is theirs together. Expressing joint ownership of the pregnancy is unique to my material, but work done by Teman (2010) shows that viewing the surrogate pregnancy as a dyadic body project is actually quite common among intended mothers and surrogates. This is intimacy and mutual generosity defines the surrogacy experience to such a degree that Ulrikke could not imagine surrogacy to be possible without

it, as she says: *your relationship to the surrogate is so close all the way, it would have been a major conflict with the couple who have this person carrying the child.*

This intimacy is contrasted by a situation Ulrikke brings up in her first interview. Ulrikke tells me that it was emotionally burdensome to hire a surrogate, as she felt "*an enormous amount of responsibility for her*." She tells me: "*It was hard, because I felt responsibility for Espen, I felt responsibility for my family, for my friends.* (...) *And now I'm supposed to worry about her, too?"* She goes on to tell me about a situation that made her put her foot down to protect Dana from herself: After embryo transfer is completed, Dana is eager to see if it implanted and tells Ulrikke she wants to do an early pregnancy test. This makes Ulrikke "*super annoyed"* because early testing will inevitably produce false results, which would end up gravely disappointing Dana, she says. Ulrikke orders Dana not to test until she gives her the all clear, and institutes a week long communication ban between the two, that she later rescinds and apologizes for.

Here, Ulrikke becomes the experienced, rational figure, while Dana is the clumsy one in need of protection. This creates distance, and hierarchy. Ulrikke exerts her position as the commissioning parent, in telling Dana when she can test, and when they can talk. Though she's not making claims about surrogacy as a commercial or non-commercial activity, she here positions herself as the employer of Dana, with the right and power to micromanage, and importantly, to reduce intimacy when she sees fit, or perhaps more accurately: when intimacy and mutuality becomes too much to bear.

She later admits the situation made her feel a lack of control, and that testing "*terrified"* her. No wonder, since Ulrikke's experience with testing has been exclusively negative up to this point. I also read it in context of Ulrikke's feelings toward her own pregnancy: recall how she says that accepting that she needed help was "*the most difficult process in the entire process*" and talk about how it made her feel insignificant and worthless. A quality of the gift that also applies to modern commodities, is that it contains something of the giver (Rus, 2008). If we understand Dana's *ability to give*, her altruistic tendencies, to be the "something" that the child gift contains, it wouldn't be hard to imagine that Ulrikke would feel ambivalent about it, as it blaringly points to Ulrikke's position as the one who needs in the situation. Perhaps the situation above made Ulrikke feel like they were in fact *not* equal, like Dana in fact did *not* need Ulrikke to complete the pregnancy, that the pregnancy was in fact *not* as much Ulrikke's as she would have liked?

Dana's altruistic motivation is thus a double edged sword. As I explained, it could be that Dana's desire and ability to give sometimes highlights Ulrikke's inability in hurtful ways.

Ulrikke might then try to reestablish her position by asserting control over certain aspects of the pregnancy and the relationship, in order to correct the imbalance the focus on Dana's privileged position as giver has created. This might also be why it is so important for Ulrikke to frame that Dana's altruistic motivation in terms of what Ulrikke offers her, as in the initial quote. The win-win situation allows Ulrikke to be the one who gives, as she provides Dana with joy and purpose, creating balance in the relationship. Though I read her as saying the monetary compensation is to be kept separate from the exchange of the child, so as not to commodify it, it might also be that the sense of relief she says it gives her to spoil Dana with vacations and the like, is part of what I have understood as an attempt to soften or mute her position as a "the one who takes". It may simply offer her tangible evidence that Dana is benefitting from Ulrikke's presence, in addition to reducing charges of harm.

The six parents variably emphasized the surrogate's altruistic motivation, and often insisted that money was not a motivating factor whatsoever. They often supported their argument by referring to the surrogate as a being of superior moral character, whose motivation was to offer her goodness and helping hand to those in need. Ulrikke defines her surrogacy experience as one which is fundamentally intimate and wrought with emotion and mutual generosity, and finds ways to accommodate the commercial aspect without threatening or ruining this fundamental intimate character of their relationship. Her emphasis on altruism and the win-win situation might have provided her with a sense of purpose, and the feeling of being involved in a pregnancy that highlighted her inability to become pregnant herself. I showed how Ulrikke might have her own, personal investment in this discourse, and how she might have felt compensation to provide a temporary sense of relief from the burden she has placed Dana under. Below, I will show how Marianne took a different route in that she managed to preserve the kinning and intimate character of surrogacy even as she defined the surrogate's intention in mostly economic terms.

