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‘Our family picture is a little hint of heaven’: race, religion and selective reproduction in US ‘embryo adoption’

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Abstract People use selective reproductive technologies (SRT) in various family-making practices to assist with decisions about which children should be born. The practice of ‘embryo adoption’, a form of embryo donation developed by white American evangelical Christians in the late 1990s, is a novel site for reconceptualizing SRT and examining how they function among users. Based on ethnographic research conducted between 2008 and 2018 on US ‘embryo adoption’, this study provides an anthropological analysis of media produced by and about one white evangelical couple’s race-specific preferences for embryos from donors of colour. This article shows how racializing processes and religious beliefs function as mutually reinforcing SRT for some ‘embryo adoption’ participants. Evangelical convictions justify racialized preferences, and racializing processes within and beyond the church reinforce religious acts. Race-specific preferences for embryos among white evangelicals promote selective decision-making not for particular kinds of children, a current focus in studies of SRT, but for particular kinds of families. This study expands the framework of SRT to include selection for wanted family forms and technologies beyond biomedical techniques, such as social technologies like racial constructs and religious convictions. Broadly, this article encourages greater attention to religion within analyses about race and reproduction by revealing how they are deeply entwined with Christianity, especially in the USA. Wherever constructions of race and religious convictions co-exist with selective reproductive decision-making, scholars should consider race, reproduction and religion as inextricable, rather than distinct, domains of analysis. 

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KEYWORDS: embryo donation, ‘embryo adoption’, selective reproductive technologies, race, evangelical Christianity, USA

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Introduction

In April 2016, Rachel Halbert gave birth to Black triplets. The Halberts are white Christian missionaries who live in Honduras, and had already adopted two Black children.¹ The couple worked closely with the National Embryo Donation Center (NEDC), a Christian 'embryo adoption' programme based in the USA, to receive two embryos frozen for 15 years following in-vitro fertilization (IVF) from Black American donors. Both embryos implanted and one split into identical twins. A few days following the triplet birth, Aaron Halbert published an op-ed in the *Washington Post* explaining the couple's choice, saying they regarded it as 'the logical outcome of being pro-life' and lamenting that it 'often needs much explaining' (Halbert, 2016).

Within the broader context of assisted reproduction, the Halberts' desire for a family composed of children perceived as racially different from themselves is uncommon. Rather, desires for racial similarity actively shape egg, embryo and sperm selection practices around the world (Adrian, 2019; Cromer, 2019a; Deomampo, 2019; Homanen, 2018; Kroløkke, 2009; Martin, 2014; Moll, 2019; Quiroga, 2007; Roberts, 2012; Thompson, 2009). In US fertility markets, failure to fulfill requests for racial sameness have litigious consequences (Rich, in press; Williams, 2007, 2014), evinced by headline catching lawsuits claiming 'racial mistakes' at fertility clinics that led to the 'wrongful birth' of Black children to white couples. While uncommon among users of assisted reproduction, the Halberts' desire to parent Black children echoes those expressed by other white evangelical couples seeking children of colour through traditional adoption as part of a growing wave of enthusiasm for 'racial reconciliation' among white American evangelical Christians over recent decades. Thus, the Halberts' racialized selection of embryos, reinforced by religious convictions, requires a novel consideration of how race and religion relate within assisted and selective reproduction.²

As the growing body of scholarship on embryo donation for procreation in France (Mathieu, 2019) and around the world suggests (Afshar and Bagheri, 2013; Armuand et al., 2019; Goedeke and Payne, 2009), the practice of 'embryo adoption' is shaped by a confluence of factors that make it distinctly US American. Overproducing and storing human embryos left over en masse from IVF procedures does not occur within many national, religious and cultural contexts (Inhorn, 2006, 2015; Roberts, 2007) as it does in the USA. The under-regulated US fertility industry has distinct 'Wild West' qualities (Inhorn and Birenbaum, 2008) that contribute to the estimated surplus of 1 million embryos in fertility clinic storage across the country (Lomax and Trounson,

2013). The central role of religion in American politics (Brown, 2002; FitzGerald, 2017; Putnam and Campbell, 2012), including opposition to abortion (Ginsburg, 1989; Petchesky, 1990), presented favourable conditions for the emergence of 'embryo adoption' (Cromer, 2019b).

