Miracles of love: The use of metaphor in egg donor ads

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In recent years, the appearance of egg donor advertisements in American college newspapers, sometimes offering five- and six-figure fees to ‘genetically-gifted’ donors, has given rise to critical comment on both sides of the Atlantic, and has caused some to fear that the use of these procedures will eventually result in the creation of ‘designer babies’ with preselected genetic qualities. Whether such fears will be realized depends, to a great extent, upon how both the participants themselves and society as a whole come to view and understand these procedures. This article explores emerging images of assisted reproduction through an analysis of the use of metaphor in egg donor ads that appeared in the student newspaper of the University of California, Los Angeles. I argue that the attitudes displayed in these ads result from a mapping of existing cultural stereotypes associated with biological parenthood, including the role of childbearing in marriage and ‘coupledom’, onto the assisted-reproduction process, and that these metaphors are used precisely because they construct this cultural model and adapt it to the new reality of the assisted-conception experience.

KEYWORDS: Egg donor ads, metaphor

INTRODUCTION

Please help us give our precious baby a sibling. We seek a compassionate, intelligent, attractive, honest, energetic, and fun-loving Caucasian woman, under 32, at least 5’5”, to be our egg donor. Please contact us at egghunting@aol.com or PO Box 140-328, Howard Beach, NY 11414.

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KEYWORDS: Egg donor ads, metaphor

INTRODUCTION

1] $50,000 FOR EGG DONATION
PLEASE HELP us give our precious baby boy a sibling. We seek a compassionate, intelligent, attractive, honest, energetic, and fun-loving Caucasian woman, under 32, at least 5’5”, to be our egg donor. Please contact us at egghunting@aol.com or PO Box 140-328, Howard Beach, NY 11414.

13] CHINESE-AMERICAN & KOREAN AMERICAN WOMEN. Oops too much school! Don’t let this happen to you. After I finished med school I could no longer have children. Fertility declines drastically at 35. Now my husband and I, a UCLA alumnus seek a caring woman of Chinese or Korean descent to help us have a child by donating her eggs. Must be healthy and under 30 years old. Will pay $5,000 and our eternal gratitude. Can you help us? Please contact our agency toll free at 1-877-782-6355.

In recent years, the appearance of egg donor ads in American college newspapers, sometimes offering five- and six-figure fees to ‘genetically-gifted’ donors, has given rise to critical comment on both sides of the Atlantic, and has caused some to fear that the use of these procedures will eventually result in the creation of ‘designer babies’ with preselected genetic qualities. Whether such fears will be realized depends, to a great extent, upon how both the participants themselves and society as a whole come to view and understand these procedures. This article explores emerging images of assisted reproduction through an analysis of the use of metaphor in egg donor ads that appeared in the student newspaper of the University of California, Los Angeles. I argue that the attitudes displayed in these ads result from a mapping of existing cultural stereotypes associated with biological parenthood, including the role of childbearing in marriage and ‘coupledom’, onto the assisted-reproduction process, and that these metaphors are used precisely because they construct this cultural model and adapt it to the new reality of the assisted-conception experience.

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rise to critical comments on both sides of the Atlantic (see Krum 2001; Weiss 2001). These ads are a byproduct of advances in reproductive technology which have radically altered existing models of childbearing and parenthood. In the past, female infertility meant that a woman would never experience pregnancy and childbirth; however, today assisted reproduction has made the previously impossible possible and, through ovum donation, an infertile woman can give birth. The introduction of technological assistance into the creation of human life raises profound moral and philosophical questions regarding practices that may appear to constitute the commodification and commercialization of procreation, and has caused some to fear that the use of these procedures will eventually result in the creation of ‘designer babies’ with pre-selected genetic qualities (Gorner 2001). Whether or not such fears will be realized depends, to a great extent, upon how both the participants themselves and society as a whole come to view and understand these procedures.

This article explores emerging images of assisted reproduction through an analysis of the use of metaphor in egg donor ads that appeared in the Daily Bruin, the student newspaper of the University of California, Los Angeles, during the 2000–2001 academic year. I demonstrate that, rather than presenting assisted reproduction as a commercial transaction, the images produced by the metaphors in these ads portray it as a miracle of modern science enabling childless couples to fulfill their dreams of love. I thus argue that these ads are part of a dynamic process taking place in the United States to purge reproductive technology, including the participation of third-party reproductive partners, of negative images by mapping existing cultural stereotypes associated with biological parenthood onto these procedures and relationships.

ASSISTED REPRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW

The urge to procreate is a strong biologic drive, and the desire to have children is a dream shared by many (Ziselman 1997: 180). However, problems of infertility strike one out of eight women in the industrialized world (Volpe 1987: 3). In the United States, there was a twenty-five percent increase in the incidence of reported infertility among women of childbearing age between 1988 and 1995, and infertility-related office visits almost tripled during the same period (Ryan 2001: 2). By 1995, an estimated 5.3 million American couples faced the problem of infertility (Wisot and Meldrum 2004: 2), and in 2002, the National Survey of Family Growth, using a common definition of infertility, reported that 7 percent of married women of childbearing age stated that they had not conceived after 12 months of unprotected intercourse (Wright, Change, Jeng and Macaluiso 2006: 8).

Because the birth of a child results not only in the creation of a new life, but of new relationships, the inability to have a child deprives infertile couples not only of the experience of parenthood, but of the identity acquired by assuming the roles of mother and father (Franklin 1997: 4–5). Moreover, because the ability to
reproduce is a core aspect of gender identity, infertility is often experienced as more than just reproductive failure, and this is particularly true for women (Ryan 2001: 71): the Western medical tradition that locates fertility and infertility as (solely) in women’s bodies, thus framing infertility as a female experience, reflects long-standing cultural attitudes that regard pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood as central to womanhood (McMahon 1996: 491). According to this view, women who voluntarily remain childless, or who attempt but fail to achieve pregnancy, ‘are presumed to be somehow less than fully functional adult women’ (McMahon 1996: 491; see also Freed 1999: 262).

Such attitudes are pervasive in American culture. As a part of her research on women’s pregnancy narratives, Freed (1996, 1999) explored the attitudes and expectations imposed on pregnant women in the United States by groups with which they routinely interact (doctors and other health care professionals, members of religious groups, relatives, and women who have themselves been pregnant) by means of ‘a dominant discourse and normative rhetoric about pregnancy’ which act to ‘suggest not only that these experiences are uniquely female, but that they are essential to being a woman’ (Freed 1999: 261–262). Women who are trying to become pregnant interact with the same groups, and are exposed to the same culturally-constructed attitudes:

Traditional assumptions that women are most fulfilled by pregnancy and motherhood, and/or that families consist of a father, mother and their biological children, are re-inscribed in the popular belief that it is inherently problematic if a couple cannot conceive. (McMahon 1996: 491–492, fn omitted)

Today new reproductive technologies offer previously unimagined hopes to childless couples; yet one consequence of these advances is the production of new uncertainties (Franklin 1997: 11). Overall in vitro fertilization (IVF) success rates of 35 percent mean that only one in three cycles results in the birth of a child (Wright et al. 2005: 1). There is thus a significant discrepancy between the representation of IVF as a series of stages leading to pregnancy and parenthood, and the actual experience of recipients in the majority of cases (Franklin 1997: 10). Nevertheless, research shows that women who are infertile will go to great lengths to achieve biological pregnancy, including years of diagnosis and assisted reproductive interventions (Leiblum, Aviv and Hamer 1998: 3569). Moreover, although the majority of fertility treatment interventions using assisted reproductive technology (i.e. in vitro fertilization and related procedures) involve the implantation of either freshly fertilized or thawed embryos from the patient’s own eggs (see Wright et al. 2006), the use of donor eggs has continued to increase exponentially since its original introduction in the United States in 1984: in 1996, a total of 5,162 IVF cycles using donor oocytes (eggs) resulted in just over 1700 live births (Kalloglou and Gittelsohn 2000: 798); by 2003, the totals had expanded to 14,323 cycles resulting in 8042 live births (Wright et al. 2006: 14).²

