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**Soldiers and Superheroes Needed! Masculine Archetypes and Constrained Bodily**

**Commodification in the Sperm Donation Market**

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## **Abstract**

Extant research on bodily commodification emphasises contexts where market actors can pursue commodification in relatively unconstrained ways. However, scant research examines how marketers foster bodily commodification in markets where institutional constraints limit the value which can be extracted, produced, and/or exchanged. We fill this gap by studying sperm donation services in the United Kingdom and Australia, where a number of governmental regulations limit bodily commodification and value creation processes. Using an archival analysis of visual and textual material, we find that sperm banks in these constrained contexts strategically rely on the marketing of masculine archetypes as a source of value. This paper delineates the concept of constrained bodily commodification and its marketing implications. Moreover, it evidences sociocultural discursive mechanisms by which marketers attempt to overcome constrained commodification issues. Specifically, we emphasise the role of gender archetypes as a resource which allows sperm banks' marketers to transfer identity value to the donor and donation experience. Finally, this paper also has implications for the theorising of value creation by expanding our understanding of how value is created during consumer disposition processes.

## **Keywords**

Constrained commodification; Bodily commodification; Sperm donation; Masculinity; Value enactment; Gender archetypes; Systemic value creation; Disposition processes

## **Introduction**

Commodification is essential to the value creation associated with many products, services, and experiences, from artworks to love (Askegaard and Eckhardt, 2012; Goulding, 2000; Hewer and Hamilton, 2012; Hubbard et al., 2017; Jafari and Sürdem, 2012).

Commodification is often defined as the process of transforming a sociocultural, material, or immaterial entity into something that is mundane, readily accessible, purchasable, and inscribed with value arising from this entity's market exchange and use (Anderson et al., 2016; Drummond, 2006; Lusch and Watts, 2018). The type of product subject to commodification can affect the value creation process. For instance, scholars note more complex commodification processes for entities which have high identity value (Mahon-Daly, 2016; Velliquette et al., 2006) and which are perceived as spiritual and sacred, such as religions (Jafari and Sürdem, 2012). Bodily goods, such as organs and gametes engender particularly complex commodification processes since they fit both criteria (Daniels, 2008; Mahon-Day, 2016). This is why we focus on bodily commodification, or the commodification of bodily goods, as the body has "become a preeminent site of commercial capitalisation" (Brown 2013: 97).

A key assumption in the commodification literature is that such processes occur without major constraints. In other words, scholars largely examine contexts in which the logics of the free-market operate unchallenged throughout the commodification and value creation process. However, recent works have called for research on the sociocultural and institutional constraints surrounding bodily commodification. For instance, Daniels encourages further exploration of 'intersecting cultural practices: accepted business conventions, religious beliefs, ethical norms, and gender and racial relations' which may limit commodification (2008: 87). Research is needed to elucidate the processes by which

marketers can overcome various institutional constraints to ensure that value is created during bodily commodification.

Precisely, our paper aims to remedy this oversight by scrutinising how bodily commodification processes characterised by institutional regulatory constraints impact the sourcing and/or extraction of the commodity, a process that Figueiredo and Scaraboto (2016: 510) describe as value ‘enactment’. In turn, we outline the notion of constrained bodily commodification. In such contexts, the goods must be sourced/extracted before being sold or there is no value potential nor the possibility for commercial exchange. We define constrained commodification as a process which is hindered by institutional constraints – such as regulatory, political, normative, and cultural-cognitive ones (Humphreys, 2010a) – that limit marketplace actors’ capacity to acquire, transform, and/or sell a commodity. We focus on marketers as the previous literature emphasises their centrality and ability to significantly impact commodification and value creation in markets by employing different rhetorical strategies. We address the following questions: How do marketers manage bodily commodification in constrained markets? What are the implications of this management for value creation? This examination is important as markets in which constrained bodily commodification takes place are rapidly growing in volume and significance. For instance, the worldwide sperm donation market is valued today at \$3.51 billion and is expected to grow with the increased demand for fertility treatments and increased sociocultural acceptance of same-sex marriage (Grand View Research, 2017).

We chose the sperm donation market in the U.K. and in Australia to answer these questions. Indeed, this is a market where sperm donation is a legitimate and growing practice. It is also subject to regulatory constraints, such as governmental regulations that prohibit financial remuneration for sperm donors, impose limits on sperm donation’s frequency, and do not guarantee donors’ anonymity. Thus, marketers must overcome these regulatory

constraints and find alternative strategies (e.g. rhetorical, altruistic) to recruit donors in order to create value for their customers (sperm donors and sperm donation recipients) and their firms.

We adopt an archival approach and analyse media and marketing material related to sperm donation services in the U.K. and Australia. We triangulate the perspectives disseminated by sperm banks, fertility clinics, and popular media to provide a thorough view of how sperm donation services are societally situated. We find that marketers strategically deploy the masculine archetypes of duty-bound soldiers and (everyday) heroes to overcome bodily commodification constraints that hinder value creation.

We extend the literature on commodification and value creation in three ways. First, this paper contributes to the bodily commodification literature by highlighting how constructions of masculinity are entangled with market forces, thus also extending prior research regarding gender and the marketplace (Brownlie and Hewer, 2007; Holt and Thompson, 2004; Schroeder and Borgerson, 2005; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998). We also evidence the role of commodifying forces in the sociocultural construction of waste, scarcity, and surplus, as well as the implications of bodily commodification for individual agency in self-commodifying. Second, we more broadly extend the literature on commodification by introducing and defining the concept of constrained commodification and by identifying its marketing implications (cf. the delineation type of conceptual contributions, MacInnis, 2011). Particularly, we emphasise the role of gender archetypes as a commodifying resource, which allows marketers to transfer identity value to the experience despite regulatory constraints. Third, this paper has implications for the value creation literature by extending prior research on value creation in disposition processes, emphasising specifically the value enactment that occurs within an embodied experience of disposition.

Our paper proceeds as follows. First, we briefly review the relevant literature on bodily commodification and value creation before describing the context of sperm donation in the U.K. and Australia as well as the methodology. Finally, we present our findings and discuss their theoretical implications.