American IVF patients have five options for remaining embryos after they complete any IVF cycles: discard, move to long-term storage, donate to scientific research, donate to an individual or couple for procreation, or 'embryo adoption'. Clinic-based embryo donation programmes began in the early 1980s soon after IVF began. In studies of the first four options, patients tend to rank donation for research and donation for procreation as their least preferred choices (McMahon and Saunders, 2009; Nachtigall et al., 2005), and rates of donation are estimated at less than 10% (Nachtigall et al., 2010). However, donor embryo transfers have increased in the USA since 2000 (Kawwass et al., 2016), and typically occur through one of 200 clinic-based programmes in which staff match donor and recipient patients. Christians opposed to abortion and human embryonic stem cell research developed 'embryo adoption' in the late 1990s. This practice allows donors and recipients to play an active role in mutual selection, and promotes the recognition of embryos as rights-bearing persons (Collard and Kashmeri, 2011; Cromer, 2018; Frith et al., 2011; Paul et al., 2010). In 1997, the California-based Nightlight Christian Adoptions Agency began the Snowflakes embryo adoption programme with the goal of 'rescuing' leftover embryos from 'frozen orphanages' through attempting implantation. Today, eight programmes in the USA offer 'embryo adoption' services. Most allow for directed conditional donations (Frith et al., 2011). A rare model in assisted reproduction worldwide, it permits donors and recipients to rank 'matching' conditions that programme staff use to facilitate mutual selection [for exception, see Frith et al., 2011 on New Zealand policy]. Unlike anonymous, clinic-based donation programmes, giving and receiving clients in 'embryo adoption' must assent to matches and agree upon levels of contact before signing contracts and transferring for pregnancy. To date, the two largest programmes, Snowflakes and NEDC, have together facilitated the birth of over 1200 children to recipient families.

Race-specific preferences are a key feature of 'embryo adoption', much as they are active within other family-making strategies, such as adoption and gamete markets (Cartwright, 2003; Deomampo, 2019; Fox, 2009; Gailey, 2009; Thompson, 2009). Anthropologists Ayo Wahlberg and Tine Gammeltoft describe selective reproductive technologies (SRT) as techniques providing a 'guiding hand' that direct family planning, sorting and decision-making based on what kinds of children are valued or unwanted. Racializing embryos accentuates race as a selectable quality for forming families, and thus racialization in 'embryo adoption' functions as an SRT (Cromer, 2019a).

Building on previous scholarship, this article considers how racializing processes and religious beliefs function as mutually reinforcing SRT in 'embryo adoption' from the vantage of embryo recipients. Desire among a small subset of white recipients in 'embryo adoption' for embryos from donors of colour promotes selective decision-making not for particular kinds of children, a current focus in studies of SRT,

¹ In this article, I approach racial categories as sociohistorical constructs (Omi and Winant, 2014) that require some explanation when used in scholarly analyses. I use the descriptors 'Black' and 'white' to discuss a wide range of racialized peoples and identities. These descriptors reflect my analytic view and, when noted, the expressed racial identities of individuals and groups discussed.