The increasing availability and use of this and other assisted reproductive techniques troubles previous certainties about descent, relatedness and kinship.
(Franklin 1997: 8; see also Ryan 2001: 5), and calls for a radical revision of existing models of maternity. Today a woman who becomes pregnant through ovum donation is considered to be both the ‘natural’ and the ‘legal’ mother of the child, while the donor retains no relationship with her biological offspring. Moreover, this reality is mirrored by the participants’ perceptions: thus a woman interviewed by the Los Angeles Times whose pregnancy resulted from a donated ovum stated, ‘[T]his baby feels 110 percent mine’ (Weiss 2001), while a medical follow-up study demonstrated that ovum donors, who do *not* experience pregnancy and birth, reject the idea that children created from their oocytes are ‘their’ children (Kalfoglou and Gittelsohn 2000: 799).³

Such reactions raise profound moral and philosophical questions. Thus Ryan notes that assisted reproduction ‘challenges the symbolic unity of marriage, sexual intercourse, and procreation’, while raising the ethical question of ‘whether a gamete or a period of gestation is the kind of thing that should be bought or sold’ (2001: 47, 48). Citing an ad placed in Ivy League college newspapers offering $50,000 to a tall, young egg donor with high SAT scores, she asks: ‘At what point . . . does commercialized assisted reproduction promote the exploitation of persons?’ (Ryan 2001: 49). However, although financially motivated donors command media attention and sometimes even headlines (see e.g. Weiss 2001), research shows that many donors are not motivated by the prospect of financial gain. In a study of the ovum donation experiences of 33 women, approximately half stated that they were motivated by non-monetary goals, such as the desire to help an infertile couple; of those who stated that their primary motivation was financial compensation, none received more than $4000, and most received compensation in the $2000 to $3000 range (Kalfoglou and Gittelsohn 2000: 800). Moreover, Wisot and Meldrum, obstetricians who have been involved in assisted reproduction for more than twenty years, conclude that most women who donate their egg do so for altruistic reasons (2004: 228). Noting that many donors ask them to wish the recipient luck, and frequently tell them to ‘give her a hug for me’, and that donors often call to learn whether a pregnancy resulted from their donation (Wisot and Meldrum 2004: 230) – a response also observed by Kalfoglou and Gittelsohn (2000: 803) – they opine:

These women probably represent a philosophically select group, emotionally committed to the idea regardless of the inconvenience and possible risk. They are akin to the large number of people we hear about who come forth to donate a kidney to a complete stranger or the thousands who offer to be tested as bone marrow donors for a young cancer victim. There are people who meet some of their own needs by helping others in this way. (Wisot and Meldrum 2004: 228–229)

Nevertheless, the fact that donors are compensated in a significant number of cases creates a legitimate question about the participants’ perceptions of the nature of the exchange.
EGG DONOR ADS: HUMAN OVA AS ‘GOODS’?

Egg donor ads, like personal (dating) ads, constitute the individual as a site for the exchange of goods and services (Hogben and Coupland 2000: 463; see also Marley 2000); thus, at first blush, these ads appear to provide evidence that reproductive technology has indeed resulted in ‘the commodification and commercialization of procreation’ (Verhey 1997: 139). However, the fact that an exchange is contemplated should not be substituted for evidence that the nature of the exchange is primarily or predominantly commercial. Moreover, in considering the use of advertising in relational contexts, it is important to avoid an overly romanticized view of how relationships are traditionally formed (Coupland 1996: 190).

In a groundbreaking study, Coupland (1996) applied Giddens’ (1991) theoretical model of the commodification of the self to the analysis of heterosexual dating ads that appeared in three U.K. publications. Through a discourse-analytic examination of how individuals construct self- and other identities in these ads, Coupland explored advertisers’ resources for resisting ‘full-blown self-commodification’, including the use of descriptors that reject stereotypical categories, and argued that the claim that dating ads are a genre in which meaning is manipulated for instrumental effect raises problematic questions of how non-instrumental discourses and relationships should be defined (1996: 202). Indeed, the sampling of purposes listed in Coupland’s article (for friendship, possibly romance; to bring sparkle into life; for fun nights in, no ties relationship; for companions, visits and holidays; future husband) does not differ, at least superficially, from the range of motivations which prompt individuals to seek potential partners by more ‘conventional’ means, for example: through introduction by relatives or mutual acquaintances; by involvement in various types of social, religious, or political activities; by going to bars or dances; etc. Nevertheless, these ads are distinguishable from such face-to-face encounters in one important respect: that the initial impression is created entirely by the versions of themselves that advertisers construct through discourse.

In a subsequent study of gay and lesbian dating ads, Thorne and Coupland (1998) examined the discursive processes by which gay and lesbian advertisers formulate self- and other identities in these texts, and how their formulations relate to broader themes of homosexual identity. By exploring the differing conventions for self-commodification used by each of the two groups, they showed ‘how the commodifying medium of dating ads shapes homosexual identifications and how such ads both reflect and shape the cultural conditions of gay and lesbian people’ (1998: 234). Their analysis thus illustrates the central role of language in constituting social and interpersonal roles.

This theme received additional attention in Hogben and Coupland’s (2000) study of gay and lesbian classified ads for reproductive partners, in which they argue convincingly that the use of the vocabulary of parenthood in these ads acts to undermine the ‘apparent contradiction’ of gay parenting by creating resources...
for self-declarations of parental identity through the use of typological referents (e.g. ‘Latin guy . . . wants to become a father’), and by expanding the concept of parenthood beyond ‘being [a] parent’ to include ‘doing parent[ing]’ (2000: 461–462). These data display a range of attitudes and expectations; nevertheless, Hogben and Coupland demonstrate that the ‘meaning-making strategies at play’ in advertisers’ discursive construction of reproductive, parental and child-rearing roles and identities creates a realignment of relational terms and concepts, resulting in a definition of parenthood that is inclusive of the gay and lesbian experience.

Like the ‘mating ads’ in Hogben and Coupland’s study, egg donor ads involve the strategic use of language to accommodate and articulate contemporary reproductive practices. However, unlike those ads, egg donor ads ordinarily contain explicit offers of financial compensation. This article will examine a corpus of such ads in order to explore their content. I will argue that, despite their inclusion of a monetary incentive, the motivation reflected in these ads is not commercial. In the following analysis, I will demonstrate that these ads act to map existing cultural models of marriage, childbearing and parenthood onto the assisted reproduction experience through the pervasive use of metaphorical expressions for love that are associated with these longstanding cultural models.

**METAPHOR**

Metaphor is a figurative use of language that illuminates our understanding of abstract concepts through their depiction in concrete terms (Deigman 1997: 21). Metaphors operate analogically, by suggesting a likeness; however, they do not do so by comparison, but by direct identification of the subject of the metaphor with its object (Fawcett 1970: 52). Thus Shakespeare’s line, My love is a fever, burning still (1979: 813), does not compare love to, but equates it with, disease. The metaphor (‘disease’) does not appear in the text, but is evoked by the juxtaposition of terms to form a figurative expression which exploits the metaphor’s meaning.

