

The Fertility Industry Is a Science Fiction Nightmare

The fertility industry has become a multi-billion dollar enterprise, buying genetic material and selling the promise of children to same-sex couples, single parents, and heterosexual couples struggling with infertility.

Both sperm and egg agencies seek donors with “desirable” traits. Male donors for example, [must be at least 5’8” tall](#), and educational background, athletic ability, and hair color are also considered in selecting donors of either gender. Once a donor is selected, agencies collect their “donations” and sell the frozen samples through carefully crafted profiles placed in “donor catalogs.” These catalogs operate as a genetic meat market where customers can craft a child to their own liking.

Both male and female sex cell “donors” are motivated by money, as Yale Sociology Professor Rene Almeling explains in [a 2017 paper](#). Yet, there are stark differences in how men and women view their “donations.” These differences are partially due to how the fertility industry advertises to each. Almeling writes:

Drawing on the stereotype of women as nurturing caregivers, egg agencies emphasize the plight of infertile couples in selecting women who want to ‘help’ people by giving the ‘gift of life.’ In contrast, sperm banks encourage men to earn money with an easy ‘job’....

Surprisingly, Almeling also found that male donors are more likely to view themselves as the father of any child resulting from their donations than female donors are to view themselves as such a child’s mother. Almeling’s hypothesis is that our society has reduced fatherhood “to a cultural equation in

which sperm equals dad.” Female donors view the recipient of their donation, the woman who carries and/or raises the child, as the “real mother.”

In reality, those who sell their genes sell off parts of themselves and have little control over how they are used or who buys them. Thus, it is unsurprising that the fertility industry has little regard for its donors. This is especially true of women.

The true effects aren’t definitively known, but egg donors may suffer from infertility, ovarian cysts, and ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome, which sometimes results in death. Yet while intake forms ask donors about their SAT scores, they are unlikely to inform them of the [potential risks](#) associated with the egg donation process.

Male donors face a different set of problems. A [2016 Harvard Law School study](#) showed that “29% of current anonymous sperm donors... would refuse to donate,” if they couldn’t be anonymous, while the rest would require higher levels of compensation. Anonymity is something sperm banks often promise. Thanks to genetic testing services such as 23andMe, that anonymity is [all but dead](#).

The failure of anonymity isn’t the only betrayal that male donors face. Wendy Kramer conceived via a sperm donor who was promised that he would sire no more than 10 children. [He now has 20](#). Kramer’s son Ryan used the power of the internet to find his biological father, and Wendy and Ryan now run the [Donor Sibling Registry](#) to help people identify and connect with their biological parents and half-siblings.

“It’s not like they’re creating widgets in a factory ... this is an industry creating human beings, so you’d think there would be more accountability and ethics,” Kramer [told STAT News](#).

The whole fertility industry scenario reads like a scene out of a science fiction novel, such as one from Christopher

Ruocchio's "[Sun Eater](#)" series. In it, human reproduction has been handed over to test tubes and scientists, at least for the elites who can afford such procedures. Geneticists have gone full Dr. Mengele, also designing embryos to be born into slavery for specific tasks including hard labor and prostitution.

The main character, Hadrian Marlowe, is horrified by these practices, balking at a proposition to sell a sample of his blood to such a geneticist in Ruocchio's second book "[Howling Dark](#)":

In selling my genes I would be complicit in the creation of lives bred into slavery like the woman beside us. I would be complicit in their suffering, and for what? Money? Convenience? A little time? And that they would be in part myself made it seem a kind of prostitution.

In its use and abuse of human lives, as well as its disregard for the health problems created for both donors and the resulting children, the fertility industry has shown that removing love, removing human interaction, and removing humanity itself from the creation of new human life constitutes a grave societal ill.

Perhaps we ought to take a closer look at the fertility industry as it stands now, before we cross one bridge too many on our journey into the future. Isn't it time that society demanded that this industry treated people like... people?

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