6.4 Marianne: 'She'd never call it buying a baby'

The opening of this chapter suggests that there is something heinous about buying a child. Christian experienced ambivalence, as he struggled to interpret if what the woman had said to him was actually funny, or if it was accusatory. Even if he wanted to dismiss her comment as insensitive and uninformed, he couldn't, because "it had to exist". Had it not been for the vast amounts of money he was able to invest in this project, had he not been affluent enough to afford hiring a surrogate, his family would not exist as it does today. I

believe Christian resents the accusation of having bought his child, because the language doesn't usually apply to things one does out of love. One buys out of greed; one receives a child (or parenthood), in the same way as one receives a gift. At least this is the case in theory, where the dichotomy between commodities and non-commodities of gifts suggest completely different rules of exchange.

Marianne feels similarly caught off guard when faced with the suggestion that she bought her daughter. She brings up an incident in her first interview, about a persnickety child who asked if she had bought Thea, to which she had quickly replied that no she hadn't, because you can't buy a child. She had felt uncertain if this was the right answer to give, but her cousin assured her that is was a good answer, which gave Marianne some assurance. I asked her to tell me about it again in the second interview. She ponders the question, speaks slowly and thoughtfully, and meanders through her own thought process. She says:

> *Marianne: Some people might say, well, you actually did buy... Or, you could say, I bought the sperm and I bought the egg, and together that makes a baby. So you can probably make an argument for that. Eh... I sometimes fall short, here, sometimes, too, with my argumentation. But anyway, what I think is that... Someone wanted me to... I've told Thea this, she's so young so what I've said is that someone wanted us to be together forever, and that [these people] wanted to help out. And then you've got your egg and your sperm, and I haven't been very specific about that, but... And I've paid for that. And I think that if you want to say you've bought a baby, then... then that's what you'll do. And if you don't, it's... you don't buy, but... It's not a child that sits there, and then you walk up and purchase it.*

She goes on for a while, repeating the sentiment that even if Thea "*comes from a different egg and a different sperm and has been in another belly... All three wanted to help me. Or, us, that she should be here, that we're supposed to be together*". She also spends some time meditating on the fact that even if there's a lot of money involved, it's not expensive: "*Everybody needs to get paid for the job that they're doing, and it needs to be fair payment, right. So it is really that expensive*?" she asks. She also adds that:

> *Marianne: It was the economical that was important for her, to get that working, but... I don't think she'd ever call it buying a baby. From her side it might be a service you purchase, right...*

Marianne's surrogate's motivations "*weren't particulatily altruistic*", as she says in her first interview. Rather, she is motivated by the income it brings. The surrogate wants to further her education, but in order to ensure she is not a financial burden for her family she needs to "*solve the need for income for that year*". She goes on to tell me that the surrogate is highly family oriented, and "made a lot of, eh... not sacrifices, but, you know, she did a lot for her family". For example, she wanted to take use of a military bonus that would benefit her daughter, and went away for military training for a year. She eventually failed, and ended up not getting the bonus, which was devastating for her. Marianne continues to boast about her strong, "*very American*" sense of family, and concludes: "*you know, she's completely remarkable.*"

For Marianne, much like Christian (and all the other parents), the buying that's involved in surrogacy had to exist, in that without it, she wouldn't have the parts to make Thea. This is how she frames it: she feels like she hasn't bought Thea, but the parts that it took to bring Thea into existence. Like Ulrikke, she separates payment from kin creation by allocating payment to the "*service*" of others. Her take is thus that she has paid for parts and labor, not a child.