The traditional view sees metaphor as a literary device (see Fernandez 1991, n. 3); however, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have famously argued that metaphor reflects the structuring of human thought. According to their theory, most concepts are understood in part in terms of other concepts – that is, metaphorically; thus metaphor is evidence of the mental processes by which this occurs (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 56). Quinn challenges this claim, asserting that metaphors, ‘far from constituting understanding, are ordinarily selected to fit a preexisting and culturally shared model’ (1991: 60). Quinn argues that our cultural conceptions of, for example, love and marriage, exist independently of the metaphors that we use to talk about them, and that these cultural conceptions determine the metaphors we use, rather than vice versa (1991: 65–69). These seemingly opposing theories are in fact complementary: because our understanding of abstract concepts is interactive and ongoing, metaphors both shape and are shaped by existing cultural models.⁵
Metaphor is pervasive in language. However, although novel metaphors attract attention through unexpected associations (Deignman 1997: 23), many common metaphors pass virtually unnoticed. An example cited by Lakoff and Johnson is the concept of argument, which is structured almost exclusively by metaphors of war: ‘We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and we defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of attack . . . ’ (1980: 4–5). Because this is the conventional way of talking about arguments, the metaphorical quality of such descriptions is largely unrecognized (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5).

A metaphor may be exploited by either lexical or logical elaboration. A lexical elaboration of a metaphor expresses an aspect of the metaphor to a greater or lesser extent (Kövecses 1986: 14; Lakoff 1987: 384), for example, the expression Your position is indefensible. Defending positions is an aspect of war; thus the expression is a lexical elaboration of the metaphor. Conversely, a logical elaboration of the metaphor extends the metaphor’s implied comparison to the results or consequences of the characterization, what Lakoff and Johnson refer to as the metaphor’s ‘entailments’ (Kövecses 1986: 14–15; Lakoff 1987: 384). The expression I wasn’t about to get drafted into that argument elaborates the metaphor ‘argument is war’ by using the institution of the military draft (a consequence of war) to describe a bystander’s unwillingness to be drawn into an argument.

A metaphor’s entailments form logical links that ‘create reverberations that awaken and connect our memories of past experiences and serve as a possible guide for future experiences’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 140). However, metaphors do not simply entail other concepts; rather, they entail very specific aspects of those concepts, highlighting some aspects of our experience while suppressing others (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 140–142). A metaphor can thus acquire the status of truth that sanctions actions, justifies inferences and helps to set goals (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 142).

Metaphors stand for internalized conceptualizations, and thus reflect accepted realities; yet they can also serve as a mechanism for creating new meanings and associations (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 139–146). In the following analysis, I examine the meaning-making processes by which egg donor ads situate assisted reproduction within existing cultural models of marriage, childbearing and parenthood through the use of metaphorical expressions for love.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The 36 egg donor ads upon which this study is based represent all ads seeking egg donors which were placed in the Daily Bruin, the student newspaper of the University of California, Los Angeles, during the 2000–2001 academic year (September 2000 to June 2001). As its name indicates, the newspaper is a daily, published five days a week. The ads appeared in the paper’s Classified section
under a regularly appearing category entitled ‘2300 Sperm/Egg Donors’. Most if not all of the ads appeared on numerous occasions.

The ads were placed by both individuals and agencies. Of the 36 ad texts, 14 were (apparently) placed by or on behalf of individuals, 6 were placed by agencies, and three were ambiguous as to source. Based on the contact information provided, all 14 individual ads appeared to have been placed by different people; by contrast, nine agencies were responsible for placing the 19 institutional ads. Because the number of times that each ad text appeared was not tallied, percentage breakdowns are not provided. However, as the following analysis demonstrates, both sets of advertisers make extensive use of the linguistic patterns examined here.

These ads share certain generic features with personal ads and other forms of classified advertising, among them the inclusion of a heading or bold-faced introductory sequence which serves as an attention-focusing device. In 18 of the 36 ads in this study, the heading included the words ‘egg donor needed’ (see Table 1 below). Use of the word ‘needed’ is not peculiar to egg donor ads, but is in fact a common component of ordinary ‘help wanted’ ads, as exemplified by the following ‘help wanted’ ads which appeared in the Daily Bruin during the same period as the ads examined here:


DAY CAMP COUNSELORS needed at Westchester Family YMCA. Seeking energetic leaders enjoying pre-teens, beach/aquatic, field trips, arts and crafts, etc. Steve-310-670-4316.

It can thus be seen that the concept of ‘need’ encompasses both material needs (e.g. I need five roofers to finish this job) and emotional needs (e.g. A child needs its mother’s love); accordingly, the headings alone tell us little about the manner in which these ads approach the goal of engaging the response of potential donors. However, the texts of these ads reveal two approaches, which I shall designate the ‘help-wanted approach’ and the ‘personal ad approach’, in reference to the generic forms that they imitate. The help-wanted approach was adopted by the minority of these advertisers (16 out of 36). These advertisers frame the search for an egg donor as a commercial transaction; thus the text of these ads is similar in form and content to the ‘help wanted’ ads reproduced above:

[24] OOCYTE “EGG” DONORS: Currently being recruited. If you are between 18 and 32 years of age, healthy, proven fertility, good family medical history, must not be overweight. Applicants with medical insurance preferred. Women of all ethnicities and races! Generous compensation. Please call Nanette Bahl with the Center for Reproductive Health & Gynecology @ 661-254-0545.

[33] Pay your tuition with eggs. If you’re a woman between 18 and 35, you can earn money easily, anonymously. Donate your eggs to an infertile couple. $3,500 and up, depending on your education and other qualifications. Call Today.

THE CENTER FOR EGG OPTIONS
The ‘commercial’ character of these ads is conveyed by their use of terms borrowed from the ‘help-wanted’ register: ‘currently being recruited’, ‘applicants’, ‘generous compensation’, ‘Earn $5000’, ‘you can earn money easily’, ‘$3500 and up’. However, the majority of these ads (20 out of 36) display a different orientation. These ads, which take the personal ad approach, may be illustrated by the following examples:

**[23] EGG DONOR
NEEDED
ANONYMOUS**


**[26] SPECIAL EGG DONOR
NEEDED**

Loving, infertile couple is hoping to find a compassionate woman to help us have a baby. We are searching for an intelligent, healthy woman 21-29 years old, half Japanese and half Northern European. Compensation $5000. If you are interested in helping our dream of parenthood come true, please call OPTIONS 800-866-9373 x72.

These ads differ markedly from the ads that take the help-wanted approach, and more closely resemble personal ads. Rather than ‘recruiting’ ‘applicants’, these ads explicitly seek the desired other. However, despite the (apparent) differences in focus displayed by advertisers who draw upon these different approaches, the subject matter of the ads precludes their inclusion in either of the existing categories. These ads do not seek to ‘employ’ someone in the traditional sense; neither do they seek a personal relationship with the prospective donor. Rather, whether they take the ‘help wanted’ or ‘personal ad’ approach, they offer monetary compensation in exchange for genetic material that will (hopefully) enable a couple to experience childbearing and parenthood. The hybrid nature of these ads thus calls for a close examination of their language, in order to determine the meanings that they construct and convey.
This article will examine the discursive strategies by which advertisers construct the assisted reproduction experience. These strategies exploit metaphorical expressions for love that are associated with marriage, ‘coupledom’ and starting a family in order to situate assisted reproduction within existing cultural models of marriage, childbearing and parenthood. Following Hogben and Coupland, this article will examine how advertisers ‘use, adapt and realign’ (2000: 460) these metaphors to manage potentially problematic aspects of egg donation by situating the practice within existing cultural models. They thus provide evidence of an ongoing contemporary process of social construction through language.