### **Commodification and Value Creation in Consumer Research**

From an economic standpoint, commodification processes involve the transformation of an entity or activity into a commodity which possesses exchange value and is made available in a marketplace (Goulding, 2000; Humphreys and Grayson, 2008; Marx and Engels, 2002 [1848]). Commodification entails a good or service being ‘shaped, packaged, distributed and marketed’ (Brownlie and Saren, 1995: 621) and usually involves something becoming materialised, objectified, or reified for mass audiences (Drummond, 2006; Peñaloza, 2000). This includes the transformation of cultural goods and practices, such as artworks and museums (Drummond, 2006; Goulding, 2000); people, such as celebrities (Hewer and Hamilton, 2012); identities, such as one’s social media self (Anderson et al., 2016; Hubbard et al., 2017); ideas, such as values and beliefs (Goulding, 2000; Griffin et al., 2016); sacred entities, such as religion and spirituality (Askegaard and Eckhardt, 2012; Jafari and Süerdem, 2012); as well as bodily goods, such as gametes and organs (Almeling, 2007; Daniels, 2008; Bokek-Cohen, 2015; Kroløkke, 2009).

Commodification processes have implications at the micro- (e.g. commodity itself, producer, consumer) and macro-levels (e.g. society, culture). Commodification critics emphasise the dilution, loss, or destruction of the original sociocultural value of entities in favour of the financial exchange value that they can yield (Almeling, 2009; Askegaard and Eckhardt, 2012; Griffin et al., 2016; Hewer and Hamilton, 2012; Jafari and Süerdem, 2012). Bodily goods (e.g. gametes, organs, blood) are arguably the ultimate site to study the tensions

engendered by commodification as ‘life itself’ becomes ‘inextricably intertwined with bioeconomics’ (Rose, 2007:7). Furthermore, bodily goods are often seen as sacred, unclassifiable, and unique, properties that may be lost when commodified (Daniels, 2008; Parry, 2008; Tober, 2001). Bodily goods also acutely raise issues related to identity and individuality, embodiment and disembodiment, entanglement and disentanglement, expropriation and extraction, and waste and surplus (Brown, 2013; Mahon-Daly, 2016). Therefore, the tensions engendered by commodification all converge when considering bodily goods.

Scholars note that commodification is influenced by a range of marketplace actors in response to changing market conditions. It may result from the passive or active actions of consumers (Anderson et al., 2016; Askegaard and Eckhardt, 2012; Drummond, 2006; Goulding, 2000; Jafari and Süerdem, 2012) and from macro-level factors, such as globalisation and the spreading of consumer culture (Askegaard and Eckhardt, 2012; Jafari and Süerdem, 2012). Specifically, our study focuses on how meso-level market actors, such as service providers, brands, influencers, and digital intermediaries, deploy marketing strategies which contribute to commodification by shaping the cues that influence value inscription and transfer. For instance, advertising, discriminatory pricing, and ranking via metrics encourage consumers to grade and classify the entity, thus facilitating the attribution of monetary value (Anderson et al., 2016; Bokek-Cohen, 2015; Hubbard et al., 2017; Kroløkke, 2009). The crucial role that marketers play in enabling and facilitating bodily commodification creates an opportunity to further investigate their efforts in contexts characterised by institutional constraints.

Indeed, commodification processes are also shaped by context-dependent social, cultural, legal, and ethical debates and decisions concerning what should or should not be commodified, particularly in relation to human life (Almeling, 2007; Daniels, 2008), religion



(Jafari and Süerdem, 2012), and private pleasures (Gould, 2008; Hochschild, 2003). Yet, the sociocultural and institutional constraints surrounding commodification remain understudied. For instance, Daniels (2008: 87) calls scholarly attention to the factors that may hinder bodily commodification processes resulting from spirituality, religion, ethics, stereotypes, and commercial norms. Our study answers such research calls by focusing on the impact of significant institutional constraints, such as regulatory and legal, which impose drastic limits on marketers' and firms' commodifying actions beyond just moral and ethical objections. To explore this issue, we introduce the notion of constrained commodification, which we define as a commodification process that is hindered by various institutional constraints – such as regulatory, political, normative, and cultural-cognitive ones (Humphreys, 2010a) – that limit marketplace actors' capacity to acquire, transform, and/or sell a commodity.

#### *Constrained Bodily Commodification from a Systemic Value Creation Perspective*

Scholars have studied the interrelation between commodification and value, particularly the valorisation of objects subjected to commodification and the role of consumers in the co-creation of value (e.g. Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2007; Drummond, 2006; Jafari and Süerdem, 2012; Loacker and Sullivan, 2016; Warnaby and Medway, 2013). Commodification generally involves the transformation of symbolic or sacred value into monetary value, which can then be exchanged within the market. However, we currently have an incomplete understanding of how value is transferred and transformed (e.g. symbolic to exchange value) during bodily commodification processes, particularly when the process is constrained.

To address this limitation, we draw upon Figueiredo and Scaraboto's (2016) systemic value creation perspective, which considers the following four value sub-processes.

Enactment is the initial set of actions that trigger systemic value creation processes. Such initial action is defined “as the onetime performance by a networked participant of any act

that has the potential to create value for participants in the network” (Figueiredo and Scaraboto, 2016: 518), like setting a consumption goal or asking questions to a service company. Initial actions trigger value potential necessary for value creation in a network (*ibid.*). Transvaluation is the sub-process in which the value potential from actions becomes objectified. Assessment includes judgments of outcomes stemming from value-creating actions. Last, alignment ‘involves recurrent adjustments between individual and collective perceptions of what is valuable and, consequently, among different forms of value (value potential, value outcomes, and microcultural values)’ (Figueiredo and Scaraboto, 2016: 523). This framework enlightens how value creation’s participants, actions, objects, outcomes, and values are intertwined and impacted by regulatory and legal constraints.

Specifically, our examination focuses on the sub-process of value enactment since legal or regulatory constraints have the capacity to influence, enable, and limit the initial set of actions that trigger systemic value creation. For example, regulations can limit the frequency of enactment actions. These constraints can disrupt the interrelationship ‘between market processes and social life’ (Almeling, 2009: 38) but also reveal how immaterial qualities, such as prevailing gender ideals, influence processes of bodily commodification and value creation (Grönroos, 2011; Holbrook, 1999; Lusch and Vargo, 2006; Schau et al., 2009). This is an important consideration to understand how value creation applies to various contexts where bodily goods (Almeling, 2007, 2009) require circulation between bodies, as in the case of organs, tissues, cells, and gametes, and how gendered ideals and ideology influence value creation in circulation. While some studies have looked at systemic value creation, such as among geocaching communities (Figueiredo and Scaraboto, 2016), the type of object studied remains anchored in material and non-living conditions.

