

# Commodification of Motherhood: In Vitro Fertilization and Commercial Surrogacy at BioTexCom, Ukraine

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## 1. Introduction

[Word Count: 245 words]

In vitro fertilization (IVF) has transformed reproductive possibilities, enabling individuals to pursue parenthood in new ways. However, within the global fertility tourism industry—particularly at BioTexCom in Kyiv, Ukraine—IVF intersects with complex ethical issues tied to the commodification of reproduction. This project explores these ethical dimensions by focusing on BioTexCom’s socio-technical network, which includes surrogate mothers, international clients, clinic staff, regulatory bodies, and bioethics advocates.

Through actor network theory, care ethics, and Marxist analysis, this study examines how economic disparities between affluent clients and economically disadvantaged Ukrainian surrogates create conditions for coerced consent and the commodification of reproductive labor, raising critical questions about bodily autonomy and exploitation. The project further highlights global reproductive inequalities intensified by fertility tourism, along with the physical and emotional burdens faced by surrogate mothers.

It concludes with recommendations aimed at strengthening regulatory frameworks and protections for all involved. Advocating an approach informed by global feminist ethics, it underscores the need to ensure reproductive technologies like IVF are practiced responsibly, upholding ethical integrity in assisted reproduction.

### 1.1. Key Definition

<i>In vitro fertilization (IVF)</i>	Assisted reproductive technology where eggs are fertilized by sperm outside the body and implanted in the uterus [1].
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<i>Fertility tourism</i>	Traveling to another country for fertility treatments due to cost, success rates, or legal restrictions [2].
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*Gestational surrogacy*

Surrogacy where a surrogate carries a pregnancy created via IVF with no genetic link to the child [3].

*Coerced consent*

Consent given under pressure or manipulation, often limiting genuine autonomy [4].

## 2. Actor Network Analysis

[Word Count: 827 words]

BioTexCom's surrogacy model operates within a complex network of human and non-human actors, where power dynamics and ethical issues are deeply intertwined. Applying Actor-Network Theory illuminates these dynamics, revealing how various actors influence and shape surrogacy practices in Ukraine.

An interactive network analysis is available at <https://denouemenj.github.io/ant/>, with detailed connection descriptions on the accompanying website.

### 2.1. Key Human and Non-Human Actors

In BioTexCom's network, human actors include surrogate mothers, international clients, clinic staff, regulatory bodies, and advocacy organizations. A significant non-human actor is Ukrainian law, which prohibits homosexual parents from accessing surrogacy services [5][6]. This legal restriction exemplifies the concept of generalized symmetry in Actor-Network Theory, granting human and non-human elements equal agency in shaping the network's dynamics [7].

Ukrainian legislation significantly influences BioTexCom's client base and services. By restricting surrogacy access to homosexual individuals, the law reinforces societal norms within Ukraine's surrogacy industry, often steering BioTexCom's operations to exclude homosexual clients [6][8]. This exclusion reflects socio-cultural biases that typically favor clients aligning with legal expectations—usually heterosexual couples—while marginalizing LGBTQ+ clients [9]. The legal framework creates a network where economically vulnerable surrogate mothers provide reproductive labor under conditions that prioritize societal norms over their rights and agency. This situation introduces ethical complexities, particularly concerning the intersection of economic necessity and reproductive labor [10][11].

### 2.2. Power Dynamics and Translation in the BioTexCom Network

Within Actor-Network Theory, the concept of translation refers to the process of aligning the interests of diverse actors to form enduring relationships [7]. BioTexCom translates the needs of affluent heterosexual clients into structured surrogacy contracts that commodify reproductive

labor while adhering to Ukrainian legal mandates [5]. By doing so, the clinic exercises selective inclusivity, granting access to heterosexual clients while excluding homosexual clients due to legal constraints.

As an intermediary, BioTexCom balances client expectations with Ukrainian law to sustain its business model. This mediation illustrates how power circulates through the network, with Ukrainian law significantly influencing the clinic's service boundaries [6]. By catering primarily to heterosexual clients, BioTexCom complies with legal mandates and reinforces a business model that aligns with entrenched social norms favoring traditional family structures [7]. Consequently, BioTexCom and Ukrainian law collectively enforce an exclusionary structure, privileging certain clients while marginalizing others. This exclusion underscores systemic inequalities that are embedded within surrogacy practices [9].