² This article focuses specifically on white-led evangelical movements and congregations, and does not examine or make claims about the various Christian traditions led by Black Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, etc.

but for particular kinds of families. To explain how selection for families occurs among embryo recipients, I examine the role that religious beliefs play in race-specific preferences within reproductive decision-making, and consider them within recent trends in American evangelicalism. The Halberts' story provides an illustrative case. Their desire to parent Black children illuminates how their evangelical convictions justify racialized preferences, and how racializing processes within and beyond the church reinforce religious acts. In developing this argument, I encourage greater attention to religion within scholarship on race and reproductive technologies in order to deepen analyses of what legal scholar Dorothy Roberts (1997) describes as the inextricable ties between reproductive and racial politics in the USA. In so doing, I contribute to a growing literature on race, racialization and racism in studies of Christianity (Schneider and Bjork-James, 2020), reproduction (Bridges, 2011; Davis, 2019; Roberts, 1997; Valdez and Deomampo, 2019; Weinbaum, 2004, 2019) and assisted reproduction (Deomampo, 2016, 2019; Fox, 2009; Moll, 2019; Quiroga, 2007; Russell, 2018; Thompson, 2009). This research also contributes a new array of techniques, sites, people and policies for considering how selective reproduction operates within the underexamined practice of embryo donation for procreation (Wahlberg and Gammeltoft, 2018).

Materials and methods

This article closely examines one family's story encountered during an ethnographic study between 2008 and 2018 on US 'embryo adoption' [see Cromer, 2019a for detailed methods]. Data analysed in this article draw primarily on media produced by and about the Halberts following the birth of their triplets. The analysis developed here is situated in findings from ethnographic research with 'embryo adoption' programme professionals, donors and recipients.

The Halberts' case extends themes from the broader ethnographic study, which utilized three research methods – participant observation, interviews and textual analysis – to examine how race and religion interrelate within a Christian 'embryo adoption' programme that I call 'Blossom'. Considerable efforts have been made to protect the confidentiality of individuals and organizations participating in this study; thus, all names of research subjects and the organization name 'Blossom' are pseudonyms. I conducted 111 formal, semi-structured interviews with 21 'embryo adoption' professionals, 63 embryo recipients and 27 embryo donors. Questions addressed religion, race and ethnic identities, and matching preferences. Interviews with professionals often included questions about race and religious beliefs with respect to norms and variations in participant choices, uncommon cases, promotional efforts and matching challenges.

One of the 63 recipient clients interviewed (representing 50 couples) identified as Asian American and the remainder identified as non-Hispanic white. Of the 27 donors interviewed (representing 23 couples), two identified as Hispanic and the remainder identified as non-Hispanic white. Most of the recipients preferred to be matched with

embryos from donors with a similar racial identity to their own, but there were some exceptions, like the Halberts.

'There is already multi-ethnicity in my family'

The Halberts share many commonalities with the eight recipients interviewed who were open to donors of colour. Four of the white recipient couples interviewed (8%) received embryos from donors who self-identified as Korean/Caucasian, Japanese/Hispanic, Hispanic and Vietnamese. Four additional white recipient couples (8%) expressed willingness to accept embryos from donors of colour but were ultimately matched with embryos from white, non-Hispanic donors. Many, like Lisa and Mark Taye, who received embryos from a Mexican couple, chose openness to donors with any racial identity in order to allow 'God's plan' for their families to unfold. Also, like the Halberts, most in this group were parenting children from transracial adoptions and wanted future children to share racial heritage with their adopted children. Jack and Sally Alder searched online for 'Vietnamese embryos' after Vietnam suspended international adoption services in 2008, in the hope of providing their son adopted from Vietnam with 'a sibling that [sic] would share his ethnicity'. They found five frozen embryos from a Vietnamese couple advertised on the Blossom programme's 'multi-ethnic' webpage. While the donors preferred Asian recipients, they agreed to match with the Alders, who identified as white, after learning that Blossom had no prospective Asian recipients. Blossom and NEDC support 'transracial' matches when recipients claim to have racially diverse families or church communities.

Many Blossom recipients highlighted the importance of racial diversity within their families and church communities as reasons for preferring embryos from donors of colour. For example, the Stantons requested embryos from donors of any racial identity because they knew their church community welcomes transracial adoption:

At our church, there are a fair number of mixed-ethnicity families because of adoption. To see a family walking down hallway at church that doesn't match ethnically or genetically is pretty normal. We knew there would be support in that and it would not be as difficult a challenge as it might normally be.