To summarise, this paper tackles two gaps in the existing consumer research about bodily commodification. First, we address how marketplace actors, mainly marketers,

manage institutional constraints in the process of commodifying bodily goods. Second, we address the impact of constraints on value enactment, a crucial stage in systemic value creation.

### *The Commodification of Sperm Donation*

Sperm donation is one of several complex fertility treatment services (e.g. in vitro fertilisation [IVF], egg donation) that prospective parents utilise to pursue their parenthood goals as it supplies one of the gametes necessary to create embryos. Because of its valuable role in human reproduction, sperm has evolved into a commodity that can be bought, sold, stored, and exchanged (Bokek-Cohen, 2015; Tober, 2001). Prior research shows that sperm commodification is a dynamic process which undergoes continuous contestation and negotiation.

While sperm donation is a multi-step process that can extend from sperm acquisition to sperm purchase to sperm use, our study focuses specifically on sperm acquisition when men are the sole target of marketing actions. That is, we focus on how marketers implement communication campaigns to recruit male donors. Sperm acquisition, as well as institutional rhetorical efforts to attract sperm donors, have not received sufficient scholarly attention compared to other sperm donation steps such as sperm purchase or use when women and/or couples are typically the primary consumers (e.g. Daniels, 2008).

Even if the word ‘donation’ may invoke altruistic connotations, sperm donation involves typical commodity exchanges in unconstrained marketplaces. Indeed, scholars remark that, in these marketplaces, sperm banks use neoliberal logics of free choice by empowered rational actors to market commodified sperm to prospective recipients (e.g. Bokek-Cohen, 2015; Leve, 2013). Notably, Bokek-Cohen (2015, 2016a) shows that sperm banks romanticise imagined relationships between donors, recipients, and future babies using

donors' profiles to motivate sperm purchase. Such studies have greatly enhanced our understanding of this activity in countries where donors can be paid, including the U.S., Denmark, and Israel (Almeling, 2007, 2009; Bokek-Cohen, 2015, 2016a; Kroløkke, 2009; Moore and Schmidt, 1999; Wheatley, 2017). However, this contextual focus limits our knowledge of how different sociocultural and regulatory environments influence value creation processes when, in fact, important contextual differences can constrain marketers' actions. Here, marketers' actions are constrained by regulations governing how sperm is acquired, maintained, sold and used in order to create non-traditional products (i.e. babies) (cf. Appendix 1).

Consequently, we focus our examination on the U.K. and Australia, where such constraints exist. As in many parts of the world, fertility treatments, including sperm donation, represent a sizable and growing industry of approximately £550m in the U.K. (Purvis, 2013) and \$536m in Australia (IBISWorld, 2016). Importantly, marketers' actions, and therefore the processes of commodification and value creation surrounding sperm donation, in these two countries are severely constrained. These two countries have national regulations that prohibit sperm donors' remuneration, cap the use of sperm from each donor, facilitate the full identification of sperm donors by their biological children at age 18, and control the import and export of sperm (Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority [HFEA], 2016; Riggan, 2010; Sperm Donors Australia [SDA], 2017a). Sociocultural and ethical conventions, such as concerns about donor child's health and wellbeing and about preventing incest and the spread of illnesses, guide these regulations. Together, these regulatory constraints prevent marketers from promoting financial compensation and guaranteeing anonymity to sperm donors and thus, contribute to the so-called 'sperm scarcity' crisis.

The U.K. and Australia contrast with commonly studied sperm donation services contexts, like the U.S. or Denmark, where private sperm banks can remunerate donors (cf. Appendix 1). Whilst non-Western contexts, such as China, where all sperm banks are state-owned, also present an interesting source of insights, especially considering how sperm donation contradicts the cultural embracement of patrilineal kinship (Santos and Harrell, 2017), we focus on the U.K. and Australia due to their similar regulatory, sociocultural, and economic environments around fertility and reproduction. For instance, in addition to strict regulations regarding sperm donation, they also share similar characteristics regarding the mainstreamisation of fertility treatments and health systems that are supported by an ideology of universal access to medical care and a largely publicly financed structure (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2012; HFEA, 2016). Thus, understanding how marketers implement communication campaigns in the U.K. and Australia to recruit donors is crucial to understanding how institutions (here, sperm banks) construct and deploy valuable offerings under constraint and, more generally, how value is constructed in constrained but high-demand markets.

To summarise, much of the literature focuses on unconstrained bodily commodification contexts where the process of sperm donation belongs to a system of free-market economic exchange (Almeling, 2007, 2009; Bokek-Cohen, 2015; Kroløkke, 2009; Moore and Schmidt, 1999). Sperm donors are thus motivated by both financial incentives and the idea of altruism (Bokek-Cohen and Ravitsky, 2017). Yet, in the U.K. and Australia, sperm donation is highly regulated with regard to donor compensation, donor anonymity, and sperm import and export, which carry implications for the supply and demand of sperm and, consequently, for the growth of the market and the processes of sperm commodification and value creation. Thus, sperm banks must articulate and attribute alternative forms of value creation and transfer opportunities for donors. The application of the systemic perspective to

value creation in our contexts is represented in Figure 1 below. Our study characterises the sourcing of sperm donation as value enactment that is hindered by a constrained commodification process.

ENACTMENT	TRANSVALUATION	ASSESSMENT	ALIGNMENT
<p>Creation of value potential by sourcing sperm donation from donors</p> <p>Present study</p>	<p>Differential valorisation of sperm donors in the design and ranking of profiles within databases</p> <p>e.g. Bokek-Cohen, 2016b; Krolokke, 2009</p>	<p>Decommodification and romanticising of the imagined relationship between donors and users</p> <p>e.g. Bokek-Cohen, 2015; 2016a</p>	<p>Recurrent adjustments between individual and collective perceptions of what is valuable</p>

**Figure 1.** Systemic Value Creation in the Commodification of Sperm Donation

## Methodology

In addressing our research questions, we used an archival analysis of visual and textual material. The primary sources are marketing material from fertility clinics and sperm banks (cf. Table 1). We selected influential and renowned organisations using criteria such as those with the largest number of donors, highest success rates for clinics, and media and governmental recognition – while also considering that the ambiguity of such information is a defining feature of the fertility services market. We also collected background information from institutional actors, including mass media, such as newspapers and magazines, and organisations involved in the regulation of fertility services in the U.K. and Australia. We searched in particular for institutional sources’ reports and comments on sperm donation’s marketing campaigns to learn about their discursive construction. We were also interested in any analysis of the legal, economic, and sociocultural situation and evolution surrounding sperm donation services to contextualise marketing campaigns. We integrated data from all sources (Schroeder and Borgerson, 2005) such that marketing data was central to the

analysis, complemented by other data sources to contextualise and enlighten the reception of marketing campaigns.