ANALYSIS

English, like most languages, has a large number of conventionalized expressions relating to love, and metaphors figure prominently in this inventory (Kövecses 1988: 12–13). Indeed, possibly because it is not solely an emotion but is also relationship, love is perhaps the most highly metaphorized emotion (Kövecses 2000: 27). Culturally significant love relationships include the love of husband and wife, the love of parent and child, the love of country, and the love of God. Each of these love relationships has unique features that influence the ways in which it is conceptualized. This article examines five metaphors for love that appear in the data analyzed here – love as the unity of two complementary parts, love as a hidden object, love as a collaborative work of art, love as a valuable commodity, and love as a miracle – in order to explore their role in structuring the concept of assisted reproduction. In discussing these metaphors, I draw upon the work of Kövecses, a student of Lakoff, who has written extensively on the subject of metaphorical models for romantic love and their use in American culture (Kövecses 1986, 1988, 1997, 2000, 2005). By applying his descriptive analysis to the language of these ads, I show how advertisers exploit associations between love, marriage and children in order to situate assisted reproduction within existing cultural models.

The ‘Unity’ metaphor

The model of love as the unity of two complementary parts plays a central role in our conceptualization of love (Kövecses 1988: 18). It dates at least to Plato, who tells us through Aristophanes that in order to punish them for their *hubris*, Zeus cleft human beings in two (Kövecses 1988: 18). As a consequence of this conceptual frame, we see love as a kind of need, since the image of two halves of a whole necessarily entails the concept of incompleteness and dysfunctionality when one half is missing (Kövecses 1988: 23). The unity metaphor appears in such expressions as *She’s my better half* and *They were inseparable*, and, conversely, *They broke up, he broke her heart*, and *They’ve separated and are getting a divorce*. However, its most pervasive use is in the use of the word *couple* to denote romantic
or marital partners. The fact that this term has become lexicalized (see Billing and Macmillan 2005: 460), and is not perceived as being metaphorical, demonstrates the extent to which the unity metaphor has come to dominate our conception of sexual and romantic love.

One possible experiential basis for the unity metaphor is the sexual act, which brings about the joining of two physical parts (Kövecses 1988: 19). This image is reflected in the use of the term physical union, and in the overheated narratives of romance novels, including such phrases as Their bodies fused in passion. However, the modern concept of marriage as a love match gives far greater scope to the concept of love as unity than that implied by the physical act of sex alone: from a socio-cultural perspective, married love constitutes a physical, psychological, religious, and legal union. Moreover, although it is important to differentiate the possible experiential bases of the unity metaphor from the metaphor itself, many aspects of the love experience can be captured by the network of entailments associated with the unity metaphor (Kövecses 1988: 19, 22). The generative act that accompanies physical union is expressed in the metaphor of insemination, which draws on the apparent correspondence of a seed being planted in furrowed soil to a man ‘planting’ semen in a woman (McElvaine 2001: B15). Likewise the resulting child is seen as both the ‘product’ of this ‘union’ (e.g. the fruit of their passion) and as a joining, or ‘mingling’, of the bloods (e.g. consanguinity), who creates a biological union between the parents by being equally related to each, giving rise to the notion of a mingling of parental qualities (She has her mother’s eyes and her father’s temper). However, at the same time that sexual reproduction creates a biological union, it poses the dilemma of Plato’s cleft beings. As McElvaine states:

The remixing of genes in sexually reproducing species gives those genes a diversity that can help to avoid extinction. But we and all sexually reproducing organisms pay a heavy price for these benefits: we are in an important sense not whole; we are incapable of replicating ourselves. (2001: B15)

That is, because sexual reproduction requires the union of egg and sperm, the carriers of the parents’ genetic material, the absence of one prevents conception.

Egg donor ads thus powerfuly evoke the unity metaphor: because we know that conception results from the union of egg and sperm, the request for an egg donor evokes the metaphor’s central image of two halves of a whole. It implies incompleteness and dysfunctionality where one half is missing, creating associations with past experiences (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 140; Kövecses 1988: 23), including pervasive cultural imagery depicting the trinity of marriage, pregnancy and child rearing as primary sources of happiness and fulfillment. Due to this pervasive imagery, these events are (widely) seen as milestones marking the normal progression through adult life, and failure to achieve any of them signals a life that is incomplete or unfulfilled (compare McMahon 1996: 491–492). The unity metaphor’s framing of love as need thus vividly evokes the longing felt by infertile couples to whom the egg donor symbolizes the possibility of achieving
Table 1: Use of ‘needed’ in headings of egg donor ads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text of heading</th>
<th>Number of uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANONYMOUS EGG DONOR NEEDED</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGG DONOR(S) NEEDED</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGG DONOR NEEDED — ANONYMOUS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGG DONOR NEEDED $25,000 COMPENSATION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASIAN EGG DONOR NEEDED</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEWISH EGG DONOR NEEDED</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPECIAL EGG DONOR NEEDED</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

fulfillment and completeness, as announced by the use of the word ‘need’ in the headings of many of these advertisements (see Table 1).

Similarly, the use of the word ‘couple’ in these ads acts to index the association between marriage and children, and thus the assumption that, without children, something is ‘missing’ from a marriage. The words ‘needed’ and ‘couple’ frequently co-occur in these ads (13 out of 36 or 36%), most commonly in formulations such as ‘EGG DONOR NEEDED: Loving infertile couple . . . ’ (Example 7), ‘EGG DONOR NEEDED: We are a loving infertile couple. . . ’ (Example 11), ‘EGG DONOR NEEDED: After many years of infertility struggles, loving couple. . . ’ (Example 14), and ‘ASIAN EGG DONOR NEEDED: Loving Chinese couple. . . ’ (Example 15).

[5] BROKEN HEARTED COUPLE SEEKING
Caucasian egg donor. Up to $15,000. Previous donors welcome. 888-554-0888 or E-mail: susanplant1@hotmail.com

[16] SPECIAL EGG DONOR NEEDED
Loving couple seeks East Indian egg donor to help them become parents. Call 1-502-780-7537 for information. Anonymous/confidential. $6,000.

[18] LOVING COUPLE
Desires to start a family. Needs an assistant of an egg donor. If you are between the ages of 18-29 and of medium build with light-medium complexion, eye and hair color, please call Shari at her private office. 888-882-9800. Thank you.

The foregoing are representative examples of the many uses of the unity metaphor in the 36 ads examined here. In Example 5, the term ‘Broken-hearted couple’ simultaneously evokes the partners’ unity and the painful incompleteness of childlessness. In Example 16, the unity metaphor is elaborated through the pairing of the word ‘need’ in the heading with the phrase ‘Loving couple seeks East Indian egg donor to help them become parents’: the adjective ‘loving’ both affirms the couple’s unity and proclaims their desire to achieve fulfillment through the experience of parenthood that they seek. Similarly, in Example 18, the phrases ‘Loving Couple Desires to start a family. Needs an assistant of an egg donor’ evoke the ‘natural’ progression from marriage or romantic partnership to family, and the sense of incompleteness and loss when this progression does not occur. The unity

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metaphor thus powerfully (re)asserts the emotional goal of assisted conception as the ultimate fulfillment of romantic love.

**The ‘Hidden Object’ metaphor**

A logical extension of the unity model is the model of love as a hidden object (Kövecses 1988: 60), which figures in a large number of commonly used expressions:

She was constantly looking for love.
He’s so lucky to have found her.
His search for love led him across three continents.
He was everything that she had been looking for.

The main message of the hidden object metaphor is that love is not something that comes along, but something that a person must go and find (Kövecses 1988: 61). In this metaphor, ‘love’ refers interchangeably to desire and to the desired other (Kövecses 1988: 61).

