

"Remember that your joy as a parent is a direct result of your child's first loss."

From "The Language of Blood" by Jane Jeong Trenka.

The debate around the 'right' to procure donor gametes in order to parent, focuses primarily on the 'child'. And yet a human only undergoes childhood for a period of 9 to 12 years, over their total lifespan.

The entire focus of the debate rests on 'having a baby' yet a human only remains a baby for 1-1/2 years of a life that could continue for 80+ years.

Once a human reaches the age of puberty, at approximately 12-13, they develop abstract thinking:

*"Adolescence is the time when many people reach Piaget's highest level of intellectual development, that of formal operations, which is characterised by the ability to think abstractly." (*Adolescence Life Span Development 1st Aust Ed. Gething, Hatchard, Papalia, Olds, p.284)*

'It is during this time that humans become obsessed with developing an individual identity. According to Erikson (1968) the chief task of adolescence is to resolve the conflict of identity versus identity confusion. The desirable outcome is a sense of oneself as a unique human being with a meaningful role to play in society. " (p.296)

"The search for identity is a lifelong search which comes into focus during adolescence and may recur from time to time during adulthood." (p296)

Donor conceived adolescents who are either conceived by anonymous donation or are awaiting identity release when they turn 18, will struggle with identity during its most intense period

"it's a bit weird when you turn 13, look in the mirror and notice that you don't look like your father" (Michael Walker, donor-conceived adult)

Artificial Reproduction Technology is a science, but the product of this scientific activity is a human being. Human beings are about emotions - therefore ART is about emotions.

Current supporters of ART believe that legislation which recognises the right of children to receive information about their biological origins should erase any identity problems donor conceived may suffer. As the partner of a donor who met with and developed a strong bond with his donor offspring, I see this as an extreme simplification of a very complex situation:

My partner Michael Linden had donated his sperm in the 70's when he was a student and discovered in November 2001 the existence of a donor conceived son (then 18) and a daughter (then 20). As their 'donor', there was no legal or moral obligation for him to have more than a polite and formal exchange with his 'donor offspring'. We were informed that all that was required of him, under these

exceptional circumstances, was a handshake and a presentation of information and photos, followed by a cheerful wave goodbye to his grateful donor conceived children as they went off into their lives, probably never to be heard from again, besides the odd email.

Through the use of language couched in words laden with connotations of charity such as 'donor', 'donation', 'grateful for gift of life', 'grateful for coming forward' 'no legal or moral obligation' it was ensured that _____ and all other donor conceived offspring are considered the beneficiaries of charity, and should be forever grateful, not just for the gift of life, but also because they were loved and wanted.

Behind this facade of terminology lies an explosion of human emotion so laden that the only way to deal with it is to dehumanize it and, as a result, the people created in this way are robbed of basic human rights. For example, human rights defined in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child do not apply to donor conceived people.

As a result ART has been allowed to balloon and grow at an incredible rate, ever increasing and actively growing unchecked. Most research is skewed to support ART and when adult donor conceived do try to claim some rights they are dismissed or ignored.

It struck me quite soon after meeting _____ that she was grieving the fact that she hadn't been raised by her biological father: that he hadn't held her as a baby, seen her first steps, heard him say daddy, speak her first words, take her to ballet, watch her grow, help her become a person. She missed not knowing her half sisters, wished she had grown up with them, gone to the same school, argued with them. Like her, they were beautiful, intelligent, artistic, they too excelled in illustration, music, had attended ballet classes. It was clear that she was 'homesick' and dealing with the losses. These are the same losses experienced by adoptees.

Unlike naturally conceived people, and even adoptees, donor conceived are expected to remain forever thankful for their lives, they are effectively gagged from any form of honest expression of feelings of loss and grief over the pain of not knowing their biological parent, grandparents, aunts, uncles, half siblings or having access to their identity, history, or any information whatsoever about half their biological family. These people are purpose built to help people create families and, because their birth relieves the parents of the pain of infertility, these offspring are expected to go through life happy because they were 'loved and wanted' and, unlike the rest of us, were 'offered' the gift of life.

It is as if they are psychologically blackmailed into 'protecting' their social parent(s), from the pain of being infertile and any attempts to locate their biological parents or any expression of loss and grief is seen as disloyalty to the parents who so loved and wanted them.