Anne Jones, a mother of five children born through 'embryo adoption' and evangelical homeschooler, requested embryos from 'multi-ethnic' donors because her extended family was formed through transracial adoption:

One of the nice things is there is already multi-ethnicity in my family. My younger siblings are all African American, so we were actually interested in multi-ethnic embryos, which the embryos we adopted are.

Acknowledging some of the difficulties faced by families formed through transracial adoption, Anne felt certain that children of colour would feel comfortable within her family:

I know that's a lot of the problem with children that are adopted interracially – they may feel like they are the only one in their family that is different than everybody else. We already have a

community where they don't have to feel like they are different from everybody else. There are other ones, though maybe not just like them. We don't have Hispanic currently or Japanese, but [my children] are not the only ones who are different and [they] can see that all the other ones are accepted just as a regular part of the family.

At the same time, Anne expressed a colourblind view of race:

I don't really see race that much. It doesn't affect me or my husband. I know it's there. I see it as an opportunity to learn about their heritage.

A common view among Blossom recipients, colourblindness contrasts with the Halberts' embrace of a 'theology of diversity' that rejects colourblind discourse and advances the idea that God produced racial difference in his image. The Halberts' approach to family-making through 'embryo adoption' reflects a growing wave of enthusiasm for transracial adoption and 'racial reconciliation' among white Christians over recent decades.

'A glimpse of the truth and beauty of the gospel'

Christian congregations embraced adoption in unprecedented ways in the early 21st century (Joyce, 2013). 'Adoption is everywhere', proclaimed an editorial headline in the July 2010 issue of *Christianity Today*, 'and God is into it too'. Journalist Kathryn Joyce observed a 'sea change' that followed a 2007 summit hosted by the Christian Alliance for Orphans, the umbrella organization for the evangelical orphan care and adoption movement. Key Christian leaders in attendance forged a plan that centralized adoption as a 'signature issue' called for by God. Over ensuing years, growing enthusiasm for adoption found expression through establishing 'Orphan Sundays' in congregations worldwide, publishing dozens of popular and scholarly books that espouse 'orphan theology' (Cruver et al., 2010; Merida and Morton, 2011; Moore, 2009), and seeking political opportunities to foreground the so-called 'orphan crisis' as the premier concern for evangelicals. Bethany Christian Services, the nation's largest adoption agency, reported significant increases in adoption enquiries and placements by 2010, which it attributed to the increased mobilization of churches around adoption [Joyce, 2013, p. 56; see Perry, 2017 for a critique of the orphan movement's success]. For the Halberts and other millennial evangelicals, saving orphans and saving souls are similar projects, as Aaron stated, 'near to the heart of God'.

Aaron's op-ed describes a mutual desire to adopt children of colour as an expression of the couple's evangelical faith. 'While we were fertile', Aaron wrote, 'we were both deeply convicted [sic] that one of the ways to be pro-life is to involve ourselves in adoption' (Halbert, 2016). Aaron describes their desire to adopt as a biblical calling:

[A] prevalent theme of the Bible is that God adopts believers into his own family. When we adopt, we are echoing his own

compassionate work, giving the world a glimpse of the truth and beauty of the gospel (Halbert, 2016).

Thus, the Halberts aligned themselves with interpretations of Christian scripture that suggest that adoption represents the conversion of non-Christians who are outside of God's 'family' of believers into a familial relationship with the church (Smolin, 2011).

'Any child except...'