### 2.3. Punctualization and the Concealment of Network Complexity

Punctualization in Actor-Network Theory involves simplifying a network into a cohesive entity, thereby masking its underlying complexities [7]. BioTexCom employs this strategy by marketing surrogacy as a streamlined, accessible service, concealing the intricate legal, ethical, and logistical challenges involved [10]. For heterosexual clients, this portrayal suggests that surrogacy is a straightforward transaction, potentially obscuring the legal restrictions and ethical issues affecting other demographics [5].

However, this simplified model faces disruption from advocacy groups and media outlets exposing the exclusionary practices in BioTexCom's operations [8]. Media organizations like the BBC report on these legal constraints, effectively "depunctualizing" the network by highlighting its concealed complexities and ethical implications [11]. Such scrutiny challenges BioTexCom's portrayal of surrogacy and prompts public reevaluation of the ethical and legal challenges involved.

### 2.4. Resistance and Tensions in the Network

All actors in a network possess the capacity for resistance, challenging existing relationships and configurations [7]. Within BioTexCom's network, resistance arises from LGBTQ+ advocacy groups and media entities contesting the exclusion of homosexual clients and promoting equal access to surrogacy services [9]. These actors push back against the current network configuration, pressuring BioTexCom and Ukrainian policymakers to reconsider restrictive policies [8].

This resistance highlights ethical tensions within BioTexCom's network and emphasizes the role of advocacy in challenging exclusionary practices and striving for inclusivity [7][11]. Through public engagement, these resistances may prompt regulatory and societal reevaluation of BioTexCom's selective model, exposing limitations in a network that commodifies surrogacy while adhering to exclusionary statutes. Advocacy efforts underscore the broader societal need

to question norms dictating access to reproductive technologies [9]. These challenges are crucial for understanding and potentially reshaping the socio-technical structure of BioTexCom's surrogacy network [10].

## 2.5. Patterning and Network Stability

Patterning refers to establishing stable relationships that maintain the network's operation [7]. BioTexCom achieves patterning by fostering sustained interactions with surrogate mothers and heterosexual clients who meet Ukrainian legal standards [6]. This stability allows the clinic to operate within legal and social parameters, maintaining its business model [8].

However, this stability is conditional and may not endure under persistent challenges from advocacy groups, media scrutiny, or international legal pressures [9]. Resistances against selective access expose the fragility of BioTexCom's stability, suggesting that its exclusionary practices could face intensified ethical and regulatory examination [8]. If external pressures gain momentum, BioTexCom may need to adopt a more inclusive model, or regulatory bodies might impose reforms to ensure equitable access [7]. Thus, the network's stability is precarious, vulnerable to shifts as external actors question the ethical viability of current operations. Ongoing scrutiny not only challenges the present model but also opens pathways for meaningful reform in surrogacy practices [11].

## 3. Ethical Analysis

[Word Count: 851 words]

This ethical analysis examines how economic disparities in the global fertility tourism industry impact surrogate autonomy, highlighting ethical concerns regarding consent, commodification, and exploitation.

### 3.1. Neoliberalism and Coerced Consent

In the context of neoliberalism, the commodification of reproductive labor within global fertility tourism—particularly evident at BioTexCom—often leads to coerced consent. Neoliberal ideologies promote individual economic responsibility, which can intensify pressures on financially disadvantaged women to perceive surrogacy as a necessary financial solution [12][13]. Consequently, their consent may be shaped less by genuine autonomy and more by economic necessity [14][15]. The choices available to these women are frequently constrained by financial pressures and limited alternatives, further marginalizing already vulnerable individuals.

From a Care Ethics perspective, this situation reflects relational vulnerability, wherein socio-economic constraints significantly limit women's autonomy [16][17]. Surrogates at

BioTexCom may face compounded pressures stemming from poverty, inequality, and stark wealth disparities between themselves and their clients. Actor-Network Theory illuminates how power dynamics within the surrogacy network can shape the surrogate's agency [18][19][20]. BioTexCom and its clients potentially exert control over the surrogate's choices, reducing her role to that of a dependent with limited ability to negotiate. This process of punctualization frames surrogates as mere service providers rather than autonomous individuals.