Naturally conceived people are also loved and wanted yet they are never made to feel that

they should feel grateful for their lives. While parents of donor conceived children feel that their love for their child will more than compensate for any feelings of grief and loss or identity confusion their children may one day suffer most parents know no amount of being loved and wanted by a parent will compensate for an individual adult's feelings of loss and grief or identity confusion.

"We have the fundamental questions that everyone has growing up. Where did I come from? Who am I? Is my biological parent like me? Do I have their eyes, their nose, their hair? What are their interests? What nationality are they? And I could continue on for a long while, but I think you should get the picture. We have a huge gap of missing information about ourselves.

I want to meet my donor too. I would never want to intrude on his life, or stalk him, that's just crazy! We only want answers to help shape our identities.

I always think that, hey I would have enough respect if he has his own life that he doesn't want me to be a part of. I think I could come to terms with that if he respected that fact that I need to know this information. I always try to think from his point of view and I know that if (and I would never) I ever donated an egg I would at least give this person the information that they desire about myself. Donating something that will create a human being, is not something I think anyway should be able to just do and walk away from.

*I look at people on trains and in the street wondering if he is walking past me, but that gets tiring, so I often try to avoid making eye contact with anyone. If someone looks at me for a second longer than usual I suspect it's because I look like someone they know, and maybe they think I could be someone child that they know, or maybe they just think I have a nice bracelet. This is what we go through each day. So to have our questions answered, would be a BLESSING. And then I could get on with my life feeling more content with the world.
Rel."*

Cryobank shopping, overseas fertility trips and creating new families through ART is changing the language of conception. Within ART gametes is referred to as 'human tissue' or 'genetic material', new terminology around procreation is eroding our fundamental understanding of human creation.

"To me, donor sperm and my relationship to it was just a means to an end, not an emotional attachment to the description of a genetic profile. In fact, I changed donors mid cycle my first time, deciding the first donor wasn't as motile as I was paying for. For me that felt like choosing between blue car or a black one, I was going to get the car bottom line.

My emotional attachment and commitment is to my child(ren), not to the contents of a vial. I see them as totally separate things, so no I don't think the process I used to pick a donor for my child affects her in the least. For me, the creating was the end result of a series of decisions I made, and the beginning of an ongoing process of raising my kids. That's the creating." (anon).

ART also severs ties with our genetic heritage thus cutting people off from what roots humans to their existence. Allowing those who cannot conceive, and those who support them, to change the language of human creation serves to pervert and mutate our appreciation of human creation. While many enjoy plotting their family tree and researching family histories donor conceived people are barred from this experience. They are forced to live their lives according to a double standard.

People are now 'shopping' for children. And for the children of these 'New Families' one half of their entire family has been wiped from existence. They will carry with them through life a brief non-identifying description of their parent and a faint hope of meeting them someday. For some it will be when they turn 18. Never has so much hope and faith been placed in such a vague promise.

Donor offspring, are highly vulnerable human beings, possibly having spent most of their lives thinking about their 'mystery' parent. It doesn't matter how good the parenting is, or how well the child has been raised, some of the children of these conceptions will be hurt by the fact that essentially 50% of their identity has been taken away.

ART cannot escape the fact that all children eventually have questions about their biological parents because whether the technology is there or not, it's the order of life. Technology does not and cannot change that need.

Donor Conception in its current practice is a form of abuse. It has been 30 years since donor conception became commonplace and there are now enough donor conceived adults with strong views and opinions about the moral and legal ethics of assisted reproduction and the majority believe that this practice does not take their feelings into consideration.

These people are not being heard or listened to and this is evidenced by the fact that, rather than conducting inquiries into the emotional and physical impacts of the practice of encouraging people to 'donate' their children to strangers, most inquiries are into the feasibility of extending the services of assisted reproduction. Children's rights and human rights are still being overlooked.

Surely it is time to listen to the voices of the people conceived through ART and a more humane framework needs to be implemented to protect the welfare and rights of the donor conceived. At best the practice should be aligned with the rights of adoptees.

These rights should be offered retrospectively to all donor conceived adults who were conceived using donor sperm. These people have the right to know the name of their biological parent(s) and have this included on their birth certificates.

It is time that we looked at ART and its role in family creation from the perspective of addressing basic human instincts and values rather than the current viewpoint of merely satisfying desires, wants and presumed rights.