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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2014

## Guest Post: An Adoptee's Reaction to MTV's Generation Cryo

By Kristi Blazi Lado

I'll admit that that my ignorance on donor conception was somewhat willful. The human rights abuses in adoption has occupied so much of my psychological space that I just haven't been open to learning about something that had so much potential to be worse.

When I first saw the promos for MTV's *Generation Cryo*, my first thought was *for the love of all-that-is-holy, no doorstep ambushes, Jersey Shore behavior, or anything that would make people who are searching for biological relatives look like lunatics.* I'm glad I gave it a chance because not only was the subject was treated respectfully but I was able to fully appreciate the parallels between adoptees and the donor-conceived.

*Generation Cryo* is a documentary series following sperm donor-conceived Breeanna Speicher in her journey to find her biological father. Bree tours the country to meet some of her 15 half-siblings that she discovered through the Donor Sibling Registry, a non-profit organization created to help siblings connect with each other and possibly their donors. A few agree to travel to California to support Bree in her search. In watching this show, I observed family dynamics that were glaringly similar, if not identical to closed adoption situations.

### Parental Pressure

Many of the young adults in this show were very worried about hurting their parents, particularly their fathers, and in the worst cases were saddled with managing their parents' feelings of insecurity. Some seemed to accept this as being their responsibility and (much like in-the-fog adoptees) modeled their parents' attitudes toward the donor. In the worst cases, meeting the donor was seen as an act of disrespect to the parents.

It was very sad to witness Jonah and Hilli's dad, Eric, struggle with not being their genetic father and the effect it had on his family. He admits that he was hesitant to tell his children how they were conceived because he wanted them to be "his" kids. He remarked, "Adding donor... adding siblings is not my definition of family." Eric's wife, Terri, is the only one in their family that expresses interest in meeting the donor. I love what she says in response to Eric's disapproval: "I would want to know where they came from because that would help me know my children better." Exactly. Isn't that why adoptees search? *We want to know ourselves better.*

Eric wasn't the only parent with unresolved issues. When Paige and Molly inform their mother of the donor's name she looked less-than-pleased remarking, "This is going to hurt him [their father] a lot... more than you know," and "You are mine. I don't want to share you with him."

Luckily for Breeanna, her two mothers were very supportive of her search. I couldn't help but notice that the three siblings expressing the most interest in meeting the donor – Breeanna, Jesse, and Jayme – were the three that didn't grow up with a father figure. I don't feel this is a coincidence. It seemed easier for these families to deal with the idea of having the donor in their lives because there was no perceived threat to an existing father's role.

The parents' approval of the siblings' relationships, while being a great thing, also (in my opinion) exposes the hypocrisy of those who disapproved of their children finding the donor. In other words, relationships with biological relatives are considered healthy & ok as long as nobody feels as if they are being replaced. It was obvious to me that the ease of which the siblings relate to one another was likely due to the fact that their parents were not threatened by these relationships.

This show has strengthened my conviction that the degree to which the parents have come to grips with their infertility and accepted the truth of their child's origins will have a significant impact on the level of anxiety that child will feel about searching for his roots.

If we are going to place children in the position of being adopted or donor-conceived, we must correct the notion that the children, the products of these institutions, are responsible for their parents' happiness. Specifically, they should

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not be expected to tiptoe around the subject of their beginnings in order to fulfill their parents' dreams of having a 100% biological family. Parents: The reality is that other people helped create your children. You chose this. It is your responsibility as a parent to help your child process this reality in a healthy way. It is perfectly normal and natural for a person to want to know the families that contributed their DNA. *It is what makes a person what they are, and that is very important.* Please treat it as such.

Even some siblings whose parents were very supportive of their contact with the biological father worry about hurting the parent(s) who raised them. Adoptees, even those with open and supportive families, almost always worry about hurting their adoptive parents as well. Why is this so? The notion that there can only be one mother and one father in a family seems to be deeply embedded in our culture. How many of us adoptees have been asked if we want to know our "real" (biological) parents, or outright told that our adoptive parents are the only set that should be considered "real"? We are conditioned to try to make all families fit in the nuclear model which, in an adoptive or donor family, is a denial of truth. Whether the child is an adoptee or donor-conceived, the bare fact is separate individuals are fulfilling roles that we traditionally define as "mother" or "father." One or both individuals that contributed everything we are made of are not the one(s) that parented us. Both are equally important components of who we are.