The coverage of sperm donation-related news from newspapers and magazines covers 2005 to 2017. In 2005, the U.K. ended donor anonymity (HFEA, 2016), resulting in a shortage of sperm donors which forced the national sperm bank to close and the private sperm banks to flourish. Since then, the U.K. sperm market has recovered (Sullivan, 2016). Australia revoked donor anonymity state by state, confirming the revocation with a national bill in 2015 (Patel, 2017), from which the effects remain mixed (e.g. sperm shortage in some states) (Matthews, 2017).

**Table 1.** Data Source Description

Source			Material collected	
Type	#	Examples	Type	#
<b>Fertility clinics</b> (for-profit and non-profit)	8	U.K.: London Women's Clinic, The Bridge Centre, The Lister Hospital, The Centre for Reproduction and Gynaecology Wales Australia: Fertility First, IVF Australia, Melbourne IVF, Monash IVF, Rainbow Fertility, Repromed	Company website, blog, publication, social media, video, ad; third-party review	185
<b>Sperm banks</b> (for-profit)	5	U.K.: Aberdeen Fertility Centre, Coparent Match, London Sperm Bank Australia: Genea Australia, MedicineX, Sperm Donors Australia	Company website, blog, publication, social media, video, ad	196
<b>Health organisations</b> (non-profit)	6	U.K.: Donor Register, HFEA, National Gametes Donation Trust, NHS Australia: Health Direct, Victorian Reproductive Treatment Authority	Organisation website, blog, publication, social media, videos, ad	138
<b>Magazines and journals</b> (for-profit)	9	Both: <i>Cosmopolitan</i> , <i>Elle</i> U.K.: <i>Daily Mail</i> , <i>The Guardian</i> , <i>The Telegraph</i> , <i>The Times</i> Australia: <i>ABC News</i> , <i>The Advertiser</i> , <i>The Age</i> , <i>News</i>	Articles	198

We looked for preferred encoded meanings (Hall, 1980), which relate to how producers of texts, including marketers, try ‘to impress a particular vision on our psyches’ (hooks, 2012: 4). To accomplish this, we searched for patterns or themes in primary and secondary discourses (Crockett, 2008: 249) which entailed looking at explicit marketing messages that were intended to attract donors, as well as secondary (more implicit) messages that conveyed ideas regarding values, archetypes, and norms. The three authors separately coded the data. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and a closer reading of the data.

We followed Schroeder and Borgerson’s (2005: 581) treatment of ‘marketing images as cultural texts, and not merely as accurate or true strategic pictures that transparently record faces, families, or familiar products, services, and sights’. Whilst signs depicted in such content are open to interpretation, they are also part of representation regimes rooted in dominant cultural conventions (Hall et al., 2013). Almeling’s argument that ‘variation in the social process of commodifying the body is produced by the interaction of biological bodies with economic processes and cultural norms in specific structural contexts’ (2009: 57) drew our attention to the essential role of gender in bodily commodification processes and made it our primary unit of analysis. Thus, we paid close attention to how depictions of gender archetypes, including the aesthetic and physical embodiment of individuals, especially in relation to the gaze of gendered consumers (Berger, 1972; Patterson and Elliott, 2002), may influence marketplace commodification. This included the consideration of expressions of hegemonic masculinity which signifies the most honoured way of being a man in a given culture and time (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005)<sup>i</sup>. We used the concept of hegemonic masculinity as an analytical tool because it encompasses and unpacks ideal notions of manhood and their social significance while also recognising that those ideals vary over time and place and are therefore multiple. Furthermore, we considered how certain framings of



masculinity are rendered (in)visible in media and marketing narratives and how marketing can prescriptively construct dualistic dynamics between men and women in heterosexual relationships. Lastly, we theorised how marketers communicate value creation opportunities and enhance goods' value potentialities rather than how consumers actually perceive value. In doing so, we considered how such processes are entangled with the use of gendered ideas and imagery.

We analysed the data by iteratively moving between the data, background information, literature, and emerging conceptual framework (Thompson, 1997). As we sought to understand marketers' management of constrained bodily commodification and its implications for value creation, we inductively delineated three major themes (duty-bound soldiers, (everyday) heroes, and sexualising/romanticising). We selected the quotes and visuals presented subsequently for their exemplarity as they reflect recurrent patterns and themes.

### **(Re)producers Wanted! Soldiers and (Everyday) Superheroes**

This section evidences how marketers manage institutional constraints in the commodification of the sperm donation experience by deploying two masculine archetypes: duty-bound soldiers and (everyday) heroes. Sperm banks' marketing material invokes existing and conventional masculine archetypes that frame sperm donation as an embodied masculinity-affirming experience. The constructions of the soldier and (everyday) hero subscribe to traditional hegemonic masculinity ideals. These ideas denote heteronormative expressions of the identities of men, who are frequently racialized as white (hooks, 2004) and who are defined by their perceived strength, stoicism, and virility (Hirschman, 2000). Thus, through the consumption of the sperm donation experience, donors are able to reaffirm their masculinity with symbolic elements connoting physical strength, reliability, patriotism,

bravery, heroism, etc. Value creation is enacted in the consumption of this service (by donors) by paradoxically promoting simultaneously selfless and selfish motivations. Here, marketers source valuable sperm donations by relying on masculine archetypes.

We provide further evidence of how these different appeals are (re)produced in sperm banks' marketing material and institutional discourses (e.g. from NGOs, government bodies, and news media) in Appendix 2.