After marrying, the Halberts pursued domestic adoption in Mississippi when they were also trying to conceive together. Aware of problems in American adoption placements that disadvantage children of colour, the Halberts notified the adoption agency of their race-specific preference, saying they 'were willing to accept any child except a fully Caucasian child'. As Aaron explained, 'if the Lord wanted us to have a fully Caucasian child my wife would conceive naturally' (Halbert, 2016). In this, they reflected a trend within American evangelicalism promoting transracial adoptions between white adults and children of colour. While Christian families adopting across racial categories and national boundaries has a long, contentious history in the USA (Briggs, 2012; Dubinsky, 2010; Gordon, 1999; Oh, 2012), scholars of adoption draw attention to growing support for transracial adoption domestically and internationally, noting how it is framed as a Christian mission (Dubinsky, 2010; Joyce, 2013; Smolin, 2011) and supports political opposition to abortion and to government aid to minority mothers (Briggs, 2012; Raible, 2015; Solinger, 2001).

Other adoption scholars link surging support for transracial adoption to the movement for 'racial reconciliation' growing in white evangelical congregations (Marti and Emerson, 2014). According to the Christian authors of 'Orphanology: Awakening to Gospel-Centered Adoption and Orphan Care' (Merida and Morton, 2011), the so-called 'world orphan crisis' 'affords the church a tangible opportunity to live out a God-based ethic of racial relationships and to engage in racial reconciliation to its utmost' (cited in Joyce, 2013, p. 71). Racial diversity has become a status symbol in recent years within Christian congregations seeking what Marti and Emerson (2014) call 'badges of diversity' (e.g. Moore and Walker, 2016). In this context, evangelical 'diversity experts' emerge to address forms of racial conflict, often by focusing on transforming individuals through shared faith rather than addressing systemic forms of oppression (Emerson and Smith, 2001; Marti and Emerson, 2014). Like adoption, racial diversity appeared more prominently in 21st century white-majority evangelical Christian movements, and God, according to movement leaders, seems 'into it' too. White evangelicals' emphasis on racial reconciliation and transracial adoption demonstrates how racializing processes can align with religious practices in a relationship of mutual reinforcement. The Halberts' participation in 'embryo adoption' illustrates this further.

According to Aaron's narrative, soon after adopting their Black children, the Halberts were drawn to 'embryo adoption' due to their religious commitment to the 'protection of the unborn'. 'All life', Aaron wrote, 'no matter how young or old, no matter the stages of

development – has inherent dignity and value’ because ‘every human life bears [God’s] image’ (Halbert, 2016). After talking with a couple who had a child through embryo adoption, the Halberts felt ‘deeply moved by the idea of adding more children to our family by rescuing these tiny lives’ (Halbert, 2016). Given their belief that ‘life begins at conception’, Aaron wrote, ‘we should respond by being willing to support embryo adoption and even take part in it ourselves’ (Halbert, 2016).

The Halberts again encountered questions about race-specific preferences for their family. ‘We were again faced with the question of what ethnicity we would choose for our adopted embryos’, Aaron wrote (Halbert, 2016). According to its website, NEDC typically reserves ‘minority embryos’ for recipients with the same racial identity, but white parents who have adopted transracially can qualify for an exception (National Embryo Donation Center, 2019). The Halberts requested embryos from ‘African American’ donors because, Aaron said, ‘we wanted additional siblings to feel connected to our first two children racially’ (Halbert, 2016). NEDC supported their race-specific selection, which ultimately resulted in Rachel’s triplet birth.

The Halberts’ race-specific preferences for composing their family illustrate how racializing processes and religious beliefs function in tandem as SRT. Race functions as an SRT when embryos are racialized and selected for according to their perceived racial traits. Racializing embryos occurs when the Halberts and NEDC collapse distinctions between the donors’ racial identities into their embryos and project racial imaginaries on to potential children. Charis Thompson describes this collapsing process in egg donation as involving ‘too easy elisions’ (Thompson, 2009, p. 141). Elsewhere, I trace the easy elisions evident within the Blossom programme that reduce embryo donors into two racialized component parts that combine to form a racially distinct set of embryos (Cromer, 2019a). Racializing elisions are evident in the Halberts’ case when Aaron describes their ‘decision to select African American embryos’ and NEDC’s use of the term ‘minority embryos’. The racializing processes by which embryos come to bear racial designation function as a selective technique that guided the Halberts’ sorting decision for what kinds of children and embryos they requested.

