

# Reaction to: “I Paid for a White Baby: How Assisted Reproductive Technologies Reproduce White Supremacy”

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In *I Paid for a White Baby: How Assisted Reproductive Technologies Reproduce White Supremacy*, Annie Houghton-Larsen sets forth an eloquent and compelling argument for how the assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) market contributes to the preservation of racial categories by encouraging parents to reproduce monoracial families. Because white parents predominantly comprise the market, sperm banks serve to protect white purity and white privilege, urging hopeful parents to choose a donor of the same race. Undoubtedly, the sperm banks’ implicit or explicit messaging caters to the white parents, who comprise the majority of their market. And perhaps for good reason—the Crambletts and Harnichers of the world are clearly ill-equipped to raise mixed-race children when they have never experienced the imbalance of privileges (let alone harsh injustices) that racism creates for black people and other people of color.

But what about couples who are not white? For many queer couples in which one or both partners identify as people of color, the desire to produce a nonwhite baby may reflect a very reasonable desire to pass down a parent’s cultural and ethnic heritage. Consider the story of Rosa Yadira Ortiz. Ortiz is Mexican; her partner is black.<sup>1</sup> Ortiz, as the partner who would not be carrying the child, wanted a sperm donor who had two Mexican parents, darker skin, and a master’s degree.<sup>2</sup> Of the 550 donors available to choose from at California Cryobank, only five were both of Mexican descent and had a master’s degree.<sup>3</sup>

Brittney Thornburley had similar trouble. Thornburley, who is black, sought the sperm of a black donor.<sup>4</sup> Thornburley pointed out that if biology did allow her to have sperm, it would not create white babies and, accordingly, she did not want to pay for white sperm: “I want sperm from some anonymous guy that looks at least kind of like me, so that my kids look kind of like me, and can lay claim to the same heritage I do,” she wrote.<sup>5</sup> But when Thornburley and her partner embarked on their search, they encountered a dearth of black donors to choose from on sperm bank

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1. Miriam Zoila Pérez, *Where Are All the Sperm Donors of Color?*, REWIRE.NEWS (Nov. 28, 2018, 5:30 PM), <https://rewire.news/article/2018/11/28/where-are-all-the-sperm-donors-of-color/> [<https://perma.cc/7QBC-8XJ4>].

2. *Id.*

3. *See id.*

4. Brittney Thornburley, *Aspiring Queer Mom Seeks Black Sperm Donor, Can’t Find Too Many*, AUTOSTRADDLE (Apr. 20, 2017, 11:00 AM), <https://www.autostraddle.com/aspiring-queer-mom-seeks-black-sperm-donor-cant-find-too-many-375953/> [<https://perma.cc/29ZM-2V4F>].

5. *Id.*

website: “[S]ometimes four. One of the larger banks I know of has TWO up for offer.”<sup>6</sup> A quick scan of the comments section beneath her story indicates that Thornburley was not alone in her struggle. Moms-to-be commiserated about their issues in finding Chinese, Middle Eastern, and Native American donors, to name a few.<sup>7</sup>

Fortunately, Ortiz and Thornburley found donors who fit their criteria. Ortiz eventually found a Mexican donor from another bank, and Thornburley found a black donor who once did a school project on police reform and whose dream lunch date was Octavia Butler.<sup>8</sup> However, their struggles point to a larger issue with the way most sperm banks currently operate; sperm banks cater to the demands of the “future minority” of America while ignoring the desires and needs of would-be parents of color.<sup>9</sup> There are several possible explanations for the lack of representation of POC donors. To start, there are high barriers to entry for many sperm banks. California Cryobank and Fairfax Cryobank, the largest sperm banks in the United States, accept one out of every one hundred applicants, which itself could be a result of the intense testing and interviewing.<sup>10</sup> Geography may pose an additional barrier, as donors must live close enough to the bank to deposit sperm once or twice a month for at least six months.<sup>11</sup> Lack of diversity among doctors and staff at sperm banks may also play a role in failed efforts to recruit more donors of color.<sup>12</sup> Whatever the reasons, this segment of the ARTs industry is clearly responding first and foremost to the desires of a white market.

As for Houghton-Larsen’s conclusion that it is more difficult to be a mixed-race child because of our society and not because of white parents, I would counter that. Speaking from experience, having parents who do not look like you certainly does not make life in America any easier. If given the choice, I would have chosen to grow up with at least one parent who represents my Samoan heritage and could validate my existence through shared appearance and culture. My upbringing was not so different from that of my mother, most likely because I chose to assimilate to the dominant white culture as much as practicable. All of which is to say that it is natural to connect and bond with individuals who look like us. Perhaps, then, the choice to reproduce within one’s own racial or ethnic confines is not the problem. Rather, it is lack of choice provided by sperm banks that constitutes the more ominous issue. As long as the invisible white hand continues to guide, reproducing white supremacy will remain a priority for the ARTs market.

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6. *Id.*

7. *Id.*

8. Pérez, *supra* note 2; Thornburley, *supra* note 5.

9. Thornburley, *supra* note 5.

10. Pérez, *supra* note 2.

11. *Id.*

12. *Id.*