### *The Duty-Bound Soldier*

Marketers use the duty-bound soldier archetype to inscribe value in the sperm donation experience for donors by assigning the experience with a traditional form of masculinity characterised by disciplined strength, reliability, courage, and a collective orientation. The duty-bound soldier relies heavily on altruistic motives as the donor is represented as giving a sacred gift to humanity. In this archetype, the obligation is diluted and shared within the humankind community in a form of generalised reciprocity. The expectation is not a return in kind between two parties but rather the possibility of a return at a future point in time by any member of the community (cf. Mathwick et al., 2007). The duty-bound soldier affirms his masculinity by demonstrating heroism in the accomplishment of his duty and his willingness to self-sacrifice. While masculinity-affirming, the archetype of the duty-bound soldier is also one of humility and abnegation.

The soldier archetype is directly alluded to in *The Telegraph*, which features the slogan 'Your country needs you', recalling the iconic 1914 propaganda poster intended to encourage men to enlist in the British army (Telegraph Men, 2015; cf. Figure 2). In another example replicating the patriotic message with a more contemporary turn, an awareness-raising campaign, designed by London Sperm Banks [LSB] (2016a) and promoted in the

London underground, mentions ‘the real banking crisis’. Such wording evokes a sense of urgency and implies the need for duty-bound soldiers, which men are alluded to being.

The soldier archetype also relies on the idea of becoming a ‘good man’, a moral exemplar who serves his country reliably and courageously. This is visible when donor testimonial videos available on the LSB website open with the caption ‘A Few Good Men’ (LSB, 2017a) and on SDA’s homepage with the title ‘Good men needed for an important job’ (SDA, 2016). SDA’s ‘Good men’ campaign (cf. Figure 2) presents the ideal sperm donor as strong, tall, and attractive, which are physical characteristics associated with the soldier archetype.

Lastly, we note that the soldier archetype also includes a degree of masculine heroism in which selfless soldiers seek to preserve life (Daniels, 2008; Penniston-Bird and Vickers, 2017) or, in the case of sperm donation, produce it. This is often directly advertised as in LSB’s ‘real banking crisis’ (2016a) campaign which exposes ‘Every year demand for sperm donors outstrips supply. If you are male and aged between 18 and 45, you can become a sperm donor and help create life’.



*National Sperm Bank Challenges Men To 'Prove Their Manhood'*

The Telegraph (2015):  
Headline and illustration



Sperm Donors Australia (2016):  
Website’s homepage

**Figure 2.** Marketing Material Promoting the Duty-Bound Soldier Archetype

The soldier archetype then becomes a resource in the commodification of sperm in constrained contexts. As reflected in the above-mentioned examples, the masculine archetype of the duty-bound soldier doing his job remains anchored in selflessness and moral imperative as it is inscribed in a form of duty toward humanity and in related perceptions of appropriate masculinity (Penniston-Bird and Vickers, 2017). First, the soldier archetype helps to convey sperm donation's value potential as a selfless act in answer to the country's (or even humanity's) needs. This is present in the patriotic appeal recurrent in the data, such as the idea of donating to defend from invasion by foreign sperm (London Sperm Bank Donors, 2015; Goodchild, 2015) or to solve a national crisis (MedicineX, 2017; LSB, 2016b; SDA, 2014). Thus, financial remuneration would lessen the value of the donation experience because it diverges from this archetypal schema.

Second, marketing discourses in praise of the morality of sperm donors promote the notion that masculinity 'appears to be constructed mainly by what one does, not what one has' (Ostberg, 2010: 51). Such marketing messages are a by-product of the constrained commodification context of the sperm donation services industry in the U.K. and Australia, which results in marketers drawing on non-monetary rewards to incentivise donors. In this case, such incentives take the form of presenting them with the prospect of a masculinity-affirming experience. Adverts (e.g. Figure 2) indicate that it is through donating their sperm that men may 'become' donors (Mohr, 2017) and, in turn, be valued as 'good men' who are perceived worthy of 'saluting' (LSB, 2017b), a term specifically associated with 'the military man' (cf. Bokek-Cohen, 2015: 534). Extending on Figueiredo and Scaraboto's study (2016), value enactment then does not reside first in an object but rather in marketers' discursive practices and continues during the embodied sperm donation experience

*The (Everyday) Hero*

The second masculine archetype deployed with the purpose of commodifying the sperm donation experience and imbuing the consumption of donation services with further value is that of the (everyday) hero. This construction communicates the idea that sperm donation offers donors the attainability of a sense of heroism. Thus, the donation process is presented as mutually beneficial to both donor and recipient and, as will be shown in the following, the core of the difference between the two masculine archetypes is that the soldier is constructed as selfless and communally-motivated while the (everyday) hero is constructed as reciprocal and individually-motivated.

The everyday hero archetype draws on images of firefighters, lifeguards, and other life-saving roles (cf. Figure 3). These representations are embedded in a sense of self-illusory fantasy (Belk and Costa, 1998) and potentially compensatory consumption (Holt and Thompson, 2004; Schouten, 1991; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998), based on the implied equivalence between saving a life and donors' ability to help conceive one. The discursively created equivalence between saving a life, giving life, and the experience of sperm donation participates in the embodied dimension of value enactment. The subject positions promoted to potential donors are those of powerful yet obliging men who choose to assist individuals in their quest to become parents. Once again, the archetypal representation of men as everyday heroes serves as a resource to enact the value of sperm donation services in a constrained context. Donors engage in an experience that strengthens their identities as everyday saviours. Donating is presented as fulfilling a gap in their everyday life by providing them with a sense of achievement associated with a heroic deed. Financial remuneration becomes superfluous as the masculinity-affirming experience itself is enough compensation.

A typical example of how ideas of heroism are deployed is exemplified by IVF Australia's campaign (cf. Figure 3), which incorporates 'a pure archetype of the saviour hero' (Hirschman, 2000: 128). By depicting donors as emergency service workers, as opposed to

fictional superheroes, these ads still maintain perceptions of donors' normalcy and, thus, of the experience's attainability. The (everyday) hero archetype underscores marketing and institutional content that reflects sperm donation marketers' attempts at asserting an 'ideology of heroic masculinity' (Holt and Thompson, 2004: 425), albeit an everyday and achievable form of heroism. This conveys the idea of sperm donation as a compensatory consumption activity that affirms men's masculinity in the pursuit of their ideal selves (Holt and Thompson, 2004; Schouten, 1991; Woodruffe-Burton, 1998).