Take note of how Marianne brings up destiny ("*we were supposed to be together*") here. I understand that Marianne sees this element of fate to be decisive in relating Thea to her as kin; there is something unexplainable, immaterial about their relationship that makes them undeniably inseparable as a family. Fate gives an added dimension to the actions that occurred in the reproductive marketplace, and signals that there is something beyond utilitarianism going on here. Even if surrogacy might be said to be one of the most meticulously orchestrated reproductive events imaginable, fate, the element of the predestined, that which is beyond human planning and intervention, might better describe how Marianne felt about surrogacy that market language does. She is not going to the store to buy a frozen chicken or shopping for a car, but setting out to do whatever she can to fulfill her dream, to find that missing piece in her life, start a family and a relationship with a person that she'll cherish forever. Yes, there is purchase involved, but I can understand how it is disorienting or even offensive to characterize something that feels so intimate as a purchase. For Marianne, the bottom line is that the series of events she sometimes paid for and carefully planned, was done with the intention of starting a family.

This is reflected in her discussion on adoption. Again, she brings up the predestined and unplannable as key elements of procreation, and chooses to emphasize those parts. She had considered adoption, which at the time seemed to be unavailable to her. No adopting

countries would allow a single parent to adopt, she said. But there had been one option available in the past, an option which involved what she thought of as "competing" for a severely handicapped child. Even the prospect of this made her feel queasy:

> *Marianne: But it was kind of, like, I almost got the impression that.... It was almost like an auction process, that I felt like, oh gosh, that makes me feel uncomfortable. Because then you have to decide if the child, I mean, is this a child I can take care of by myself? (...) That's a process I don't think I could.... Handle. It felt more like, then I have to consider if this is... then I'm considering a living child. While in the surrogacy process... I felt like it was more like, eh, a normal way to eh, to have a child, this way. You don't know what you get, these genetic combinations, you can have a child with a handicap, you have to sign and agree to that, that was in the contract. And I was completely open to that.*

Again, Marianne is shying away from anything that resembles "buying" a human being. Auctioning isn't only heavily tied to commerce, but brings thoughts back to the dehumanizing and morally repugnant slave trade of the past and present. This form of obtaining a child was plotted on the wrong end of the commodity/non-commodity spectrum for Marianne. Again, she averts from market language, and brings up the "element of surprise" as an important part of kinship; one that is naturally a part of procreation, but conceivably doesn't exist in the market. For Marianne, this is what separates market exchange from the kin-creating process she has been involved in. She thus draws surrogacy closer to "natural" procreation by emphasizing the "not knowing", later likening surrogacy to natural procreation through the metaphor "*the lottery of life*". This both helps to sweeten the pill, by placing surrogacy closer to a form of reproduction it is hard to disagree with (thereby normalizing it), and it rearticulates and therefore strengthens Marianne's understanding of kinship, which relies on an idea of destiny. It also therefore rearticulates surrogacy as a family creation process that involves business, but isn't primarily defined by it.

It is in this context that it is interesting to note how she mentions and repeats that her surrogate is "*not particularly altruistic*". One would think it would be in Marianne's interest to emphasize the surrogate's help and non-commercial interests if she wants to preserve the strength of her surrogacy-as-kinship narrative. But if my reading about Marianne's insecurity as a mother is correct, it might help to locate the surrogate's intent (a key ingredient of kinship) as far away from kinship as possible. This might thus be understood as yet another distancing mechanism employed by Marianne. Though Ulrikke and Marianne locates their

surrogate's motivation in different places - Ulrikke in the altruistic and Marianne in the economic - the function appears to be the same: to preclude kinship between child and surrogate on the basis of intent.

Theoretically, a few characteristics of the gift is that it imposes a sense of identity on the object exchanged, and that it is inalienable, i.e. "always connected to its producer" (Rus, 2008, p. 97). Rus (2008) suggests that modern commodities can assume such characteristics, particularly when the exchange is considered more personal, which was invariably the case in my six narratives. Applying this logic to Marianne's case, then, no matter of Thea is spoken about as a commodity or a gift, the surrogate's presence is a looming threat to Thea and Marianne's relationship. Thea will always be "connected to [her] producer", and further, Marianne's identity will always be embossed with the "identity" of the giving surrogate. And this much is true: Thea is inarguably a surrogate child, and Marianne is inarguably a parent due to the "help" or "service" of the surrogate. Crucially, Marianne is not denying this fact, but in her narrative she continually downplays those elements that could be seen to strengthen the relationship between Thea and her surrogate, and weaken her ties to Thea.