The hidden object metaphor constructs love as something that is ‘out there’, passively waiting to be found (Kövecses 1988: 60–61). The metaphor thus includes the following entailments: ‘an object that is hidden actually exists’ (i.e. its absence is not due to non-existence) and ‘an object that is hidden can be found with effort’, as exemplified in expressions such as *There’s someone for everyone* and *At long last she found true love*. This metaphor is particularly appropriate to the situation of infertile couples advertising for potential egg donors. Rather than accepting the ‘death sentence’ of infertility as foreclosing the possibility of parenthood, these couples persist in their belief that the solution to their problem exists and can be found, given the expenditure of sufficient effort. Thus the sought-for egg donation comes to symbolize for them the desired child that is the ultimate object of their search. The hidden object metaphor thus appears frequently in egg donor ads, many of which are couched in terms of a quest:

[1] **S 50,000 FOR EGG DONATION**

Please help us give our precious baby boy a sibling. We seek a compassionate, intelligent, attractive, honest, energetic, and fun-loving Caucasian woman, under 32, at least 5′5″, to be our egg donor. Please contact us at egghunting@aol.com or PO Box 140-328, Howard Beach, NY 11414.

[7] **EGG DONOR NEEDED $25,000 COMPENSATION**

Loving infertile couple is hoping to find a compassionate woman to help us have a baby. We’re looking for a healthy, intelligent college student or college grad, age 21-33, with blue eyes and blond or light brown hair. Your gift of life would bring great joy.

Please contact us through our representative at 1.800.776.7680.


We are a loving, infertile couple hoping to find a compassionate woman to help us have a baby.

[drawing of a baby wrapped in a blanket] We’re looking for a healthy, intelligent college student or college grad, age 21-33, with blue eyes and blond or light brown hair. Your gift of life would bring great joy.

Please contact us through our representative at 1.800.776.7680.
[silhouette of Chinese background, 21-30 years old, stork carrying 5′3″ to 5′9″ tall. If you can help, please call baby] (800) 886-9373 ext. 693

OPTIONS
Compensation $6,000

In these examples from the data, advertisers elaborate the hidden object metaphor through their use of the words ‘seek’, ‘hoping to find’ and ‘looking for’, combined with visual images and verbal strategies that act to further develop this theme. In Example 1, the advertiser’s email address, egghunting@aol.com, constructs their active role in seeking the desired genetic material, while Examples 7 and 11 incorporate images associated with well-known depictions of newborn infants as found objects. The image of the stork carrying a baby evokes the desexualized version of conception and birth traditionally related to children: that the stork delivers the baby by leaving it at the house for the parents to find. Similarly, the image of the baby wrapped in a blanket suggests stories of foundling infants (including the biblical story of Moses), which frequently end with offers of adoption.7

As used in these ads, the hidden object metaphor embodies the advertiser’s active role in the search for the means to achieve conception and childbirth, and invites the reader’s collaboration in bringing the search to a successful end. The use of this metaphor together with the ‘love as a collaborative work of art’ metaphor (see below) makes a powerful appeal to the reader’s attention designed to provoke an emotional response.

The ‘Love as a Collaborative Work of Art’ metaphor

Another metaphor that lends itself to this setting is that of love as a collaborative work of art (Kövecses 1988: 82), as is seen in expressions such as We are building a beautiful life together and They make a perfect couple. This metaphor, which is of recent vintage (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 139), gives new meaning to love and appears to be particularly applicable to the experience of egg donors and recipient couples. It incorporates established cultural models of conception as a joint creative act and of a child as both the symbol and object of its parents’ love, and provides a means of applying these models to the special case of assisted reproduction. Moreover, by structuring the experience as an artistic endeavor, it highlights certain aspects of the experience while suppressing others (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 142, 139). Because the creation of a work of art is a unique process that can never be repeated, works of art have a tendency to develop their own rules, and this conception of love thus entails the ideas of experimentation and flexibility (Kövecses 1988: 83). The creation of a collaborative work of art presupposes the maximally coordinated work of two persons, which requires them to have at least roughly similar general human values, ideals and purposes, and also requires self discipline, the ability to compromise, and a willingness to make sacrifices in order to further larger common goals (Kövecses 1988: 83).
The conceptualization of love as a collaborative work of art entails the ideas that ‘love requires a shared aesthetic experience’, ‘love requires shared values and goals’, ‘love creates a reality’, and ‘love needs funding’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 140). The metaphor thus helps to restructure the understanding of the most problematic aspects of assisted reproduction – that it (usually) involves monetary payment to the ‘donor’, and that selection criteria based on physical and intellectual characteristics suggest a desire to obtain a made-to-specification or ‘designer’ child. To those who live the experience of assisted reproduction according to this metaphorical model, notions that the materials necessary to produce artistic creations must be purchased and that the production of a work of art requires the exercise of aesthetic preferences do not seem inappropriate or distasteful, since they are wholly consistent with the experiences of artistic creation. This can be seen in these ads in requests for personal information or specific character traits:

[14] EGG DONOR NEEDED. After many years of infertility struggles, loving couple is looking for young woman (age 21-27) with 100% Asian background to donate eggs. Compensation $5,000. Call 800-886-9373 x 663 or go to www.fertilityoptions.com for more info.

[21] LOVING COUPLE SEEKS Gift of Life from healthy egg donor w/great beauty, intelligence and warm heart! Desire 21-30, caucasian. 5’5” or taller, slender/medium, blue eyed, light-dark brunette, please contact Karen 818-631-5998, send description, picture, phone. PO Box 4570 Van Nuys Blvd. #323, Sherman Oaks, CA 91403.

The selection criteria contained in these ads define the nature of the collaboration that assisted reproduction involves: when an embryo created in vitro from a donor’s oocytes is implanted in a recipient’s uterus, it is the fertility of the donor that allows the recipient to give birth; thus the biological bases of motherhood are collaboratively produced. Moreover, because both fertility and a positive pregnancy outcome are necessary to produce a child, both donor and recipient play an essential procreative role. Accordingly, the age limitations which appear in both of these ads are designed to maximize the possibility that pregnancy will occur by disqualifying donors who have passed their peak fertile years (see Wisot and Meldrum 2004: 58–61): a common feature of egg donor ads, they appear in 26 of the 36 ads examined here. Requests for a donor of a particular race or ethnicity (‘100% Asian background’, ‘caucasian’) are even more common, and are seen in all ads in this sample that were placed by or on behalf of an individual couple. Like requests for a particular height or build, or for particular hair and eye color (all of which appear in Example 21), these requests ordinarily seek to match the physical characteristics of the recipient, in order to produce a child that appears to be the recipient’s genetic offspring.

[1] $50,000 FOR EGG DONATION PLEASE HELP us give our precious baby boy a sibling. We seek a compassionate, intelligent, attractive, honest, energetic, and

[8] EGG DONOR Sought by professional L.A. couple – highly intelligent, 21-32, kind, fair complexion, excellent personal/family health, non-smoker. Response w/personal descriptions,
fun-loving Caucasian woman, under 32, at least 5’5”, to be our egg donor. Please contact us at egghunting@aol.com or PO Box 140-328, Howard Beach, NY 11414.

Lists of desired personal qualities are also common in these ads. Example 1, in addition to its specifications of age, race and height, requests a donor who is ‘compassionate, intelligent, attractive, honest, energetic and fun-loving’. The adjective ‘compassionate’ is used in six of the ads in this data, and appears to refer specifically to the donor’s willingness to donate her eggs. The remaining traits may be assumed to be desired for their (supposed) heritability, and it is here that questions of commodification most often arise. Thus to some, the request for an ‘intelligent’ and ‘attractive’ donor will suggest the desire to produce a ‘top-of-the-line model’ that will maximize the advertisers’ return on their (monetary and emotional) investment. However, this begs the question, what parent does not hope for intelligent and attractive children? Moreover, here the inclusion of the personality traits ‘honest, energetic, and fun-loving’ illustrates Kövecses’ observation that a collaborative work of art requires participants who ‘possess sufficiently similar general human values, ideals, and purposes, and . . . hold at least compatible world views’ (1988: 83), as does Example 8, in which applicants are invited to respond with statements of their ‘goals’ and ‘requirements’.

