

Motherhood as Mosaic Altruism & Self-Interest
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Abstract
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Motherhood is purely altruistic, according to conventional wisdom. Yet a feminist recognition of women as individual agents as well as relational beings requires recognition of self-interest that also pervades mother-child relations. Yet scholars and popular culture lack shorthand for expressing this truth. My book *Love's Promises*¹ contends that it's entirely natural to speak of love and exchange (both legally binding contracts and the not-binding exchanges I call "deals") in the same breath. This paper takes that discussion to feminist ideas of motherhood, suggesting that mosaicism provides a metaphor that captures both altruism and self-interest in motherhood.

Take payments to birth mothers by adoptive parents. Princeton sociologist Viviana Zelizer has brought scholars two-thirds of the way in naming a workable typology to describe this overlap of altruism and self-interest. She calls a world view in which everything is for sale "nothing but," as in "nothing but" market exchanges, and uses the phrase "hostile worlds" to describe the belief that market and non-market spheres are "hostile worlds" that cannot overlap without cross-contamination and possible erasure of altruism.² But her phrases for the common but often-masked overlap between altruism and self-interest -- "differentiated ties" and "connected lives"-- have not stuck.

Nor have other scholars provided widely-adopted terminology. Kara Swanson and others suggest "civic property," Peggy Radin discusses "incomplete commodification," Tsilly Dagan and Talia Fisher explore "nuanced alienability," and Michele Goodwin supports a system of "altruistic procurement" and "hybrid commoditization" in exchanges of human body parts.³

Mosaicism provides a rich and accurate shorthand for scholars and policymakers puzzling over mixes of altruism and self interest. This paper briefly describes mosaicism and applies it to three doctrinal areas that mix elements of exchange with altruism: adoption; markets in body parts; and the "office housework" that workplaces often devalue.

This paper begins with a review of linguist George Lakoff's work on metaphors,⁴ contending that the important and complex idea of overlapping altruism and self interest requires a good metaphor that captures core aspects of these situations. It then describes

¹ Martha Ertman, *Love's Promises* (2015)

² Viviana Zelizer, *The Purchase of Intimacy* (2005).

³ Natalie Ram, *Body Banking from the Bench to the Bedside*, 129 HARV. L. REV. 491 (2016); KARA SWANSON, *BANKING ON THE BODY* (2014); Tsilly Dagan & Talia Fisher, *Rights for Sale*, 96 MINN. L REV. 90, 140 (2011); MICHELE GOODWIN, *BLACK MARKETS* 21 (2013).

⁴ GEORGE LAKOFF & MARK JOHNSON, *METAPHORS WE LIVE BY* (1980, 2003).

mosaicism, a medical term that captures the complex truth that a person with Down Syndrome only has the defining genetic anomaly in the cells descended from the first cell that mutated that way.

It then applies the metaphor to three distinct contexts. In adoption, law and social practices carefully designate some payments as permissible and others as off-limits. Similarly, artificial persons like the University of California and the genetic-testing company 23andMe routinely sell genetic material but do not pay the flesh and blood natural persons who provide that valuable raw material. Finally, workplaces tend to ignore or even denigrate the valuable work of integrating new employees onto a team, remembering birthdays, and other “office housework” just as family law tends to devalue homemaking labor.

The mosaicism metaphor provides a vivid metaphor that captures these complex social and economic relationships just as a mosaic made out of ceramics or glass can depict dimensionality and emotion with a diverse mix of colors and textures. Along the same lines, payments to birth mothers, to individuals who transfer their genetic material, and putting a dollar value on “office housework,” as well as the altruism that motivates the exchanges, can and should be part of the picture of a recognizable portrait. While mosaicism applies to many contexts, I will focus on adoption since it is likely of most interest the Applied Feminism conference.