Importantly, Marianne doesn't see the surrogate's economic motivation as a sign that she is a bad person. Even if I am right and Marianne feels somehow threatened by her, it is still clear to me that she admired her for what she has done, and that she is eternally grateful for her contribution. She tells me about how wonderful she is with her own children, and how she opened up to her when Marianne came to visit. The image she presents of her surrogate, is that she is a wonderful person and a caring mother hen, who is extremely family oriented. It is, in fact, her family orientedness that led her to surrogacy, as she wanted to provide for them by making her own money. In this way, Marianne directs her surrogate's self-sacrifice toward her own family, thus upholding her image as a "remarkable" Mother Mary without suggesting her maternal feelings extend toward Thea. This may allow Marianne to feel like the surrogate, while financially motivated, is still a kind hearted person who legitimately wanted to help Marianne start a family, while at the same time helping her own. This re-establishes the surrogacy process as one that centers kin, family, love, and kindness, rather than profit, without threatening Marianne's relationship with Thea.

6.5 Christian: Gratitude, extended families, and the way forward

One of the most crucial distinctions between a market exchange and a non-market (or gift) exchange, is the kind of relationship it created between giver and receiver. A non-market exchange carries a social or moral obligation that creates a cycle of exchange and a lasting relationship, whereas a market exchange is enacted between actors who remain independent from each other after the exchange is completed. With the help of their American agencies, Norwegian parents of surrogate children actively frame their relationship with the surrogate as a personal relationship that removes theri kinship projects away from the threat of commodification, and into the realms of the relatively intimate non-market. Yet the non-market poses challenges of its own, especially as it concerns the creation and exchange of a child. As we've seen, for example in Ulrikke's case, the child is insulated from the payment, suggesting that what is paid to the surrogate in money compensates for things like pain and suffering, while the child is offered in exchange for gratitude and the joy of giving itself. It was important that Dana didn't feel like the child was hers, so she could offer it "back" to Ulrikke with joy. This reinforces the sentiment that what is given, is "free, unconstrained and unconstraining" (Carrier, 1990, p. 23).

It also serves to minimize the debt. A gift that becomes too big created unmanageable debt, which puts an end to the cycle and the relationship (Godbout & Caillé, 1998). Ulrikke expresses that she found the gift Dana offered her to be of almost inconceivable value: as such, it was important for Ulrikke to confirm that all Dana wanted in return was her gratitude. Her intent was neither to sell a child for profit, nor to keep a child that was hers; rather, her intention was to "help" Ulrikke into parenthood. That's why Ulrikke can say that it's not about Dana and the baby, but about Dana and Ulrikke, because Dana's intention was to create a relationship with Ulrikke, not with the child.

A similar tale of gratitude and personal relationship is reflected by Christian.

Christian: We talked about this thing of fear of... are you afraid of having bonded with the children? You're going there, every day, with [blood] pumping, [hearts] beating, and.... And then she said that no, I'm not afraid of that, but I am very afraid of it being over. I'm very scared of that. I'm very scared of... I'm very scared of losing you, kind of. So it... It... That's the way that relationship has become what it is. It's almost like one has... In the beginning, the gratitude is so enormous. It's, it's... It's still that way that we can't see our children without seeing her in it. Every time we have, kind of, these grand happy moments with the boys, she's on our minds, this gratitude we have towards her. But at the same time it's been such a relief for us, because I think that gratitude, in time, I don't think you can... Or, it isn't nourished after some time. So

we... So when that love is so grand, it doesn't matter. And we'll always, it's... We've gotten an extra family, really, an extended family.

I see several similarities between this comment and Ulrikke's, in that both communicate that the primary relationship is between the (intended) parent and the surrogate. In addition, the gratitude is experienced as "enormous", and the debt can seem to be experienced as almost unpayable. In Ulrikke's case, she expresses that the only "thanks" (read both as payment and expression of gratitude) Dana needs is to see they joy on Ulrikke's face once she hands over the child, i.e. the joy of giving and Ulrikke's gratitude in and of itself. In Christian's quote, the passing of time becomes an important transformative element, whereby the tremendous sense of gratitude slowly dissipates, because "*it isn't nourished".* He goes on to say that it doesn't matter that his gratitude takes a different form, because the love is so grand anyways, and they now are (extended) family.