Religious belief as an SRT works seamlessly with racializing processes in the Halberts’ case. While Aaron describes making ‘choices’, ‘selections’ and ‘decisions’, the couple ultimately defers the work of selective reproduction to God, including if and how their family takes shape. Discourse about God’s plan for their family, which is very common among evangelical embryo recipients in the Blossom programme, surfaces in remarks Aaron and Rachel make in a promotional video created by NEDC, ‘Three Times the Blessing: the Halberts’ Story’ (National Embryo Donation Center, 2016). Rachel explains that she and Aaron remained open to parenting through adoption or biological conception and ‘God opened the door to adoption first’. Thus, God determined their family would begin with the adoption of children of colour. Crying as he talks about the triplets, Aaron expresses awe in knowing ‘the Lord was considering us [for 15 years before our daughters were born]’. Aaron acknowledges that their family composition ‘is not the way we planned it 12 years ago’, but he and Rachel express gratitude for God’s ‘blessing us with these sweet little ones he

has placed in our care’. As SRT, racializing processes and religious beliefs worked in mutually reinforcing ways to facilitate the selective decisions the Halberts faced within ‘embryo adoption’.

‘Our family picture is a little hint of heaven’

At the turn of the 21st century, some evangelical Christians began challenging colourblindness discourse common in congregations throughout the previous century with a new ‘theology of diversity’ (Thompson, 2017). ‘Jesus is not colorblind’, declared one Baptist pastor in an essay featured on the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention website about the perils of colourblindness (Prince, 2014). Tolerating, rather than celebrating, racial and ethnic diversity prevents Christians from doing God’s work of encouraging love and inclusion.

Armed with scripture references, evangelicals like the Halberts actively encourage the celebration of racial diversity as created by God and in his image. For example, Aaron wrote:

One of the central themes of Christianity is, after all, that God, through His Son, is calling people from every tongue, tribe and nation. Grasping diversity will make the world stronger as we marvel at God’s creative genius on display through His people’s varying pigments, personalities and proficiencies. Our differences are cause for celebration, not scorn (Halbert, 2016).

Each person, he claims, is ‘an image-bearer of God’, which unites all humanity but should not prevent Christians from celebrating God’s ‘creative genius’ in producing racial diversity. Racial differences, Aaron writes, are not ‘insignificant’. Rather, ‘the human family’s varying physical characteristics [are] awesome reminders of God’s creative brilliance’. Instead of seeking colourblindness, the Halberts ‘embrace’ race (Halbert, 2016).

Embracing a theology of racial diversity shaped the Halberts’ desires for a family that looks like God’s racially diverse kingdom. Aaron’s op-ed contrasts his dream with that of a friend who ‘wanted his family to look like a little United Nations’. Aaron says he ‘prefer[s] to take it a step further, daring to hope that our family picture is a little hint of heaven’ (Halbert, 2016). Religious desires for a racially diverse family guided the Halberts towards selecting children and embryos that allowed them to compose their family based on a racialized imaginary about how heaven looks.

Aaron demonstrates his religious commitment to a theology of racial diversity by actively ‘seeing’ race in the contrasting composition of his family’s bodies. A white child of evangelical missionaries in Central America, Aaron felt primed to notice racialized difference from an early age:

[G]rowing up I was very aware of racial diversity because I was the blue-eyed, cotton-topped white kid who stuck out like a sore thumb, but all the while felt deeply connected to the people [in Honduras], even though we looked very different (Halbert, 2016).