From a Marxist standpoint, such practices exemplify capitalist exploitation, where BioTexCom profits while surrogates bear the physical and emotional burdens without receiving adequate compensation [21]. The concept of alienated labor is crucial here: surrogates may feel disconnected from their work, as their reproductive capacities are monetized for a global reproductive market. Neoliberal and capitalist frameworks commodify reproductive capacity, potentially reducing surrogate autonomy to a mere transaction within a profit-driven economy [22]. Both Care Ethics and Marxism advocate for policies that provide economic support, legal protections, and alternatives for surrogates to counteract coercive financial pressures [23][24].

### 3.2. Commodification and the Sanctity of Life

The commodification of reproductive labor raises serious ethical concerns regarding the sanctity of life, as childbirth shifts from a deeply personal experience to a transactional service [25][26]. BioTexCom's business model may epitomize this shift, wherein surrogates' reproductive labor is exchanged for compensation, thereby commodifying their bodies and the life they bring into the world [27].

From a Care Ethics perspective, this commodification conflicts with principles of interdependence and voice [28]. Surrogates, who are central to the reproductive process, often find their experiences minimized in favor of clients' desires and BioTexCom's profitability [29]. Care Ethics asserts that surrogates should be recognized as active participants in a meaningful process, not merely as service providers [30]. This perspective rejects reducing surrogates to utilitarian functions, advocating for the recognition of their voices and experiences beyond the transactional exchange.

From a Marxist standpoint, such commodification aligns with capitalism's tendency to treat all aspects of human existence, including life itself, as commodities [31]. BioTexCom acts as an intermediary, potentially maximizing profits by offering an "end product"—a child—to clients while disregarding surrogate welfare [32]. Actor-Network Theory highlights how this commodification represents a network alignment that prioritizes economic output over ethical considerations, reducing reproductive labor to a purchasable service [33]. This process may undermine the sanctity of life by turning a relational and emotional experience into a market exchange [34]. Both Care Ethics and Marxism call for policies that support surrogate welfare, agency, and fair compensation, aiming to uphold the ethical significance of life in the reproductive process [35].

### 3.3. Global Reproductive Inequality and Migration

Global reproductive inequality magnifies ethical concerns surrounding fertility tourism by exploiting cross-border economic disparities and regulatory gaps [36]. BioTexCom's operations in Ukraine may mirror surrogacy practices in countries like India, where low-cost surrogacy attracts clients from wealthier regions [37]. Political instability, poverty, and conflict can drive women in these areas toward surrogacy as a survival strategy, often at the expense of their health, autonomy, and dignity [38].

From a Care Ethics perspective, this inequality underscores the importance of recognizing interdependent relationships among international clients, surrogates, and agencies within socio-economically vulnerable contexts [39]. Affluent clients from stable nations rely on reproductive labor from women in disadvantaged regions, potentially prioritizing their desires over surrogate autonomy [40]. Care Ethics argues for a nuanced, contextualized approach that respects the socio-economic constraints of these women, recognizing that their "choice" to enter surrogacy is often shaped by limited employment opportunities and displacement due to conflict [41].

A Marxist interpretation views global reproductive inequality as an extension of capitalist exploitation on an international scale [42]. By outsourcing reproductive labor to low-cost regions, wealthier nations may avoid domestic regulatory costs and restrictions, reinforcing global economic disparities [43]. Surrogates in regions like India may face inadequate health protections, insufficient compensation, and minimal agency in surrogacy agreements, reflecting capitalism's prioritization of profit over human welfare [44].

Actor-Network Theory illustrates how this system functions as a network strategically outsourcing reproductive labor, enabling economically stable clients to influence conditions for surrogates in less regulated regions [45]. The exploitation inherent in global reproductive inequality highlights the urgent need for policy interventions that establish fair, protective standards [46]. International agreements addressing these regulatory gaps could help create a more ethnically balanced surrogacy industry, ensuring surrogate welfare is protected globally [47].