Christian also expresses that he "*can't see our children without seeing her"*, which Christian doesn't seem to feel conflicted about. Whereas I have suggested that Marianne might feel more conflicted or threatened by constantly seeing a competing mother in Thea's image, it might be easier for Christian to express love and gratitude toward the woman who helped him become a father, and thinks about her with thankfulness when he experiences a significant moment with his children. He calls Amber and her family their "extended family", another word consistently used by the parents I interviewed. I believe this is yet another narrative provided by the agencies to enforce proper boundaries between the intimate and the commercial. To adopt this narrative frame is, as I see it, a useful way to maintain some sense of boundary with the surrogate, while simultaneously offering a sense of closeness. As a gift, the child might even provide the link between parent and surrogate that makes them share a sense of *mutuality of being* without becoming too invasive.

As Christian's comment suggests, too, the more time that passes between the birth/exchange, the more able are the surrogate and parents to create a relationship on their own terms. The legal contract, with its own list of terms for the relationship, is during the pregnancy kept at arm's length so as not to soil the relationship with the surrogate, which is kept personal. As such, when the exchange is completed, the contractual side of the process is dropped a lifeless appendage: the business-relationship is closed, while the personal lives on. This is only possible due to the emotional and narrative enforcement of the personal-business boundary, and the fact that each party was encouraged by the agencies to form a sort of friendship from the get-go.

Of course the personal relationship is more than a mere narrative choice: the parents unequivocally adored and enjoyed their surrogates and their families. The five of them who during the time of interview had completed the process, are still in touch with their surrogates; Ulrikke intends to do the same. Eline, for example, says:

> *Eline: We still have a lot of contact with Heather. Both because we love them, and respect them for what they've done, and because we think they're cool people, we want to hang out with them. They're, like, our friends.*

Love, respect, friendship, and family are words that accrue not only in Eline's narration of her own experience, but in all the narratives I collected. The child gift is experienced at first as overwhelming, but as time passes, memories fade and what is left is the weekly, monthly, or bimonthly communication over Skype or Facebook, as well as the odd vacation, should one afford it. With the business contract no longer threatening to disturb what they all feel is a close, personal relationship, it might be easier to form a relationship on their own terms. Still, a gift doesn't merely *suggest* a continued relationship; it requires it. The moral obligation to keep in touch is expressed through words like respect and gratitude, and like Christian suggests, the relationship may change, but there's no room to ever forget the grand gesture the surrogate offered them, strangers, in their time of need. While he at one point suggests that the sense of gratitude is no longer overwhelming, he simultaneously insists on his moral obligation to never forget Amber's generosity:

> *Christian: My mother thinks it's very odd that... Ugh, are you going to have this much contact now, after it's over? Yes, of course we are! OK, but... Can't just... You can't keep walking around feeling grateful for the rest of your lives. Yes, we actually have to! Yes, that's true. Yes, that's actually very true. We must do that.*

6.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have showed how the money taboo causes great discomfort, and how parents of children born via surrogacy tend to struggle to place their own experience within a discursive framework that upholds the strict boundary between commercial and non-commercial. Like a lot of literature on surrogacy suggests, parents tend to highlight the non-commercial aspects of surrogacy, and describe their relationship with the surrogates in persona terms. I have showed how parents experience the process as a highly intimate and emotional experience even as there is a commercial aspect involved; this results in the parents being forced to find alternative ways to speak about their experience in a way that can fathom

both the commercial and the non-commercial aspects of surrogacy. Since surrogacy is for these parents an experience of fulfilling a deep and personal desire to become parents and start a family, their narratives for the most part reflect this, by highlighting the kinning, the friendship, and the generosity involved in their relationships, and by downplaying the commercial aspects and separating it from the intimate.

