

Sperm mislabeling causes consternation for all-white family with mixed race child

Jennifer Cramblett of Uniontown, Ohio is not a sympathetic character. The 36-year-old conceived her two-year-old daughter with her partner Amanda using sperm ordered from an online sperm bank. The bank sent the wrong sample—they had requested a white donor and ended up having a child of mixed race. The daughter's donor was African American.

Now [Cramblett is suing the sperm bank](#) for damages exceeding \$50,000 because of the emotional and economic hardships that they and their daughter will face raising a child of mixed race in a racially segregated and intolerant community. Jennifer's court complaint alleges that she and her partner should move to a larger, more diverse community for the benefit of their daughter, for example.

Cramblett's case brings a lot of issues to the forefront. First, that while the fertility industry is widely used ([nearly 1 million children conceived with donors each year](#)) and extremely lucrative, it's not particularly well-regulated or standardized. The ordering process at Cramblett's donor clinic used hand written notes that led to the transposition of an identification number and the shipment and subsequent insemination with incorrect donor sperm. And the Cramblett case is just one example, writes [Keli Goff at Daily Beast](#):

But what her case highlights is the lack of regulation of an industry that has life and death implications and is not regulated accordingly. If there is a silver lining in Cramblett's case, it may be that Americans finally become outraged about the lack of regulation of the sperm donation industry, and start pushing legislators to do something about it.

Goff goes on to mention the fact that there are no limits to the number of children a donor can create. In some cases men have fathered hundreds within the same communities, which may lead to cases of accidental incest further down the line. There is no standardization of clinical testing for genetic abnormalities and no screening of potential parents to see if they would be fit to raise a child. Goff editorializes that Cramblett and her partner might have benefited from this screening.

The second set of larger issues that Cramblett raises regards the biology and genetics of race and the treatment of those traits by society at large. Claiming that her daughter will suffer because of her biracial background is essentially asking the court to acknowledge this tiered social system exists and that a person from one tier with a family member from another has reduced quality of life, says [Matthew McKnight at the New Yorker](#):

The case is entangled with a number of troubling ideas about science, identity, and class in this country. By equating race with "genetic traits," Cramblett is claiming that race is a biological fact. By arguing that a child with darker skin and hair that is different from hers is an impediment to her chosen life style, Cramblett tacitly condones the hierarchy in this country that determines the relative worth of one life over another.

And, McKnight argues, [she is asking the court to separate the biological aspects of race from the social ones](#)

, a topic far from being resolved even by genetic and anthropological experts:

Un-learning race is not an abstract exercise; it is a difficult task that requires, among other things, a firm grasp of the distinction between skin color and race, between what is biological and what is social. Any fair adjudication of the Cramblett complaint—in a court of law or public opinion—demands that science be distinguished from fiction.

Meredith Knight is editor of the human genetics section for Genetic Literacy Project and a freelance science and health writer in Austin, Texas. Follow her @meremereknight.

Additional Resources:

- [Reproducing Race](#), Huffington Post
- [What genes tell us about history, race and ourselves: Christine Kenneally's new book has hits, misses](#), Genetic Literacy Project
- [Should the sperm donor industry be regulated?](#), New York Times