#### Do donor-conceived individuals experience "the fog" like we do?

First the positive... and this is huge. I love, love, LOVE, the way the siblings in this show came together and (despite their varying attitudes toward the donor) genuinely supported one other. As an adoptee (and my natural mother's only child), this is something that gave me a stab of... what's the word? Not jealousy but *longing*. I would have been ecstatic if I'd found siblings at the *end* of my search. What a gift it would have been to have been supported *during* my search by siblings who understood my exact situation.

That said, many of the siblings had ambivalence toward the donor or unwillingness to deal with the feelings surrounding their conception.

Some adoptees describe what is known in our circles as "the fog" to be a Stockholm Syndrome of sorts. That is not to say that adoptive parents are aggressive captors (usually) but the child feels like he must identify with or mirror his parents' feelings about his birth parents (and anything else having to do with his adoption) in order to function within the family unit.

Hilit and Jonah express over and over that they do not wish to meet the donor. I have to wonder what seems obvious to us adoptees: Are they convinced they feel this way because they've repeated it so many times to placate their father? Would they feel the same way if Eric had been more open??

Sometimes "the fog" is simply a denial or repression of feelings that threaten to become overwhelming. Bree's half-brother, Jesse Bogden, had very supportive parents. His father had taken the initiative to find his siblings on the Donor Sibling Registry when Jesse was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and encouraged him to know more about the donor. However, Jesse was uncomfortable with his emotions about being donor-conceived. He admitted that in the past he did not talk about it and had reacted with anger when his father found his siblings. He also told Bree of insensitive comments made to him by extended family about not being blood-related. Even his sister said she was "more of a miracle" because she was conceived naturally (at which point I had to refrain from throwing something at the television). Ironically, when the siblings obtain a yearbook picture of the donor, they think Jesse looks the most like him. When he balks, Breeanna jokingly says he's in denial (she was right). Thankfully, in the end Jesse was more at ease with his circumstances and seemed to have benefited from knowing his siblings.

I personally identified with the scene after the siblings find out the donor's name. They all sat in silence and Bree remarks, "I feel like I forget how to feel." Jonah responds, "Because you're so used to blocking it out." Whether in or out of the fog, numbing can be a major defense mechanism our brains employ to avoid being overwhelmed with emotion. It can sometimes take a significant amount of time for adoptees to process new information about their origins because they must rewrite their entire narrative. This seems no different for the participants in *Generation Cryo*.

#### Human Rights (or lack thereof)

We'll start with the scene where a handful of the siblings pay a visit to the California Cryo Bank to see if they can make contact with their genetic father. My stomach turned when I saw the process was almost identical to an adoption agency. The representative for the cryo company explained that they would send a letter to the donor letting him know his offspring want to meet him. If there was no response, they would assume this was a "no" and would take no further action.

Shortly afterwards, Breeanna decides to strike out on her own to find the donor because the cryo bank, "Didn't seem to be moving at the speed of light." We hear you, sister.

One of the most contentious moments of the series was when Breeanna and her half-brother Julian disagree over their right to contact the donor. Julian had previously attempted to make contact through the cryo bank with no luck, but called searching for donor independently "immoral." He says of the donor, "People do this thinking they're gonna have ultimate anonymity because that's what the cryo bank ensures."

It pains me to hear someone so perfectly willing to give up on knowing his genetic other half because he might disrupt the guy's life. It shows just how much we are programmed as adoptees/cryo kids to accept that our needs are secondary.

Bree remarks that, "It's dumb to think you're going to bring kids into the world and they're not going to be interested in you at all." I concur. If you participate in creating a human being, no matter what the means, you have a minimal responsibility to allow them access to their ancestry, inform them of your ongoing medical history, and (even if it's just once) allow them look into your eyes.

Julian asserts that the donor was, "just making money and that's fine." No Julian, it shouldn't be fine.

I see a huge need for proper counseling of donors & recipients. By proper, I mean *completely* informing both parties of what they will potentially have to deal with in the future as the result of their decisions.

I would imagine the reason cryo banks don't appear to be doing this is similar to adoption agencies: It isn't in their best interest because money is the first priority, not human beings. If either party (donor/birth parents or receiving/adoptive parents) was fully aware of what they were getting into there would potentially be less product (people willing to donate/give up children) and less demand for said product (gametes & embryos or children available for adoption).

Just as I am in favor of open adoptions, I am completely against donor anonymity. I'm not convinced that this industry should exist, period, but if it has to, let's ensure that the child's rights to know who they came from are intact.