7 Conclusion

The point of departure for this thesis was a curiosity about "the boundaries we push when we want something more" (Naveen, 2013, p. 15). Mainly, I wanted to know:

> How do Norwegian parents describe and understand their own experiences with transnational gestational commercial surrogacy?

In order to answer this question, I invited six parents to partake in a two-part interview process guided by the principles of FANI. In order to answer the main research question, a set of sub-questions were formulated:

1. What discourses and experiences do they draw on to construct a personal narrative that is whole, complete, and justifiable?
2. What competing norms enter to threaten the validity of their feelings and experiences?
3. What ideas do they draw on to repair this sense of disruption?
4. May this effort of repair also - potentially - lead to gradual changes of the cultural norms and discourses about kinship and parenthood?

My analysis shows that there are multiple, co-existing strategies that occur in the narratives, and that parents generally draw on specific ideas about kinship and family in order to present their stories as complete and justifiable. I show how parents variably drew on normative discourses, assumed a victimized position, and established themselves as good, moral subjects in order to provide a coherent and justifiable narrative that might also have served to heal a sense of rupture in the face of norm violations and feelings of lack, guilt, or ambivalence. I used case examples to illustrate how certain patterns would be better understood when seen in light of the respondents' own personal discursive investments and the feelings I interpreted as present in their narratives. Below I highlight some general findings to conclude.

7.1 Competing frameworks of family and commerce

The point of departure for my respondents was all involuntary childlessness. Like was suggested in the introduction, family life is an expected and valued form of life, and the desire to have children is understood and both natural and as requiring serious pursuit. For my

respondents, surrogacy was perceived as the only way to fulfill their deep desire for a child of one's own.

Yet surrogacy also highlighted their norm violation, in that these were all individuals who could not conceive on their own. Legal frameworks and kinship ideals that state that privilege unitary motherhood (prohibition against egg donation) and biological motherhood (the *mater semper certa est* principle) threaten Eline's, Ulrikke's, and Marianne's motherhood, and the two-parent, heteronormative model in addition entered to make Thomas, Christian, and Marianne's desire questionable. In addition, the public debate around surrogacy and the image of the exploited Indian surrogate, threatened the validity of their stories as narratives of intimacy and kinship.

7.2 Seeking narrative repair: Family

The central theme of the narratives I collected was "family," and as such, ideals about how one is supposed to start one circulated heavily. Some experienced infertility like a major disruption in life. Eline (reflected in Henrik's narrative) and Ulrikke explain that a part of themselves went missing when they discovered they were infertile, and experience further hurt when the law, health care system, and the cultural discourse do not stand with them in their plight for motherhood. While they in some sense violate norms of unitary and biological motherhood, they draw on the biogenetic ideal in asserting their rightful motherhood status, and further position themselves as marginalized in the face of an unfeeling government, in a way to resurrect their experiences as whole, valid, and valuable.

Thomas and Christian present a stark contrast. In the midst of a culture that is evolving to accommodate their parenthood, surrogacy's offer of parenthood worked to *normalize* more than it did highlight a norm violation (as in the case of Eline and Ulrikke). Their identities as gay men had precluded them from imagining themselves as parents, but with surrogacy, they were able to align themselves with the changing cultural ideal, fitting their family formation into the norm of biogenetic, bilateral parenthood. They expressed far less internal struggle, and show no signs of experiencing jealousy, but do talk about their fears of starting a family without a mother, and the consequences that may have for their sons as a defining and difficult part of their journey to parenthood.

Marianne presents a third way of handling misalignment with norms. Marianne emphasizes elements like destiny in her narrative, and draws her daughter closer to her by fantasizing about her genetic connection to Norway, and thus to herself. She emphasizes non-

natural elements like fate and intent, but also acknowledges heredity and genetic lineage. Relative to the others, she speaks far more about the donor and far less about the surrogate, which reflects cultural ideals about the two-parent model and exclusive motherhood. Since Marianne fit the ideal to a lesser degree than for example Eline or Ulrikke, she had to employ more creative solutions to her disruption.

7.3 Seeking narrative repair: Commerce

The threat of commodification and marketization loomed large in the parents' narratives, and there were several signs that this caused distress among my respondents. Money posed a threat both in the form of the exploitation charge, and it also threatened to commodify their child and re-define the entire surrogate-parent relationship as one based *primarily* around business.

