Short Description:

Gamete donation has become a core part of assisted reproductive technology, enabling parenthood for millions of people worldwide. This track seeks to advance understanding of how consumers navigate the under-regulated egg donation marketplace. Through a series of studies, we plan to examine the experiences and decision-making of both donors and recipients, the influence of marketing practices, and the broader cultural forces that shape participation in egg donation services. Ultimately, the track aims to identify ways to support equitable marketplace experiences for donors and recipients.

Extended Track Description:

Track 1: Navigating Egg Donation Marketplace: Experiences and Challenges of Egg Donors and Egg Recipients

Track Co-Chairs
Zhe (Kitty) Li, PhD Candidate, Marketing, Bentley University, USA
zheli@bentley.edu
Elena Elkanova, Assistant Professor of Marketing, Assumption University, USA
eelkanova@bentley.edu

Gamete donation has become a core part of assisted reproductive technology, enabling parenthood for millions of people worldwide, including those experiencing infertility, LGBTQ+ individuals and couples, and others unable to use their own gametes (Leibetseder and Griffin, 2020; Malmquist and Höjerström, 2020). The egg donation industry has grown into a multi-billion-dollar market, with donor eggs now used in roughly 10% of all in vitro fertilization (IVF) cycles in the US (Bokek-Cohen, 2023). As key intermediaries in this market, egg donation agencies recruit donors and match them with recipients. Yet the limited regulation of the US egg donation industry creates distinct vulnerabilities for both groups.

Donors are predominantly recruited through compensation-focused marketing (e.g., "pay off student loans," "invest in your future") that emphasizes financial rewards while minimizing discussion of health risks (Carpenter and Campo-Engelstein, 2025). Because donors are not legally treated as consumers, recruitment practices operate in a regulatory gray area with limited protection against potentially misleading marketing practices (Carpenter and Campo-Engelstein, 2025). Agencies market donors through curated profiles as desirable assets, transforming donors into marketable products (Bokek-Cohen, 2023) within what has been termed the “oocyte economy”, in which women with fewer economic opportunities supply reproductive material that enables wealthier recipients to pursue motherhood. (Waldby, 2019).

Recipients face a different set of challenges. Agencies shape decisions through appeals to hegemonic femininity, a cultural framework that closely links womanhood, fertility, and motherhood (Takhar and Houston, 2019). Infertile women often report lower self-esteem, shame, and depression, and feel less feminine or socially valued (Alamin et al., 2020; Wells and Heinsch, 2020; Facchin et al., 2019). Agencies capitalize on this actual-versus-ideal-self gap through donor profiles that convey not only desirable genetic traits but also well-rounded personality, talents, and cultural capital, leading recipients to imagine an ideal future child (Martin, 2018). These profile messages risk oversimplifying behavioral genetics and intensify the emotional stakes of donor selection (Keehn et al., 2015). Access is skewed toward wealthier recipients because donor-egg IVF is expensive, often requires multiple treatment cycles, and is rarely covered by insurance (Daniels and Heidt-Forsythe, 2012).

This track seeks to advance understanding of how consumers navigate the under-regulated egg donation marketplace. Through a series of studies, we plan to examine the experiences and decision-making of both donors and recipients, the influence of marketing practices, and the broader cultural forces that shape participation in egg donation services. Ultimately, the track aims to identify ways to support equitable marketplace experiences for donors and recipients. Although the discussion focuses on the US marketplace, participants based in any location are welcome to join. We also welcome relevant external stakeholders, final-stage Ph.D. students, and junior faculty to apply.

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Track Co-chairs' Biographies



Zhe (Kitty) Li is a PhD candidate in Business Administration with a concentration in Marketing at Bentley University. Her research focuses on spirituality and consumption, consumer experience, and decolonization and branding, drawing on qualitative and ethnographic methods to examine how people engage with spiritual wellness, space, and place. Her work has been published in the *Journal of Service Management* and as a book chapter in the edited book Decolonizing Branding: Applying Chinese Principles of Relationships, Loyalty, and Personality, edited by Hasan Gilani

Track Point of Contact: Zheli@bentley.edu



Elena Elkanova is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Assumption University and a Ph.D. candidate at Bentley University, with an expected dissertation defense by the end of 2026. Her research focuses on marketplace exclusion, consumer empowerment, and consumer vulnerability. Her work has been published in Marketing Theory, the Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, and in the edited book Sexuality in Marketing and Consumption: Queer Theory, Feminist Research, and Intersectionality, edited by Daskalopoulou, A., Pirani, D., and Ostberg, J. She co-chaired a track at the 2023 Transformative Consumer Research (TCR) Conference and participated in the 2025 TCR Conference.