He describes ‘sheer delight during this pregnancy watching my son and daughter, with his dark brown skin

and her with the ringlet hair and slightly tan skin, kiss my white wife's growing belly' (Halbert, 2016). He elaborates on some of his 'beautiful and enriching' experiences as part of a white couple parenting Black children:

There is something beautiful and enriching being the only white face sitting and chatting with some of my African-American friends as my son gets his hair cut on a Saturday morning. There is also something wonderful in the relationship that is built as my wife asks a [B]lack friend on Facebook how to care for our little biracial daughter's hair. The beauty of a multi-ethnic family is found there, in the fact that the differences are the very thing that make ours richer and fuller (Halbert, 2016).

Finally, he appreciates that other white evangelical millennials are 'now placing a high priority on life, adoption and multi-ethnic families', as the Halberts do.

Aaron's narrative draws upon race as a visualizing technology (Chun, 2009) to create religious meaning and promote religious actions. By foregrounding fetishistic and exotifying details of his family's contrasting skin colours and hair types, Aaron makes conspicuous racialized bodily differences to demonstrate how their 'family portrait' resembles their racialized vision of heaven. The construction of race in the USA, according to historian Evelyn Hammonds, 'has always been dependent upon the visual' (Hammonds, 2000, p. 306). Religious studies scholar Gerardo Marti (2012) describes 'conspicuous colour' as a strategy common within 21st century, white-majority Christian congregations that embrace a theology of racial diversity. The California congregations in his study use racialized ritual inclusion to make sure that racial diversity is visibly on display within worship rituals, such as centring singers of colour in gospel choirs and other public liturgies. Similarly, the Halberts make racialized differences conspicuous in their family's 'portrait' through exotifying, detailed descriptions of their and their children's bodies. For Christian audiences, doing so frames their race-specific preferences for Black children as driven by religious convictions. According to the Halberts, making selective decisions for Black children and embryos from Black donors allowed them to create a particular kind of family: one that conspicuously reflects and honours God's racially diverse kingdom.

Discussion

Scholars of SRT examine various family-making practices around the world, from gamete donation to IVF, and selecting technologies, such as sperm sorting and prenatal genetic testing, that assist with decisions about which children ought to be born (Gammeltoft and Wahlberg, 2014; Wahlberg and Gammeltoft, 2018). The practice of 'embryo adoption' introduces a novel set of techniques, sites, people and policies for tracing how SRT configure among their users. Focusing on one couple's family-making decisions through 'embryo adoption', I showed how racializing processes and religious beliefs served as mutually reinforcing SRT for determining which embryos to receive. Like other white recipients in 'embryo adoption' desiring embryos from donors of colour, the Halberts' race-specific preferences and religious convictions promoted selective decision-making not for particular kinds of children but for a

particular type of family composition. Aaron and Rachel desired 'conspicuous colour' in their family in order to make visible their Christian commitment to a theology of racial diversity.

Criticisms of the recent evangelical movement for racial reconciliation and its embrace of racial diversity for failing to address systemic racism (Emerson and Smith, 2001; Oyakawa, 2019; Tisby, 2019) raise questions about how the families formed through these technologies fare. Future researchers might investigate how children born through transracial 'embryo adoption' identify and feel about the growing enthusiasm for transracial adoption, emphases on racial diversity within white-majority congregations, and their role in their parents' conspicuous colour strategies. Adult adoptees of colour raised in white Christian families already offer critical perspectives on some of these questions (Kim, 2012; Roorda, 2015; Trenka et al., 2006), and draw attention to what scholars of assisted reproduction might anticipate among children born through transracial embryo donation practices.

In addition to introducing new techniques, sites, people and policies to scholarly literature on SRT, examining the practice of 'embryo adoption' presents opportunities for expanding the SRT framework (c.f. Adrian, 2019; Stockey-Bridge, 2018). I have argued that selective practices not only produce particular kinds of children, as demonstrated by Wahlberg and Gammeltoft (2018), but shape and are shaped by desires for particular kinds of families. Broadening the SRT analytic framework to include strategies for composing desired families, or avoiding unwanted family forms, would elicit new insights about a wide range of assisted reproduction users. While pronounced desires for particular family forms can be expected among white evangelicals who use family discourses in religious and political practices (Bjork-James, 2020), they also shape selective decisions among people very different from the Halberts in religious belief, sexual orientation, racial identity, etc. For example, cultural studies scholar Jaya Keaney (2019) shows how queer Australian families conceived via third party reproduction make race-specific decisions to forge multiracial families as an expression of queer kinship (Mamo, 2007).

