

Father Time

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Subject(s):

[anonymous sperm donation](#), [mandatory gamete registry](#), [donor-conceived offspring](#)

Mandatory registry: Earlier this week, a Canadian court issued an order that prevented anyone from destroying any records they have about sperm, egg or embryo donation ["Donor Babies," by Craig Malisow, November 6]. The court was responding to a class-action lawsuit filed by Olivia Pratten, whose parents used donor sperm 27 years ago. Pratten has been searching for almost a decade for information about the man who donated the sperm that makes up one-half of her genetic material. But she has no way of getting access to any records about him, and she doesn't even know if any records still exist.

If she lived in the United States, she would have no access to this information. In most cases, donor-conceived offspring have no rights to know anything about their genetic origins. In many cases, their parents never have told them that they are donor-conceived. If they do search, then the sperm bank or egg provider may have already destroyed the records or refuse to give out any information, even medical information that might be extremely important to the donor-conceived and their family.

Many donor-conceived offspring feel a very strong need to know where they come from: They want to know their genetic, medical and ancestral histories. Most also want to know the identity of their biological fathers.

When other countries have considered the best interests of the child, they have come to the conclusion that anonymity violates the basic human rights of the donor-conceived and as a consequence, many countries have ended donor anonymity. Donor anonymity is now banned in England, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and numerous other countries.

As more and more donor-conceived offspring and their parents search for their donors, there has been increasing interest in establishing a national gamete donor registry in the U.S. We propose the development of a National Mandatory Donor Gamete Data Bank. The purpose would be to collect and safeguard records that link donor-conceived offspring to their genetic and biological origins. All fertility clinics, sperm banks and egg recruiters would be required, by federal law, to participate. The bank would provide information about donors once the offspring reached the age of 18 or, perhaps in some cases, even earlier. For this to happen, Congress must enact legislation requiring that fertility clinics, sperm and egg banks, and physicians' offices maintain records for each child born through donor gametes.

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Online readers weigh in:

Identity issues: Malisow's story reads, "The Society's spokesman, Sean Tipton, also points out that while the folks on the Donor Sibling Registry might criticize the industry, there are thousands of donor-conceived children out there who don't appear to have these identity issues, and who don't make any noise."

Yes, this is true, but only because 90 percent of heterosexual couples never tell their children the truth about their conception. It is because of this deception that the majority of donor-conceived people are then silent. There's no proper education or counseling at the sperm banks for donors or parents about the needs of the donor-conceived and the curiosities so many of them are living with. It is an innate human desire to want to know where you come from. These parents and donors are therefore not able to make fully educated decisions about the process.

Comment by wendy from Nederland,

Colorado

Not true: Many donor kids know the truth and don't care.

Comment by Ohiomom from leftblank

No anonymity: I don't think any of us are saying that donor insemination is wrong — it's the anonymous part that upsets us. I don't think any parent who chose this route thought at the outset, "This will harm my child, but I don't care." I think it's more thoughtlessness on their part and greed on the part of the industry. They desperately wanted that little baby, but nobody bothered to tell them the effect it would have on their kids. Nobody bothered to point out they were denying that little baby what they've always had and taken for granted — a complete history and family tree.

And to all those parents who think that this is other people's kids — I have never told my mother how I feel about her choice. I could be your kid resenting the heck out of you for making a bad choice.

Comment by Maira from Anonymous, USA

Not family: A guy jerked off in a cup and got paid for it. His sperm was then used to impregnate a woman (for whatever the reason and circumstances). The donor was paid for his sperm, not to be a parent, then or later in life. There was no emotional connection between the mother and the donor. They didn't date. They didn't have a one-night stand and never see each again. There is no lost love crying out for a romantic ending. What exactly does Kathleen want from this man if she does find him? They are complete strangers. There is no emotional tie (although she appears to have created one). They share DNA, which links them genetically, but certainly does not make them "family."

Comment by Steve

The incest question: What if you were conceived with donor sperm, grew up and then dated a sibling without knowing it? Do you just go for it and hope for the best? I see they scatter these samples all over the country. It seems like they're acting more on faith than anything else. Seriously, wouldn't you like to have some background knowledge? Isn't there a health issue to consider here? What if your secret donor father has a history of medical illness and you don't know about it?

Comment by Anse from Houston