Remember my fear that the cryo industry might be worse than the adoption industry?

I had the pleasure of speaking with The Donor Sibling Registry founder, and *Generation Cryo* associate producer Wendy Kramer, who confirmed that cryogenics practices are as out-of-control as adoption, if not more so. "It's the wild

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west in terms of the law," she states, explaining that Cryo companies are not required by law to keep accurate records (or any records for that matter) about their donors or who purchases sperm/eggs/embryos. "The largest sibling group on our registry is about two-hundred. And that's just the people who registered with DSR. These companies proclaim to have strict limitations on the size of each sibling group. Clearly with some, this is not the case." In other words, we have a full-blown public health issue on our hands, especially if large sibling groups *who do not know they are siblings* are concentrated in one geographic area.

For years Wendy has advocated for laws that would regulate gamete donation practices, including restricting how many offspring are generated from each donor and the abolishment of donor anonymity. Her frustrations are painfully similar to adoptees' struggles to change closed records laws. "We're up against a 3 billion dollar industry. They can afford to have lobbyists in D.C. blocking every effort to regulate their practices." Sound familiar?

#### Advocating for the Offspring

So why have I chosen to write about donor conception for a site dedicated to adoption? Because when you zoom out and examine the whole picture, they're essentially the same industry. They have different means to a common end, and way too often people fool themselves into thinking *the end justifies the means*. Both exhibit a common problem: We are doing what might be convenient for the adults in the situation with little regard for the person who will bear the brunt of the consequences.

My plea to society in both cases is: If we aren't putting our children first, where are our priorities? Justice for ALL is thought to be a value in this country. We are stripping children of their basic human right to know where they came from and downplaying this injustice by reminding them how lucky they are to be alive. This is not acceptable, and should never have been tolerated in the first place.

Infant adoptions and donor-assisted conceptions are multi-billion dollar industries which put the paying customer first, and often put the child's needs dead last. There is a dire need for parent education, strict regulation, and the protection of the child's rights under the law.

Otherwise, we are allowing the brokering of human life.

Learn more about the [Donor Sibling Registry](#).  
Watch full episodes of [Generation Cryo](#).

#### About the author

Kristi was adopted through the closed domestic system in Pennsylvania. Formerly an associate producer for cable TV's *Forensic Files*, she has since become an independent writer and advocate for open records. She has served as a board member for Adoption Forum of Philadelphia and recently co-founded C.A.R.E.S., a support forum for those conceived by rape. [www.cares-group.org](http://www.cares-group.org)

Posted by Julie Stromberg

Labels: [adoptees](#), [adoption](#), [donor conceived](#), [ethics](#), [Generation Cryo](#), [MTV](#), [reunion](#)

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Dana 58p · 4 hours ago

+2

Probably human cultures think a person only has one mother and one father because... a person only has one mother and one father. Even with these three-donor situations they are coming up with now, the third donor is only donating mitochondria--she's got nothing to do with the nucleic DNA that programs pretty much everything physical about us.

The problem isn't that no one's accepting more than two parents but that some people have put too much time into brainwashing stepchildren, adoptees, and donor-conceived into thinking that raising a child is exactly as important as giving that child life (it's not; without a living child you will hardly have a child to raise) and not enough time into inventing new words that signify new concepts. We have no words for "genetic stranger to a child who raises that child to adulthood." We especially have no pet names that signify these relationships, which would better help a child conceptualize what the actual relationship is instead of replacing the biological parents in their minds.

This is a problem, and it needs solving. We don't need any more brainwashing--either of children or of society.

And speaking of replacing biological parents. That's the hypocrisy that "really" stands out to me about these social parents of the donor-conceived. They had absolutely no problem replacing the biological parent. Now they're afraid it will be done to them. I see the same attitude among adoptive parents and it really makes me ill. If you don't want it done to you, here's a shocking idea: don't do it to anyone else!

**Reply** [1 reply](#) · active 2 hours ago

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dmdezigns 26p · 2 hours ago

+1

I disagree that a person can only have one mother and one father. Maybe from a genetic standpoint that's true. But I as a person get to decide who I consider a mom and dad. I consider my mom, my bio dad, and my aunt to be parents. I have 2 moms because my mom left me with my aunt for 4 years. My aunt has been the one always there no matter what. I am not "brainwashed" into thinking I have 2 moms. I honor my aunt as a mom because of the role she has played in my life. I also honor my mom for the same reason. I do not however honor my adoptive step dad who was abusive. I don't even consider him a dad to me no matter what the law says.