The collaborative work of art metaphor thus challenges the assumption that the selection criteria contained in egg donor ads are evidence of a commodity-oriented approach to assisted conception by framing those criteria as shared values. It also creates a number of additional entailments that provide coherent structure to the experience of assisted reproduction. For example, although the emotional aspects of love are almost never viewed as being under the lovers’ active control in our conventional conceptual system, this new metaphor foregrounds the notions of active participation and control by the use of the word ‘work’ and its dual association with ‘collaborative work’ and ‘work of art’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 141). Thus by focusing on the aspects of activity, for instance, work, creation, building, helping, etc., the metaphor provides an organizational framework for love experiences that is not made available by our conventional conceptual system (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 141).

[26] SPECIAL EGG DONOR NEEDED

Loving, infertile couple is hoping to find a compassionate woman to help us have a baby. We are searching for an intelligent, healthy woman 21-29 years old, half Japanese and half Northern European. Compensation $5000. If you are interested in helping our dream of parenthood come true, please call OPTIONS 800-866-9373 x72.

[32] EGG DONOR NEEDED

Make a miraculous difference in the life of a loving couple by turning their dream of building a family into a reality. If you are an educated female between the ages of 21-30, non-smoker with excellent health, call The Registry Ovum
In these ads, the notion of activity is exploited in the language of quest cited in connection with the ‘hidden object’ metaphor discussed above, including the use of terms such as seeks, is looking for, is searching for, and is hoping to find. Similarly, notions of helping, creation and building are reflected in the use of appeals such as: ‘Please help us give our precious baby boy a sibling’ (Example 1 above), ‘Loving, infertile couple is hoping to find a compassionate woman to help us have a baby’ (Example 26); ‘Late 40’s, married woman looking for coed interested in helping create a child’ (Example 28); and ‘Make a miraculous difference in the life of a loving couple by turning their dream of building a family into reality’ (Example 32). The last of these also exploits the entailment ‘love creates a reality’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 140), which is central to the emotional experiences of recipient couples, who often persevere for years in their attempts to conceive a child.

The ‘Valuable Commodity’ metaphor

An additional metaphor that serves to map existing models of parental love onto the assisted-conception experience is the metaphor of love as a valuable commodity (Kővecses 1988: 58). This metaphor, which appears in expressions such as My precious darling, She’s worth everything to me, He gave her everything and received nothing in return, and I’ve got a lot invested in this relationship, elaborates the concept of economic exchange (Kővecses 1988: 58). However, given the model of love as an emotional experience, such expressions do not index a commercial orientation, but rather, an association between love and value. This association is also an aspect of the metaphorical concept of love as a collaborative work of art, through the identification of art with value and, hence, monetary price, giving rise to the entailment ‘love needs funding’. The two metaphors thus activate the same underlying concept.

---

[28] EGG DONOR
Late 40’s, married woman looking for coed interested in helping to create a child.
$2,500+ negotiable. Please call June 310-376-7000.

[1] $50,000 FOR EGG DONATION
PLEASE HELP us give our precious baby boy a sibling. We seek a compassionate, intelligent, attractive, honest, energetic, and fun-loving Caucasian woman, under 32, at least 5’5”, to be our egg donor. Please contact us at egghunting@aol.com or PO Box 140-328, Howard Beach, NY 11414.

$25,000 COMPENSATION
We are a loving, infertile couple hoping to find a compassionate woman to help us have a baby. We’re looking for a healthy, intelligent college student or college grad, age 21-33, with blue eyes and blond or light brown hair. Your gift of life would bring great joy.

[13] CHINESE-AMERICAN & KOREAN AMERICAN WOMEN. Oops too much school! Don’t let this happen to you. After I finished med...
school I could no longer have children. Fertility declines drastically at 35. Now my husband and I, a UCLA alumnus, seek a caring woman of Chinese or Korean descent to help us have a child by donating her eggs. Must be healthy and under 30 years old. Will pay $5,000 and our eternal gratitude. Can you help us? Please contact our agency toll free at 1-877-781-6355.

[21] LOVING COUPLE SEEKS Gift of Life from healthy donor w/great beauty, intelligence and warm heart! Desire 21-30, caucasian, 5'5” or taller, slender/medium, blue eyed, light/dark brunette, please contact Karen 818-631-5998, send description, picture, phone. PO Box 3570 Van Buys Blvd. #323, Sherman Oaks, CA 91403.

The valuable commodity metaphor embodies the experience of infertile couples who would ‘give anything’ to have a baby, and calls for a re-examination of evaluations of assisted conception as the commodification of procreation. Couples who would ‘pay any price’ to experience parenthood clearly express the view that money is secondary to the satisfaction of emotional needs, a fact that is vividly illustrated by the use of the words ‘donor’ and ‘gift’ in these ads, since the use of these terms in connection with something that is actually paid for indexes the perceived pricelessness of what is obtained. Thus the apparent contradiction of headings such as ‘$50,000 FOR EGG DONATION’ (Example 1) and ‘EGG DONOR NEEDED $25,000 COMPENSATION’ (Example 11) conveys the message that no amount of money could ever equal the value of the child whose life was made possible by the donor’s participation.

The use of the term ‘gift of life’ in Examples 11 and 21 similarly conveys the sense of inestimable value, as does the appeal in Example 1, ‘Please help us give our precious baby boy a sibling’ through the transference of the term ‘precious baby’ to the child that is sought to be conceived. Viewed through the framework of this metaphor, these ads and their offers of financial compensation demonstrate the extent to which (how much) the advertisers desire a child.

‘Miracle’ metaphors

[32] EGG DONOR NEEDED
Make a miraculous difference in the life of a loving couple by turning their dream of building a family into a reality. If you are an educated female between the ages of 21-30, non-smoker with excellent health, call The Registry Ovum Donor Service
Religious models create a symbolic picture of reality that provides man with a system for orienting his life in the world (Fawcett 1970: 85–86). Although the modern age has witnessed the decline of religious influence in Western societies, religious symbolism remains pervasive, even among those for whom its original significance has faded. One religious concept which is frequently invoked in metaphor is the miracle, which is used in expressions such as Considering all the traffic, it was a miracle that I got there on time and He made a miraculous recovery, in order to convey that sense that something that appeared to be impossible was achieved. This metaphor is thus particularly appropriate to the subject of assisted conception where, through the intervention of reproductive technology, the impossible is rendered possible.

The association of miracles with conception, pregnancy and birth is powerfully present in Western culture, through the pervasive influence of Christianity on Western thought (see Leach 1969). Miraculous conception is a central tenet of Christianity, and images of Jesus’ birth are pervasive in American culture. The Bible also attests other instances of miraculous conception, that of Sarah (the wife of Abraham) in the Old Testament and that of Elizabeth (the mother of John the Baptist and the cousin of the Virgin Mary) in the New Testament (Fawcett 1970: 98). In biblical accounts of miraculous conception, the event is heralded by an angel who appears to the future parent in a vision to announce the birth. Thus because visions in biblical literature are interchangeable with dreams (Fawcett 1970: 181–182), there is a strong association in Western culture between dreams and events perceived to be miraculous, as reflected in expressions such as I never dreamed I would be so lucky and I couldn’t believe it had really happened – I thought I must be dreaming.

