

**PURPOSE & INTRODUCTION**

In gestational surrogacy, an embryo is created in vitro using an intended father's sperm and an ovum from an egg donor. The embryo is then transferred to the uterus of a different woman (a "surrogate") who has agreed to carry the baby through pregnancy.

This is the first study to explore:

- Motivations and decision-making processes of gestational surrogates who are willing to work with gay male prospective parents.
- Personality differences between these surrogates and an age-matched sample of non-surrogate women.

Prior psychological research in this area focused only on surrogates who worked with heterosexual couples. Also, previous investigators used only the MMPI-2 clinical scales whereas we used MMPI-2 scales assessing broader personality traits.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

We obtained archival assessment interview data and MMPI-2 scores on a sample of 79 gestational surrogates who worked with gay men. We also received comparison archival data (given to us by MMPI-2 Corporation) on 100 women matched for age (22-37 years old).

The surrogacy sample included women from an agency in California that works with surrogates nationwide. Among the agency's selection criteria, a surrogate must already have at least one child of her own and show no obvious evidence of psychopathology in interviews or on the MMPI-2 clinical scales.

For the present study, data were selected only from surrogates who indicated they were willing to help gay men become parents. They were paid approximately \$25,000 for surrogacy.

The sample was predominantly Caucasian (75%). Sixty-one percent of the surrogates were married; 9% were in a committed relationship; and 25% were single. Surrogates had an average of 1.97 children of their own.

A possible limitation is this study's reliance on only one agency's archival data about surrogates. However, other surrogacy agencies have very similar selection procedures (assessment interviews and screening based on MMPI-2 clinical scales).

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**Measures**

**PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW:** An individual interview was conducted with each prospective surrogate as part of her application process to become a surrogate. Responses to interview questions were written down by the interviewer at the surrogacy agency.

The data analyzed in the current study were in response to the question: *Tell me how you reached your decision to become a surrogate?* Responses to this question were coded by trained research assistants to discern major themes in surrogates' motivations and decision-making processes.

**MINNESOTA MULTIPHASIC PERSONALITY**

**INVENTORY:** The MMPI-2 assesses psychiatric symptoms through its clinical scales as well as assessing more general personality characteristics. Because women with elevated scores on the clinical scales would already have been screened out as unsuitable for surrogacy by the agency, we chose to examine the following broader personality scales:

- **Ego Strength (Es):** Adaptability, resiliency, personal resourcefulness, effective functioning, ability to cope with stress and recover from problems.
- **Disconstraint (DISC):** Low scorers tend to be self-controlled and not impulsive, have high tolerance for boredom, tend to follow rules and laws, and may respond better to structured treatment approaches.
- **Social Responsibility (Se):** How a person sees themselves/are seen by others as dependable and trustworthy, and having integrity and a sense of responsibility to the group.
- **Negative Emotionality/Neuroticism (NEGE):** A broad affective disposition to experience negative emotions, especially anxiety and nervousness.
- **Introversion/Low Positive Emotionality (INTRE):** Low scorers are persons who have the capacity to experience joy and pleasure, are quite sociable, and have lots of energy.
- **Dominance (Do):** How a person sees themselves and are seen by others as safe, secure, confident, poised and self-assured, behaving in a straightforward manner, optimistic, resourceful, efficient, realistic, and achievement oriented.

**Table 1.  
Motivational & Decision-Making Themes**

Theme	Percent of Surrogates Who Mentioned this Theme
Thought About Being a Surrogate for a While	58.2%
Own Family is Complete	57.0%
Want to Give or Help Others	55.7%
Like Being Pregnant	43.0%
Empathy Regarding Others' Infertility	38.0%
Closeness to Someone with Fertility Problems	30.4%
Perceived Ability & Confidence	26.6%
Researched Surrogacy Before	26.6%
Talked to Friends & Family about Surrogacy	24.1%
Time is Right To Become a Surrogate	24.1%
Importance of Having Children	22.8%
Saw Surrogacy Ads on Internet/TV/Media	22.8%
Knows A Surrogate	15.2%
Considered Being an Egg Donor or Foster Parent	13.9%
Previous Experience Similar to Surrogacy	11.4%
See Surrogacy as a Good Fit for Them	10.1%
Receive Financial Support	7.6%

**Table 2. Surrogate vs. Non-Surrogate Comparisons on MMPI-2 Scales**

Variable	N	Surrogate Mean (SD)	Control Grp Mean (SD)	Mean Difference	t	df
Ego Strength (Es)	79	59.47 (5.88)	50.74 (9.48)	8.73	13.19 **	78
Disconstraint (DISC)	79	47.54 (8.89)	52.44 (10.59)	-4.90	-4.89 **	78
Social Responsibility (Se)	79	58.39 (7.34)	49.80 (9.49)	8.59	10.41 **	78
Negative Emotionality /Neuroticism (NEGE)	79	38.14 (5.98)	50.10 (10.08)	-11.96	-17.78 **	78
Introversion/Low Positive Emotionality (INTRE)	79	44.14 (6.28)	49.73 (9.82)	-5.59	-7.89 **	78
Dominance (Do)	79	50.52 (6.23)	49.70 (9.48)	.89	1.17	78

Note. \*\*  $p < .001$

**RESULTS**

Analyses of the interview data revealed a wide range of motivations and decision-making processes (see Table 1). Motivations that were most frequently expressed were: "Want to give or help others" (56%); "Like being pregnant" (43%); and "Empathy regarding others' infertility" (38%). Decision-making processes most frequently described were: "Thought about being a surrogate for a while" (58%), "Own family is complete" (57%) Perceived ability and confidence" (27%), and "Researched Surrogacy before" (27%).

Surrogates scored in the more prosocial/ adaptive direction on five of the six MMPI-2 scales (see Table 2). Especially strong findings were that surrogates scored higher than the control group women on ego strength and social responsibility, and lower on negative emotionality/neuroticism.

**CONCLUSIONS**

These results suggest that gestational surrogates who are willing and selected to work with prospective gay fathers are higher functioning psychologically than a comparison group of women their same age. These surrogates are more resilient, less predisposed to experience negative emotions, and higher in social responsibility. Their primary motivations include desire to help others and enjoyment of pregnancy itself. Their decisions involve a process of thinking about and researching surrogacy over time, contemplating their own ability to handle it well, and concluding that the timing is right because they already have their own children.