## 4. What Now?

[Word Count: 498 words]

To address the ethical concerns in BioTexCom's surrogacy practices, it may be essential to propose frameworks for international regulation and global feminist policies. These recommendations aim to protect surrogate rights, promote inclusivity, and foster a more equitable surrogacy model.

## 4.1. International Regulation

Establishing a standardized international regulatory framework appears crucial for addressing the ethical challenges and inequalities within global fertility tourism, particularly in contexts like BioTexCom in Ukraine [48]. Without such regulations, surrogate mothers often face economic coercion, inadequate health protections, and limited legal recourse, positioning them in a highly commodified and potentially exploitative system [50]. An international regulatory body could implement enforceable guidelines for surrogacy that protect surrogate rights and ensure transparency [49].

Given that fertility tourism operates across borders, a coordinated response is arguably necessary [51]. An international organization, such as the World Health Organization or the United Nations, might establish baseline standards that include fair compensation, health protections, and rigorous informed consent protocols [52]. These guidelines could prevent exploitation by holding clinics accountable and ensuring that minimum standards are consistently applied, regardless of local regulatory variations [53]. Additionally, this cross-border framework would facilitate cooperation between countries, creating shared ethical standards that protect surrogates worldwide.

Admittedly, critics might argue that international regulations infringe on national sovereignty, as each country has unique cultural and legal perspectives on surrogacy [54]. However, these guidelines would serve as a baseline, allowing countries to adapt them within their cultural frameworks while still adhering to fundamental ethical standards. Such a system could protect vulnerable actors across borders, reducing exploitation and fostering a more ethical and sustainable foundation for the fertility tourism industry [55].

## 4.2. Call for Global Feminism

A global feminist approach may be vital in addressing the inequalities and ethical concerns pervasive in fertility tourism. Global feminism highlights how economic disparities and cultural biases can shape surrogacy practices, with affluent clients often relying on the reproductive labor of economically disadvantaged women [56]. This perspective advocates for policies that prioritize the dignity, autonomy, and well-being of surrogate mothers, potentially countering the transactional model that currently dominates the industry [57].

BioTexCom's operations suggest that surrogate mothers frequently face economic pressures that limit their agency, possibly forcing them into agreements that prioritize clients' needs over their own welfare [58]. Global feminism argues for surrogate-centered policies that address these power imbalances by emphasizing fair compensation, independent representation, and comprehensive support systems for surrogates [59]. This could include advocacy groups to represent surrogates' interests, as well as psychological and health services throughout the surrogacy process [60].

While some may contend that enhancing surrogate welfare could increase surrogacy costs and limit accessibility for clients [61], the ethical imperative to protect surrogates' rights arguably outweighs this concern. Moreover, a global feminist approach suggests educating clients on the ethical dimensions of surrogacy, encouraging them to value surrogate welfare [62]. Implementing these changes might foster a more ethically responsible surrogacy model that respects surrogate autonomy, transforming reproductive labor from a mere transaction into a relationship built on mutual care and respect [63].

## 5. Conclusion

[Word Count: 202 words]

The analysis of BioTexCom's surrogacy practices reveals the intricate ethical and socio-legal challenges within the global fertility tourism industry. Through Actor Network Theory, Care Ethics, and Marxist analysis, this project has illuminated the power dynamics and economic disparities that shape reproductive labor, emphasizing the vulnerabilities of surrogate mothers and the exclusion of certain groups under restrictive policies. The commodification of surrogacy at BioTexCom, driven by market demand and socioeconomic inequities, underscores pressing ethical concerns about bodily autonomy, coerced consent, and the erosion of dignity.

To address these issues, this project advocates for robust international regulation and a global feminist approach. Implementing baseline international standards would help protect surrogates by ensuring fair compensation, transparent practices, and legal safeguards, fostering a more ethically responsible industry. Additionally, a global feminist perspective would champion the rights and agency of surrogate mothers, shifting surrogacy from a transactional arrangement to one based on respect and care.

Ultimately, as assisted reproductive technologies continue to evolve, so must our ethical frameworks and policies. By centering the dignity and rights of surrogate mothers and promoting inclusivity, we can build a more equitable model for reproductive labor that respects both the individuals involved and the ethical integrity of assisted reproduction practices worldwide.



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