

My Egg Donor Went to Harvard. Did Yours?

A feature in the [Harvard Crimson](#), the university's undergraduate newspaper, gives a fascinating anecdotal picture of the sperm and egg donation industry on the fringes of Ivy League campuses.

Parents who want smart kids. It opens with an interview with a 41-year-old Vancouver woman, Shannon Copeland, who was unable to have a child in her second marriage. She is working on a doctorate in nursing and wanted her offspring to be academically gifted. She has photographed her one-year-old lying on piles of academic papers. Why are genes for genius so important? "People have said to me, 'Well, who cares [if she's smart?] Like, say she's not kind...'" she recalls.

"But I care," she says.

Young men who want money. A branch of California Cryobank, one of the world's largest sperm banks, is located halfway between Harvard and MIT. "[We have] 40-plus years of experience of having people tell us that educated donors are something that's important to them," says a spokesman. Brandon, a junior at Harvard, donates regularly and doesn't worry about the responsibility of being a father. "Parenting is more of a nurturing kind of relationship than it is a genetic relationship," he says.

Young women who want money. An "Egg Donor Needed" advertisement on the website of *The Crimson* suggests that donors would earn U.S. \$60,000. However, "Emily", an undergraduate at an Ivy League college, earned only \$17,000. Ivy League donors tend to receive a status premium of \$2,000 for their eggs, *The Crimson's* reporters were told.

Agencies who want clients. Some parents are so particular

about their requirements that the price goes through the roof. One agency told *The Crimson* that another agency had a client who was willing to pay \$250,000, including a \$50,000 donation to the charity of the donor's choice or for her own egg preservation. But they wanted a woman with "Ivy League or top tier education, clean bill of health, no cancer, no Alzheimer's, no mental illnesses, no history of substance abuse... And they were also looking for somebody over 5'6," blond-haired or red-haired and blue-eyed."

"While donation services compete to recruit Ivy Leaguers, sometimes, what they offer outcompetes an Ivy-League path," *The Crimson* reports.

Donors who want good parents. One woman, "Michelle", insisted on meeting the prospective parents. "I need to make sure that the people who are receiving my genetics are good people whose values I agree with, who... can nurture things that I may pass on to their children."

Some Ethical Considerations

"I always advocate for erasing stigma around egg donors and how you came to be into this world," Shannon Copeland tells the sympathetic reporters for *The Crimson*.

The Crimson skated over many of the ethical issues involved in sperm and egg donation. Don't the children have a right to know their genetic parents? What happens to "unwanted" embryos? How does this affect the donors psychologically? How will it affect the children? Is this a form of eugenics? Does compensation exploit women?

These issues might be too subtle for Harvard undergraduates. But one thing that the writers surely should have mentioned is the serious health risks for egg donors. Occasionally women die after ovarian hyper-stimulation. And egg donation may affect future fertility.

Sorry, but if there is anything that deserves to be stigmatized, it is donating the gift of life for profit.

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