Threats of exploitation were handled in different ways, first of all by asserting themselves as informed, morally responsible individuals who reduced the chances of exploitation by for example locating their reproductive projects in more familiar cultural contexts. By moving their location to the USA, they were first of all able to avoid affiliation with the image of the exploited Indian surrogate, but they were also better able to connect with the surrogate, as they spoke the same language and shared many cultural references. This set the stage for a close and personal relationship characterized by friendship and intimacy, not commerce. Some also heavily utilized a victimized position, which precluded the surrogate from being the victimized one in the relationship. An emphasis on the word "help," and an aversion to words such as "use" or "buy," helped the parents frame their experience in intimate terms, and further situated the parents as the ones needing help (i.e. the marginalized). The payment was, in turn, separated from this intimate act. Compensation was framed in palpable, culturally acceptable terms – paying for a service or for someone's time or effort didn't preclude the experience from *also* and *primarily* being understood as an intimate and loving act.

7.4 A transformative discourse?

Starting a family using surrogacy means pursuing a culturally encouraged goal through illicit means; navigating both written and unwritten law involves both explication and creativity. Sometimes the parents I spoke to drew on normative discourses to repair the norm

violation they experienced with ease, while at other times, they had to employ a more creativity in order to align cultural values with feelings and goals. Invoking the genecentrism discussed in the introductory chapter, most of my parents were able to explicitly and unequivocally call themselves the child's rightful and only parents (Marianne, as noted, employed a more creative understanding of kinship, though she, too, reiterated normative kinship ideals). On the one hand, surrogacy as a reproductive method fragments motherhood in a way that demands hierarchy and thus violates certain norms about motherhood, but it also allows cultural ideals of family and kinship as a joint effort of combining love and substance to persist.

I believe the most transformative potential in these narratives appear in the context of commerce. My research is a good example of what happens when reproduction is "enterprised up," like MvKinnon (2015) writes, and shows how notions of kinship (including both ideas about "nature," but also intimacy and care) influences how we do business. Perhaps it is easier to allow intimacy to enter the economy, than it is to have money enter the intimate? Parents resisted commodifying the exchange of the child, but had little issue with the surrogate being compensated. This didn't detract the relationship from being *fundamentally* characterized by the intimacy, care, and mutual generosity that was needed to make the relationship work. Like Ulrikke says: "*There has to be feelings involved, on both sides, otherwise it wouldn't have worked."* Money, in the end, poses no challenge to the presence of these feelings.

I believe the agencies play a huge role in this. They first of all heavily discourage the parents and surrogate from ever talking money or business with each other. Because of the consistent use of the English word "extended family," I also have reason to believe this kind of language is instilled in the parents by the agencies. This doesn't mean, however, that the term isn't fitting. My analysis suggests that this word fulfills a need for a word that described the relationship between parents and surrogates, which is defined by gratitude and deep friendship. "Extended family" could be a way to describe a *mutuality of being* that isn't captured in existing kin idioms. It describes not just the relationship between the child and surrogate, for example, but between the two families altogether, and further captures how the surrogate is related to the parents through her transformative work which made them parents. It says something about how the surrogate is related to the parents forever.

What is interesting is how this family is formed in the context of a commercial venture. The commercial aspect doesn't hurt this "extended family," because not only is it separated from the exchange of the child, but it is kept at arm's length during the pregnancy, and ceases to exist once the child is born. The relationship between the parents and the

surrogate, however, doesn't (even though it doesn't remain *as* close). As such, this is a commercial venture that successfully creates kinship, both between parents and children, but also a version of kinship between surrogate (and her supportive family) and the parents.

While generalizability is limited, these parents *are* part of a "hypermobile, economically privileged segment of the world population" whose choices and desires shape the reproductive market (Martin, 2016, p. 98). The way I see it, their transformative discursive potential thus mainly lies in the way we conduct business, and perhaps a little less in how we discern kin. This research shows how the market must accommodate needs for intimacy and care, and how it takes shape after perhaps more traditional ideologies that shape such needs. In this way, it helps to cement old notions of kinship, even as it opens up for new ways to make it.