These ideas about everyday heroic donors, and sub-texts about affirming their masculinity, also comes to fruition by standing in contrast to the implied inadequacies of men facing fertility issues themselves. This signals a problematic discursive 'division between males and "real men"' (Ostberg, 2010: 52-53) of value, as is embodied by their fertility and perceived heroism. This is, for example, evident in a video campaign where a supposed donor retells his experience: 'He (the doctor) said they'd have to test my boys to make sure they're okay for the programme. Turned out my swimmers are all champions...' (MedicineX, 2017). This seemingly confirms prior research which argues that, as sperm banks attempt to promote their goods' quality, they tend to 'reify power differences among men and between men. [Thus, a] hegemonic masculinity has been created and reinforced' (Moore and Schmidt, 1999: 346).

Unsurprisingly, such marketing depictions of men are ones in which 'the aesthetics of the physically active body are deeply entrenched' (Brace-Govan, 2010: 370). Sperm banks' adverts present male onlookers with depictions of seemingly 'perfect bodies' and 'against which they can compare their own' (Patterson and Elliott, 2002: 234). Such adverts serve not only to attract donors (Kroløkke, 2009); they may also communicate the type of men whom service providers seek whilst potentially repelling (undesirable) donors. For instance, IVF Australia's campaign (cf. Figure 3) appears to display a physically strong and white

racialized embodiment, which is consistent with how traditional hegemonic masculinity is conceptualized (Connell, 2005; Ostberg, 2010; hooks, 2004). This segmented aspect of sperm banks' marketing material (cf. Bokek-Cohen, 2016b) reinforces ideas related to what an adequate and valuable 'hero' (man) looks and acts like.



*Be a hero...become a donor*

Aberdeen Fertility Centre (2016):  
Online campaign



IVF Australia (2015):  
Billboard and online campaign

**Figure 3.** Examples of Archetypal Heroic Masculinity

### *The (Hyper)Sexualising and Romanticising of Donation*

To intensify the appeal of the archetypes of the soldier and (everyday) hero to recruit donors, marketers sometimes (hyper)sexualise and romanticise their representations. However, such discursive strategies are not always well received and reveal some clear cultural differences. In contrast to U.K. examples, Australian sperm donation marketing tends to include more hyper-sexualised depictions of men and idealised male bodies (Ostberg, 2010), as exemplified by images of men in small and tightly fitted swimming trunks (cf. Figure 4). Furthermore, amongst the Australian content analysed, humorous, and light-hearted sentiments, such as when referring to sperm donation as being 'more fun than giving blood' (SDA, 2014), were more frequent than in the U.K. material. Sperm donor marketing in the U.K. contrasts with this approach. For example, 'The Give a Toss' campaign (cf.

Appendix 2), which featured ‘images of young women in We Want Your Sperm T-shirts, winking at the camera, a virtual “toss-o-meter” game which encourages would-be donors to practice and improve their wrist action, and a spoof news flash about a national sperm day’ (McVeigh, 2007: n.p.n.), sparked much backlash in the U.K. This is perhaps suggestive of cultural differences between constructions of masculinity and references to sex in marketing content, which appears to include more commonly a ‘laddish’ and ‘tongue-in-cheek’ quality in the Australian context (Moore, 2009) than in the U.K. These differences are a reminder that sociocultural constraints and legal constraints are intertwined in sperm donation services.



Melbourne IVF (2016):  
Online campaign



IVF Australia (2015):  
Billboard and online campaign

**Figure 4.** (Hyper)sexualisation of Donors in Australian Campaigns

The (hyper)sexualising and romanticising of donation also helps broaden the appeal of the soldier and hero archetypes and thus ensure that they resonate with a wider range of potential donors. An *AdAge* article even refers to IVF Australia’s ‘hero’ campaign as depicting ‘hunky emergency workers’ (Jardine, 2015). Moreover, LSB’s videos of donor testimonials (2017a) reveal men depicted in a range of activities, such as handling a barbecue or giving out roses to women, most of which connote hegemonic conceptions of masculinity. For example, the representation of athletic men relates to how the ‘significance of athletic prowess to Western cultural narratives of masculinity has been observed in consumer



research' (Brace-Govan, 2010: 387). However, these depictions of masculine identities also navigate some of 'the tensions between more traditional gender roles and the assumption of contemporary roles' (Zayer and Neier, 2012: 337). For instance, men's apparent attention to their body and domesticity are conveyed in parts of the videos, including through close-ups of careful food preparation (Brownlie and Hewer, 2007) and shopping (Woodruffe-Burton, 1998) pointing to a new type of hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, at times, some of the men disclose their different sexualities. This enables LSB to target a broader group of prospective donors by dispelling ideas of 'compulsory heterosexuality in the service of commercial ends' (Brownlie and Hewer, 2007: 229) whilst conveying overarching ideas about masculinity, including those related to the appearance of desirable donors. This is made necessary by the rarity of sperm that passes quality controls, as indeed only 4% of men who come forward as potential LSB's donors are likely to be approved (Sullivan, 2016).

## **Discussion**

This paper engages with conversations around bodily commodification, commodification, and systematic value creation. Aimed at scrutinizing how bodily commodification processes characterised by institutional regulatory constraints impact the value 'enactment' process, this study has explored how marketers manage bodily commodification in such constrained markets as well as the implications of such management for value creation. In doing so, the paper first contributes to the bodily commodification literature by enlightening issues related to gender, bodily entanglements and disentanglements, waste and scarcity, and agency which are central to value enactment. We examine how ideas of gender can function as part of marketing efforts at the core of constrained bodily commodification processes. We reveal some of the unintended consequences of constrained bodily commodification and enlighten alternative sources of value that are available to marketers and, in particular, gendered

identity value. Rather than looking at the effectiveness of marketing aimed at sperm donors, we theorise the discursive practices underpinning them, including the strategic use of masculine archetypes to assuage the omnipresent neoliberal logics amidst a constrained commodification context. Our investigation reveals how marketers draw on the discursive tools of gender representations and specifically on traditional hegemonic masculinity to appeal to an inverted male gaze (i.e. ‘male-directed advertising depicting idealised male bodies,’ Patterson and Elliott, 2002: 238). This may include the use of gendered images and ideas targeted at prospective sperm donors that exemplify tensions between the extent to which some sociocultural conventions appear to fuel the commodification and the valorisation of sperm, whilst others simultaneously present a barrier to it. Depictions of men and associated masculine ideals are vessels through which the inverted male gaze is negotiated as part of processes of commodification and value creation. In this interplay, marketers must figure out the valuation of people (sperm donors), production activities (sperm donation), and products (sperm).