When we were going through fertility treatments, a cousin of mine donated her eggs. I was okay with that as we knew the family (since it was mine) and there would always be knowledge of identity there. When we had to consider anonymous egg donors, I just couldn't do it. I felt more comfortable with adoption. I understand the issues there. I can at least attempt to keep lines of information open and to get as much info for our kids as possible. My kids have another set of parents out there. I didn't replace them and they won't replace me. We each will fulfill different roles in their lives, just like my mom and my aunt.

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Bill Cordray · 1 hour ago

+1

Excellent article, Kristi.

As a donor conceived adult, I did not have anyone like Bree for support after my mother's disclosure in 1983. I was 37 then and had long suspected I was conceived in an affair. My younger DC brother had just died before the disclosure and my dad had died the year before. My two brothers and I, all from three different donors, did not know that each of us had suspicions. The one that died, however, confronted my mother when he was afraid he was dying from a staph infection in his spine. That was when I was in the Navy and he was a sophomore in High School, 20 years before his death. He also thought he'd been conceived in an affair and wanted to know who his genetic father was before he died. She disclosed his donor conception but on the condition that he would not tell my youngest brother and me. He bought into the story that our dad could be his father since then instructed our parents to have sex after the insemination. It is a ridiculous idea that donor sperm is some kind of drug that can cure a husband's infertility. I returned a few years later and found my brother had become alienated from me, having this secret burdening him. He never disclosed to me.

After knowing no other DI adult for four years, I finally joined an adoption support group. They were the only people who really understood how I felt about my loss of identity before the disclosure and the ache of mystery afterwards.

I became an advocate for the end of anonymity and, more importantly, for parents disclosing the truth early on. I gave many workshops on the impact of DI at the American Adoption Congress, where I felt I finally had found meaningful support. Since then, I have made contact with almost three or four hundred other DI adults and have a strong sense of community with them as well as with adopted people. However, many DC adults don't see the analogy with adoption rights. It is a struggle to get them to see it since, like most in society, they have little comprehension of the issues in adoption.

Anonymity is doomed, in my opinion, since so many of us are finding siblings and genetic fathers, not just through Wendy's Donor Sibling Registry but through familytreeDNA and other DNA web sites. The older DC adults have little success on DSR, since we came from the era before the advent of sperm banks and donor numbers. Our records may never have been kept at all. But our DNA is the one record of our identity that can't be hidden anymore, unlike dubious records and misleading information from sperm banks or gynecologists. It is real and we carry that record in ourselves.

Last March I identified my mother's gynecologist as my genetic father and since found four other wonderful siblings through these DNA sites. Weaving the tapestry of our various genetic matches together with genealogical information from incredible sites like those of the LDS Church, we can determine so much more than the sperm banks and gynecologists ever expected to be revealed. It amazes me to be able to send a sample of my saliva to various labs and determine who was the man who used his sperm for my creation in November 1944, almost 69 years ago. Despite his efforts to remain anonymous, his identity and those of hundreds of thousands of other secret fathers are potentially available through determined efforts. Even without legislative oversight, an unlikely possibility anyway, anonymity can no longer be guaranteed. I hope more adopted people will accelerate their search through these sources.

Bill Cordray  
My recent post [Guest Post: An Adoptee's Reaction to MTV's Generation Cryo](#)

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 lee h. · 1 hour ago 0

Kristi... what a thoughtful piece you have written. I have steered away from that show, and now I may watch. I was especially struck by the adoptive mom's comment, "you are mine." My adoptive father has sent that message by proxy for my mom who raised me as long as I can remember. I belong to no one.

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 Donor Conceived · 37 minutes ago +1

fantastic article Kristi, as a donor conceived person I agree with what you wrote and thankyou for helping to bring this to light

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Donor Conceived

fantastic article Kristi, as a donor conceived person I agree with what you wrote and thankyou for helping...  
» 37 minutes ago

lee h.

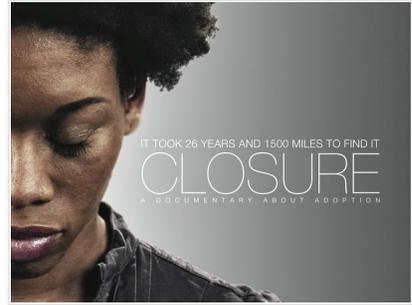
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