Miraculous conception in the biblical sense entails notions of virgin birth, divine agency and asexual reproduction that appear to be scientifically replicated in the procedures of in vitro fertilization, in which conception occurs in a petri dish without sexual intercourse and pregnancy is achieved by medical intervention when the fertilized ovum is introduced into the womb. These correspondences awaken feelings born of religious experience that contribute to the sense of awe that both parents and medical personnel feel in witnessing such births. Thus Wisot and Meldrum, obstetricians who specialize in assisted reproduction, state:

Some would argue that the word miracle is overused in our field. But we find it frequently and justifiably applies to the type of work we do because many of the people who benefit from assisted reproduction thought they were hopelessly infertile before this technology was developed. When someone is desperate, with no expectation of remedy or cure, and succeeds, you can see how ‘miracle’ readily applies. (Wisot and Meldrum 2004: 11)

Additionally, and perhaps most tellingly, McMahon notes that the popular discussion of assisted reproduction, as reflected in the media, preferentially frames
it as a miraculous event, as evidenced by headlines such as ‘A Christmas Miracle Baby’, ‘I’m Living with a Miracle’ and ‘Motherly Love Works a Miracle’ drawn from publications including the New York Times, Ladies’ Home Journal, Redbook, People’s Weekly and Health (1996: 496).

Miracle metaphors figure prominently in these ads, as reflected in such language as ‘Make a miraculous difference in the life of a loving couple by turning their dream of building a family into a reality’ (Example 32), ‘Every year, there are more and more couples dreaming of having a child but cannot due to infertility problems’ (Example 4), and ‘If you are interested in helping our dream of parenthood come true, please call’ (Example 26). Example 31 is a particularly powerful use of such imagery which combines the heading Calling all angels, evoking angelic agency and thus mediated divine intervention, with a visual depiction of a stork carrying a baby, evoking the classic story traditionally told by parents to their children. This ad, by constituting the potential egg donor as the ‘angel’ and the medical team as the ‘stork,’ constructs an evocative portrait of assisted reproduction which foregrounds purity and innocence in a fairytale setting in which the potential donor is the true heroine, and in which everyone involved appears destined to live happily ever after.
Table 2: Co-occurrence of metaphors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of ads</th>
<th>Percentage of total dataset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One category</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two categories</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three categories</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four categories</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five categories</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six categories</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ads with no metaphors</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interpenetration of metaphorical imagery**

The foregoing sections have examined examples of the use of each of the five metaphors for love that are considered here. However, while my analysis to this point has proceeded by examining these metaphors individually, the examples themselves reveal that the metaphors are often used in combination with one another. Thus in Example 4 discussed above, the sentence that launches the ad’s appeal – ‘Every year, there are more and more couples dreaming of having a child but cannot due to infertility problems’ – evokes the unity metaphor through its use of the word ‘couples’ and its metaphorical description of the incompleteness resulting from infertility. The following sentence – ‘It is only through the help of special women called egg donors that these couples have a chance of achieving their dreams’ – evokes the collaborative work of art metaphor presenting the egg donor’s role as one of helping an infertile couple to have a child, while the use of the phrase ‘achieving their dreams’ frames the act as facilitating divine intervention.

In fact, most of the 36 ads examined here (30 or 83.4%) incorporate at least three of the metaphors examined here, as detailed in Table 2. (For the purposes of this analysis, the love as a collaborative work of art metaphor has been separated into its two constituent categories: shared values and shared activity.)

The following additional examples are illustrative of the diverse ways in which these ads exploit and elaborate these metaphors of love in constructing the assisted reproduction experience.

[10] ACADEMIC COUPLE SEeks

[12] For a limited time GET $1,500 BONUS

EGG DONOR 21-28

Right candidate compensated approx $10,000 [incl expenses].

Outstanding SATs and academics, good temperament, dark hair/eyes, even features, 5’6” or taller, and

[drawing of stork carrying baby] when you are chosen by a couple within the first month of being accepted by our program.

THE EGG DONOR PROGRAM

Help a couple achieve their dream and

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lean/athletic build. Please describe motivation along w/several [returnable] photos to: POB 22, West Kingston, RI 02892 All serious replies answered.

you’ll receive the highest compensation and most personalized service from the oldest donor service in L.A.

We screen recipient parents, too
Shelley Smith, M.A., M.F.C.C.
The Egg Donor Program/The Surrogacy Program email: SSmithFMCC@aol.com
Established in 1990.

[15] ASIAN EGG DONOR NEEDED
Loving Chinese couple is looking for a compassionate woman to help us have a child and build a family. We are looking for someone 21-30 years old with an Asian background, ethnic Chinese preferred. Compensation $6,000. If you are willing to help us, please call OPTIONS 1-800-886-9373 x 674.

[35] SPECIAL EGG DONOR NEEDED
Loving black couple is hoping to find an intelligent and compassionate woman of African descent. College education. Age 18-28, compensation up to $5,000.00. The many eggs your body disposes of each month can help an infertile woman to have a baby. Please call Tina at 626-583-5404. Email: Tina-B@worldnet.att.net.

In Example 10, the heading ‘Academic couple seeks egg donor 21-28’ evokes the unity metaphor by the use of the term ‘academic couple’, which implies both the unity of marital/romantic partnership and of shared careers, and also evokes the hidden object metaphor through its use of the word ‘seeks’. The advertisers’ self-identification as academics, when combined with their request for a donor with ‘[o]utstanding SATs and academics’ who will respond by ‘describing motivation along w/several (returnable) photos’ reflects the view that the donor that they seek should have similar human values, ideals and purposes, thus constructing the experience as a collaborative work of art (Kővecses 1988: 83).

Example 12 also exploits the collaborative work of art metaphor through its use of the phrases ‘when you are chosen by a couple’ and ‘Help a couple achieve their dream’, which elaborate the shared-activity component of this metaphor. The phrase ‘help a couple’ also elaborates the unity metaphor by simultaneously evoking the unity of marital/romantic partnership and the incompleteness of childlessness, while the predicate ‘achieve their dream’ evokes the miracle metaphor by styling the request as one for miraculous intervention. Finally, the ad emphasizes the value of what is being sought by its promise that ‘you’ll receive the highest compensation’ for the requested genetic material.

Example 15 similarly exploits the unity, hidden object and collaborative work of art metaphors in the appeal ‘Asian Egg Donor Needed: Loving Chinese couple is looking for a compassionate woman to help us have a child and build a family’. Example 35 also exploits these metaphors with a similar appeal in which the location of the hidden object is explicitly described: ‘The many eggs your body disposes of each month can help an infertile woman to have a baby’.

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DISCUSSION

To some, the use of classified ads seeking egg donors is evidence that supports the claim that assisted reproductive technology has led to the commodification and commercialization of procreation. However, in evaluating these ads, it is important to separate the medium from the content of the texts themselves. In her study of heterosexual dating ads, Coupland questions whether the self-presentations that are displayed in these ads differ significantly from the self-promotional displays enacted in analogous person-to-person interactions, and details the ways in which advertisers in her data set resist and undermine the process of commodification by marshaling the available discursive strategies to present themselves as fully individualized ‘de-commodified’ human beings (1996: 202). Coupland’s analysis makes clear that the mere use of advertising cannot, without more, be equated with a commercial motivation. Accordingly, it is necessary to consider the texts of these ads in order to determine the images of assisted reproduction that they construct.

This article examines five metaphors for love that appear in the data analyzed here – love as the unity of two complementary parts, love as a hidden object, love as a collaborative work of art, love as a valuable commodity, and love as a miracle – in order to explore their role in structuring the concept of assisted reproduction. As noted in Table 2, 34 of the 36 ads in this data set (94.5%) incorporate at least one of these metaphors, and 30 of the 36 ads (83.4%) incorporate at least three. The frequency with which each of these metaphors appears in the data is listed in Table 3.

I argue that the primary function of these metaphors is to map existing cultural models of biological parenthood – including the role of childbearing in marriage and ‘coupledom’ – onto the assisted reproduction process, and that these metaphors are used precisely because they construct this cultural model and adapt it to the new reality of the assisted reproduction experience. In presenting this argument, it is not my intention to suggest that all Americans share the attitudes about marriage, childbearing and parenthood that are discussed. However, couples who have recourse to assisted reproductive technology go to extraordinary lengths to experience biological parenthood, and these ads provide evidence that their motivations are informed by this cultural model.