Furthermore, our paper highlights issues between commodification and the socio-cultural construction of waste, scarcity, and surplus. Some body parts (e.g. blood, gametes) being commodified are considered as morally contested but also overabundant and are usually ‘wasted’. In such cases of bodily commodification, market mediation and legal regulatory pressures construct the scarcity of the commodity and the commodity is assigned high value through the deployment of gender archetypes. That is, scarcity is a vehicle integrated into discourses around altruism and duty to serve marketers’ commodification aims. Paradoxically, an otherwise abundant commodity becomes scarce due to institutional constraints. We encourage further research exploring more systematically how the type of bodily good might constrain or hinder certain commodification strategies.

This paper has illustrated how macro conceptualisations of gender are entangled with marketing strategies and how institutional constraints on bodily commodification have implications at the macro-level (by limiting the commodity's supply) and meso-level (by limiting marketers' agency). We have also seen that constrained bodily commodification has implications at the micro-level by influencing individuals' agency. Indeed, regulatory constraints can limit and prevent self-commodification both in terms of monetisation and of quantification. By trying to protect individuals from the threats of unconstrained commodification, institutions may also limit their agency. Here, the prohibition of donors' remuneration limits donors' self-monetisation and limitation on the number of donations limits donors' self-quantification. Thus, regulations and legal protections may hinder men who see sperm donation as an avenue by which to impact the world and leave a legacy or to generate an income. We also complement prior works on self-commodification by showing that it is not necessarily driven by financial motivations (cf. Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2007) but also by identity motivations. Specifically, we highlight how self-commodification can serve to sustain and enhance the self, in this case through the opportunity to enact gender archetypes during the experience. Understanding self-commodification has implications for other highly relevant consumption phenomena, such as the sharing of self and data online, for example, on social media.

Second, we more broadly extend the literature on commodification by bringing to light institutional constraints that marketplace actors must manage in order to commoditise a consumption experience and enact value. See Appendix 1 for a comparison of unconstrained markets (sperm bank market in the U.S.) versus constrained markets (in the U.K. and Australia). We introduce the notion of constrained commodification, when commodification processes are limited by institutional constraints (regulatory, normative, cultural-cognitive, and political), such that systemic value creation sub-processes may be impaired. We focus on

the implications of regulatory constraints for value enactment within commodification processes and show how constrained commodification may require different discursive construction rooted in alternative sources of value and normative resources (e.g. gender archetypes), to sustain the commodification processes at play. Thus, our context illuminates the impact of institutional differences (here, legislations) on constrained commodification, gender discourses, and the construction of value. Future research could seek to explore the impact of institutional constraints (e.g. sociocultural norms, legal frameworks) for other types of commodification or at different stages of value creation.

Lastly, our study extends marketing theory regarding systemic value creation (Figueiredo and Scaraboto, 2016) by elaborating on and evidencing the enabling role of moral and gendered ideals and values in constrained commodification processes. In cases where the commodification process is considered ethically questionable and therefore constrained, our findings suggest for marketers to enact value (here, by acquiring donor sperm), they must also appear to contest and deny it (here, by constructing donors as manly, selfless, and heroic). Paradoxically, marketers' denial of exchange value becomes essential to value enactment, which contrasts with the measurability of the commodity in contexts where donors expect financial remuneration. That is, by sacralising the act of disposition (here, via the equivalence between donating sperm and saving a life), marketers discursively frame disposition into an invaluable action by indicating the creation of new value formed via new social relations (cf. Türe, 2016). During the disposition process, the entity itself is transformed from wasteful and disposable into an invaluable gift. This is not only applicable to bodily products such as sperm, hairs, and organs but also upcycling (creative reuse of waste). Future research could explore the processes of decontamination of waste and the safety of these transformations.

Lastly, our paper also highlights the potential for breaches in systemic value creation. Indeed, the commodity's invaluable status remains precarious during the enactment sub-process and is under constant threat of returning to waste until the recipients buy the commodities. For instance, here, sperm can return to waste if it fails sperm banks' quality checks. Later in the process, the high failure rates of fertility treatments (Fischer et al., 2007) also entail high possibilities of value loss as users consume the donation. This work begins to unpack value loss in systemic value creation processes. Future research could further enlighten how systemic value creation processes are breached and how to better shield networked actors from the implications of such breaches.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Comparison of Constrained and Unconstrained Sperm Donation Markets



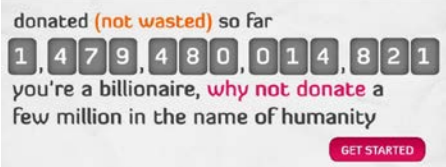
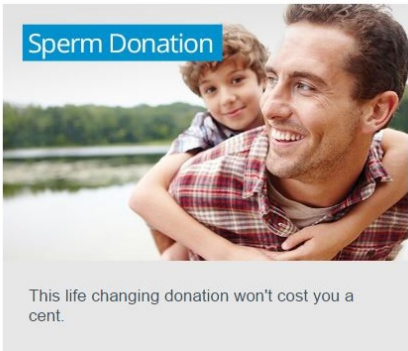


	Constrained Markets		Unconstrained Market
	Australia	United Kingdom	United States
<b>Sociocultural Characteristics</b>			
<b>Health Policies</b>	Centralised health policy that covers fertility treatments' costs	Centralised health policy that covers fertility treatments' costs	A combination of private insurance companies and public health insurance sources. Few states require insurance companies to cover fertility treatments' costs
<b>State of the Market</b>			
<b>Market Size</b>	\$536 million	£550 million	\$823 million
<b>Regulatory Actors</b>	Oversight provided by the Reproductive Technology Accreditation Committee (RTAC)	Oversight provided by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA)	No national laws regulate third-party reproduction. Food and Drug Administration oversees assisted reproductive technologies. Guidelines for sperm donation provided by the American Society for Reproductive Medicine and other institutions
<b>Commodification Constraints</b>			
<b>Compensation</b>	No remuneration allowed. Reimbursement allowed for travel, medical expenses, etc.	No remuneration allowed. Reimbursement allowed for travel, medical expenses, etc. up to £35 maximum	No limit. \$50-\$200 remuneration is standard practice
<b>Donors Anonymity</b>	Children aged 18 can know donor identity	Children aged 18 can know donor identity	No federal or state laws. Some companies release information to children aged 18
<b>Sperm Donation Frequency</b>	Maximum 5 to 10 families per sperm donor	Maximum of 10 families per sperm donor	No limit. Some companies impose their own guidelines
<b>Sperm Import and Export</b>	Limits	Limits	No limit
<b>Selected Gender Norms</b>			