This study also encourages the analysis of SRT beyond biomedical techniques common in scholarship on SRT, such as sperm sorting and genetic testing. My argument that racializing processes and religious convictions function as technologies within 'embryo adoption' builds on feminist scholarship that retheorizes conventional conceptions of technologies beyond the biomedical, which have generated theories of race, gender, kinship, biology, etc. as technologies, or powerful tools with effects in the world (Chun, 2009; de Lauretis, 1987; Franklin, 2013; Strathern, 1992). Expanding the conceptualization of 'technologies' in scholarship on SRT would expand analytic potential to include other social forces at work within family-making desires and decisions.

Race and religion, I maintain, function as mutually reinforcing technologies within the selective practices of some 'embryo adoption' participants. This argument contributes to a growing body of scholarship on assisted reproduction that conceptualizes race as a technology (Cromer, 2019a; Deomampo, 2016, 2019; Moll, 2019; Russell, 2018). It also encourages greater consideration of

religious ideologies and convictions as SRT. Scholars of SRT have made important contributions by examining religious cosmologies and local moralities that shape how people engage with selective reproduction (Gammeltoft, 2008; Ivry and Teman, 2019; Roberts, 2007; Simpson, 2009). Yet within this literature, few consider how religious beliefs function as technologies that guide selective acts.

Cases like the Halberts' provoke questions for further research within other selective reproduction arenas. What role do religious figures play in selective decision-making within other religious traditions and selective reproduction practices? The Halberts maintained that God guided the creation of their family. According to Aaron, God determined that 'race could play a major role' in how his family was formed. How do religious convictions shape how people employing SRT see their selective acts as religious? The Halberts described their race-specific preferences for children of colour as guided by desires to act in adherence with their evangelical faith. In order to create a 'little hint of heaven' in their own family's composition, the Halberts framed their race-selective decisions as religious actions, such as remaining open to God's will, praying for God's guidance, and walking through doors that God opened. Answers to such questions in other contexts would illuminate how religion itself functions as a selective technology rather than merely a context for interpreting and using it.

More generally, this article encourages greater attention to religion within analyses about race and reproduction, especially in the USA. We currently know very little about how race and religion interrelate to shape assisted reproduction practices. Cases like the Halberts' triplet birth provide an occasion to consider these intersections and their stakes. Exploring the explicit entwinements of race and American evangelicalism within the context of 'embryo adoption' also raises questions about their more covert entanglements: how might Christian logics underlying early American racial classifications and racist science (Goetz, 2012; Keel, 2018) find new expression within the resurging forms of racial science in contemporary reprogenetics? How are the 'familiar grammars' of Christianity, race and reproduction structuring the recent resurgence of white Christian nationalism in the USA, Britain, Europe and other parts of the world (Franklin and Ginsburg, 2019)? Exploring such queries may reveal that the inextricable ties between reproduction and race in the USA (Roberts, 1997) are also deeply entangled with Christianity. In other locales around the world, scholars could investigate how secularized expressions of religious principles, such as authors in this special issue reveal about Catholicism in France, subtend policies and practices concerning race within assisted reproduction.

Conclusion

The Halberts' story is particularly American and peculiar in a cross-culturally comparative frame, as research presented in this special issue indicates. However, the insights afforded by examining their case as an example of selective reproduction and through feminist conceptualization of technologies may be applied to practices in places well beyond the USA. Wherever conceptions of race and religious

convictions co-exist with selective reproductive decision-making, scholars of assisted reproduction may do well to recognize that race, reproduction and religion are inextricable, rather than distinct, domains of analysis.

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