Attitudes towards childbearing in the United States, as in Western culture in general, are the product of longstanding traditional beliefs which regard children as a primary purpose of marriage and as the products and expression of marital love. The attitude that conception is the natural and normal consequence of a couple’s sexual and emotional union entails the concepts of a cause-and-effect relationship between marriage and childbearing and of the child as a desired object, and often results in feelings of love for what is as yet only an imaged child – the metaphorical gleam in her father’s eye. It is thus capable of evoking intense feelings of loss among couples who fail to conceive, and who feel that
Table 3: Frequency of use of metaphors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
<th>Formulations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unity</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>couple(s); infertile couple(s); broken-hearted; needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidden object</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>seek(s), seeking, sought; looking for; searching for; hoping to find;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:egghunting@aol.com">egghunting@aol.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative work of art – shared aesthetic experience/values</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>[selection criteria including race or ethnicity, age, hair and eye color, height, build, physical attractiveness, intelligence, education]; goals; requirements; motivations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative work of art – shared activity</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>please help us; help them; the help of special women called egg donors; wishing to help; helping to create; build(ing) a family; needs an assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuable commodity</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>up to $15,000; your gift of life would bring great joy; will pay $5000 and our eternal gratitude; help us give our precious baby boy a sibling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miracle</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>make a miraculous difference in the life of a loving couple; calling all angels; turning their dream into a reality; dreaming of having a child; achieve their dream</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

something is ‘missing’ from their marriage or their life (see, e.g. Leiblum et al. 1998). Moreover, the same culturally mediated expectations and motivations that create the assumption that childbearing will follow marriage spur couples who experience infertility to seek solutions to their problem, including the use of third-party reproductive partners. The persistence of such efforts demonstrates the belief that the missing genetic material exists and can be found if sufficient effort is exerted. Such effort usually entails a search for a donor who possesses specific attributes shared by the recipient couple, as well as an offer of monetary compensation, in exchange for which the recipient couple hopes to obtain the child that they could not conceive on their own.
Each of these expectations and motivations, which act to situate assisted conception within existing attitudes towards marriage, childbearing and parenthood, is reflected in the metaphors that appear in the data presented here:

- the belief that, without children, something is ‘missing’ from marriage (love as unity)
- the belief that a solution to the problem of infertility exists and can be found (love as a hidden object)
- the belief that, through the participation of a donor sharing specific attributes, a child may be conceived (love as a collaborative work of art)
- the belief that the experience of childbearing is priceless (love as a valuable commodity)
- the belief that ovum donation will result in conception, making the hitherto impossible possible (love as a miraculous occurrence).

Moreover, because these beliefs exist independently of the metaphors used in the ads (compare Quinn 1991: 68), they act to shape readers’ understanding, including their interpretations of the language used, by reference to concepts and associations which are stored in their mental inventories. As a result, it is not only the metaphors that appear in these ads, but an existing culturally constructed repertoire of metaphorical concepts that acts to inform the ads’ interpretation. Thus, although the concept of ‘need’ includes both material and emotional needs, its use in egg donor ads evokes the unity metaphor’s model of love as the joining of complementary parts, and its instantiation in cultural models of procreation as an expression of marital love. Similarly, the metaphor of love as a valuable commodity acts to frame offers of financial remuneration to donors as an indication of the incalculable worth of the desired child by signaling that ‘money is no object’ in the attainment of the recipients’ goal. These internalized metaphors, like the metaphors contained in the ads, function to define the search for an egg donor in emotional, and not commercial, terms. In doing so, they expand the concept of childbearing to include assisted reproduction by constructing relationships between assisted reproduction and existing cultural models of childbearing and parenthood.

CONCLUSION

The use of assisted reproductive technology has dramatically increased since the birth of the first baby conceived by IVF in the United States in 1981, and both the number of facilities providing such services and the total number of cycles completed have notably increased in each ensuing year (Wright et al. 2006: 2). As a result, as Hogben and Coupland note, ‘both language and the law have struggled to accommodate the resulting novel identities, roles and relationships’ (2000: 461). However, although Franklin maintains that the use of this new technology requires ‘the redefinition of parenthood and procreation, of motherhood and fatherhood, of kinship and family’ (1990: 201), there is reason to question this conclusion. The ads presented in this article suggest that, rather than being
seen as heralding the advent of some ‘brave new world’, these technologies are being incorporated into the existing cultural models of marriage, childbearing and parenthood, in an ongoing process of social construction through language which defines the search for an egg donor in emotional, and not commercial, terms. These ads, and the attitudes that they reflect, thus represent a creative expression of the power of love, the power of myth, and a sense of wonder that, contrary to what is commonly believed, has been enhanced rather than diminished by the unprecedented scientific advancements that are the hallmark of contemporary society.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Marcyliena Morgan, Nikolas Coupland, Allan Bell and the anonymous reviewers of the Journal of Sociolinguistics for their helpful comments and suggestions. Any remaining shortcomings are my own.

2. The use of assisted reproductive technologies typically results in a high percentage of multiple births (i.e. twins or greater). For example, in 2003, of the 6506 infants born as a result of IVF using freshly fertilized embryos from donor eggs, only 2728 (30.3%) were singleton births (Wright et al. 2006: 7).

3. However, donors indicated that they wanted to know the birth date and gender of any child born as a result of their donation, in order to prevent their own children from inadvertently marrying or reproducing with a genetic half-sibling (Kalfoglou and Gittelsohn 2000: 799).

4. Jane Austen’s social critique of the ‘marriage market’ in middle- and upper-class English society at the turn of the nineteenth century, as vividly depicted in her novels, including Pride and Prejudice and Persuasion, demonstrates (albeit in fictionalized settings) that self- and other commodification are nothing new.

5. Thus Kövecses, responding to Quinn’s argument that metaphors do not constitute abstract concepts, but reflect cultural understandings of those concepts, states: ‘I will take the opposite tack and argue . . . that conceptual metaphors, together with other factors, can contribute to how abstract concepts are constituted. However, as Holland (personal communication) suggests, this “either/or” view of the role of metaphors might not be the best way of looking at the issue. Moreover, it seems closer to the truth to believe that some metaphors have the capacity to constitute reality, while others do not. Which ones do and which ones don’t can only be decided on the basis of detailed future research’ (2000: 17–18).

6. Criteria used to classify ads as having been placed by individuals included: use of the term ‘egg donor’ rather than ‘egg donors’, self-descriptions, and contact information consisting of what appeared to be a personal post office box, telephone number and/or e-mail address, or a request to contact ‘our representative’, ‘our agency’ or a law office.

7. At the time that I was growing up in the Midwestern United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was still common to read newspaper reports of newborn infants left on the doorsteps of convents, churches, and other public places by (presumably) unmarried mothers. I recall that such reports invariably resulted in an outpouring of offers and requests (also reported by the media) to adopt the child.

8. The incommensurability of monetary expenditures and psychic or emotional rewards is the theme of a long-running popular series of advertisements by the credit card issuer MasterCard, in which a list of various related purchases and their costs is followed by a description of the beneficiary’s response as ‘priceless’. A recent version of this ad,
which appeared in the August 2006 issue of *Real Simple* magazine features a color photograph of a number of people searching through a grassy field surrounding a ruined stone structure, accompanied by the following text:

- flights to Ireland to find a four-leaf clover: $0
- flights to Vegas to try it out: $0
- flights to Ireland to return defective four-leaf clover: $0
  (traveling for any reason at all: priceless)

The small print explains the ‘$0’ amounts by explaining that use of the reader’s MasterCard during the specified period will qualify him or her for entry in a draw to win 500 round–trip flights to any destination serviced by the participating airlines.

9. Sarah was post-menopausal and Elizabeth was ‘barren’.

REFERENCES


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