Yet I want to end with a thought. While intended parents alone might have limited potential in shaping the way we think of kinship, as they both challenge *and* accommodate different co-existing kinship ideals, I also believe they express a need that exists beyond this population, namely the need for new and more flexible kinship ideals that involve, for example, language that accommodates for more than two parents. While they alone represent a small segment of the population, they are not alone in challenging traditional notions of family and kinship, and may thus be seen as part of the movement to gain recognition for third or even fourth parents, same sex parents, non-binary parents, and families without parents, which is to say, families without children. In this way, these narratives may be part of a bigger movement that over time has the potential to transform the way we form desires and make families after all.

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Supplements

Supplement 1: Consent form

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet

"Erfaringer med foreldreskap, slektskap, og familie i norske surrogatfamilier"

(arbeidstittel)

Bakgrunn og formål

Foremålet med dette prosjektet er å undersøke hvordan forelderskapet erfares i familier der bruk av surrogatmor har vært involvert. Det vil belyse hvordan slektskap, familiedannelse, og foreldreskap oppfattes av de som har valgt å inngå fødemoravtaler som inngang til foreldreskapet. Jeg vil søke svar på spørsmål som hvorfor valget faller på akkurat surrogati (istedenfor f.eks. adopsjon), og hvilken forståelse av foreldreskap som ligger bak dette valget. Hva er en «mor» eller «far» og hvordan blir man en? Hva er en familie?

Studien er en mastergradsstudie ved Senter for Tverrfaglig Kjønnsforskning ved Universitetet i Oslo. Jeg søker personer med dyp og intim kunnskap om denne tematikken, og håper du vil være med for å bidra med ditt perspektiv i debatten om surrogati, foreldreskap, og familie.

Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?

Samtykke til deltakelse innebærer at man sier ja til en intervjuprosess bestående av (minst) to deler. Jeg vil foreta minst to intervjuer med hver deltaker. I det første intervjuet vil jeg be deg fortelle fritt om dine erfaringer med bruk av surrogati og hvordan du selv opplevde å bli mor eller far. I det andre vil jeg stille deg en rekke utdypende spørsmål. Spørsmålene vil omhandle opplevelser knyttet til de ulike sidene av det å bli forelder via surrogati - når du begynte å tenke på å stifte familie via surrogati og hvorfor, hvordan prosessen var underveis, til tanker og følelser du sitter igjen med i etterkant. Jeg forsøker å finne ut av hva det vil si å være mor eller far, hva det betyr å være en familie, og hvordan surrogati blir den rette veien å gå for noen. Samtalene vil tas opp på bånd og siden transkribert.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Kun jeg og min veileder vil ha tilgang til intervjuene, og personopplysninger vil bli anonymisert i tilfelle av publisering . Du vil få et pseudonym, og andre opplysninger (slik som bosted og yrke) vil bli anonymisert. Alt materiale som produseres, slik som opptak og transkriberte intervjuer, vil bli oppbevart på en forsvarlig måte slik at ingen utenforstående vil kunne ha tilgang til det.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes i løpet av 2018. Lydopptak vil da bli slettet permanent, og alle personopplysninger anonymiseres.

Frivillig deltakelse

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli slettet.
Dersom du ønsker å delta eller har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med Lene Marie Eriksen på tlf. [redacted]

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, NSD - Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS.

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, "Erfaringer med foreldreskap, slektskap, og familie i norske surrogatfamilier" og er villig til å delta

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Supplement 2: Approval from NSD

Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen
Senter for tverrfaglig kjønnsforskning (STK) Universitetet i Oslo
Postboks 1040 Blindern
0315 OSLO

Vår dato: 30.01.2017 Vår ref: 51470 / 3 / ASF Deres dato: Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 06.12.2016. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

51470	*Erfaringer med foreldreskap, slektskap, og familie i norske surrogatfamilier*
Behandlingsansvarlig	*Universitetet i Oslo, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig	*Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen*
Student	*Lene Marie Eriksen*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 31.12.2017, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Katrine Utaaker Segadal

Amalie Statland Fantoft

Kontaktperson: Marie Strand Schildmann tlf: 55 58 31 52
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.