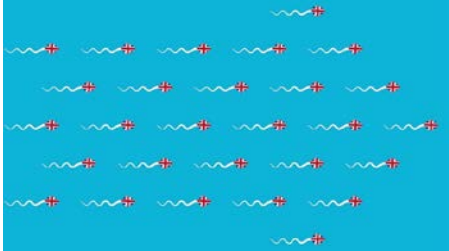


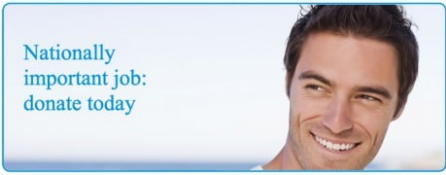

<b>Same-Sex Marriage</b>	Legalised in December 2017	Legalised in December 2014	Legalised in December 2015
<b>Fertility Rates (2015)</b>	1.83	1.81	1.84
<b>Parental Leave</b>	52 weeks	37 paid and 13 unpaid weeks	0
<b>Gender Wage Gap in Median Earnings of Full-time Employees</b>	15.3%	18.4%	21%

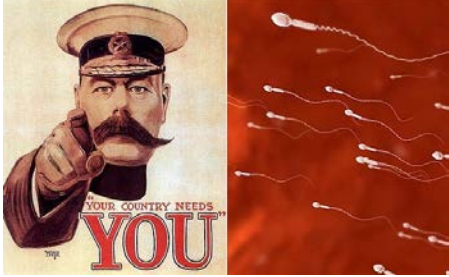



*Sources:* Craig and Mullan (2010); HFEA (2016); Riggan (2010); Weziak-Bialowolska (2015)



**Appendix 2.** Examples of Masculine Archetypes Used in Sperm Banks' Market and Institutional Actors' Publications

	United Kingdom	Australia
	<b>Classical Altruism</b>	
<b>Market Actors</b>	 <p><i>'Our sperm donors have already helped to complete 1661 families'</i> LSB (2011): London's underground ad</p>  <p><i>'Lend a hand. Demand for donor sperm in the UK is greater than supply.'</i> LSB (2016b): Website material</p>	 <p>Fertility First (2016): Online ad</p>  <p><i>'Sperm Donation: This life changing donation won't cost you a cent.'</i> Monash IVF (2016): Website's donor section</p>  <p><i>'I've never been good at giving gifts, but recently I learned about one of the best I could give. It's homemade and completely organic, which is super trendy right now! / No, it's not in the box! It's behind the box! That's right, it's my.../...sperm! I make millions of these little guys a day.'</i> MedicineX (2017): Online campaign</p>
<b>Institutional Actors</b>	 <p><i>'I am in total admiration of all donors, particularly altruistic donors who see no end benefit for themselves.'</i></p>	<p><i>'Sperm Shortage: One Man's Decision To Donate It takes a lot to become a sperm donor in Australia and you don't get paid for it. But Tyson Young is bucking the trend for a good reason.'</i></p>

	<p>National Gamete Donation (2016): Website's homepage</p> <p>Becoming a sperm donor is one of the most generous things you could do – it can offer some women and couples their only chance to have a family.</p> <p>“Donating to someone who wants a family is, quite simply, an extraordinary act of kindness”</p> <p>HFEA (2016b): Website's 'donation' section</p>	<p>Matthews (2017): Headline and sub-headline</p>
<p><b>Duty-Bound Soldier Archetype</b></p>		
<p><b>Market Actors</b></p>	 <p><i>'The British Are Coming!'</i> London Sperm Bank Donors (2015): YouTube video</p> <p><i>'The men on the donor sperm programme will all have different reasons for participation but it's likely none of them are doing it for financial gain. And for that reason, we salute them.'</i> LSB (2017b): Website content</p>  <p>LSB (2016a): Sperm donation ad</p>	 <p>SDA (2016): Website's homepage</p>  <p>SDA (2014): Online ad campaign and brochure</p>  <p><i>'I'm a firefighter, I've saved lives, but never made one! Helping someone create a family, be it a stranger or one of my mates, seems like an amazing thing to do, so I decided to look into it!'</i> MedicineX (2017): Online campaign</p>

<p><b>Institutional Actors</b></p>	 <p><i>'National sperm bank challenges men to 'prove their manhood''</i> Telegraph Men (2015): Headline and illustration</p> <p><i>'British sperm donors rise to Viking challenge'</i> Goodchild (2015): Headline</p>	
<p><b>(Everyday) Hero Archetype</b></p>		
<p><b>Market Actors</b></p>	 <p>Aberdeen Fertility Centre (2016): Website's homepage</p>	 <p>SDA (2017b): Website's homepage</p>  <p>Join our league of everyday heroes</p> <p>We're looking for heroes to become sperm donors and help create the next generation. Think you've got what it takes?</p> <p><i>'We're looking for heroes to become sperm donors and help create the next generation. Think you've got what it takes?'</i></p> <p>Melbourne IVF (2016): Website's homepage and online ad campaign</p>
<p><b>Sexualising and Romanticising Donation</b></p>		

<b>Market Actors</b>	 <p>McVeigh (2007): Online campaign</p>	 <p><i>'Don't waste your sperm'</i></p> <p>Creative Criminals (2010): Repromed's ad campaign</p>
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*Note:* Institutional actors (e.g. governmental organisations, NGOs, media) tend to rely mostly on classical altruism. Our findings suggest that this reflects commercial actors' need to attract donors by offering reciprocity in the value enactment, via the use of masculinity-affirming archetypes. This need does not affect institutional actors that are meant to appear neutral and are less inclined to draw on such messages.

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<sup>i</sup> Whilst we position sperm donors as being men and users as being women, we acknowledge that, arguably, gender is neither merely a binary issue nor is it purely determined by biological ones (Connell, 2005). Furthermore, individuals who identify with various gender identities, including those who identify as trans, non-binary, or intersex (Crosby et al., 2015), may be captured within the demographics of sperm donors and users. As our work does not focus on the narratives of individuals involved in these reproductive processes, we avoid conjecturing about their involvement in sperm donation services but maintain a call for further research which foregrounds their experiences.