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**Review: *Finding Our Families: A First-of-Its-Kind Book for Donor-Conceived People and Their Families*****Posted by Diane Beeson, *Biopolitical Times* guest contributor on March 26th, 2014**

For millions today, the concept of family is being redefined. Modern assisted reproduction techniques have enabled infertile couples (straight or gay) and people without partners to have children, and to be genetically related to their children, but in a non-traditional way.

These children have a genetic link to only one parent, while also being genetically related to a person not involved in their upbringing – the “donor” of sperm or eggs, who often remains anonymous. Such arrangements, which have become increasingly common over the past couple decades, raise an important question for those conceived via “donor” egg or sperm: Is secrecy about their origins in the children’s interest?

The answer to this question is a resounding No, according to Wendy Kramer and Naomi Cahn, the authors of *Finding Our Families: A First-of-Its-Kind Book for Donor-Conceived People and Their Families*.

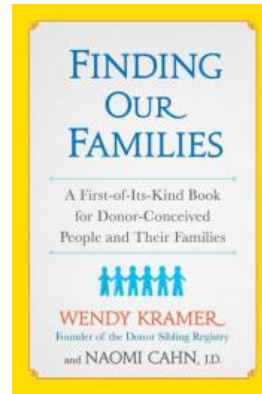
A new “donor community” is emerging to challenge the secrecy that the authors argue has too long surrounded sperm, egg and embryo donation. Donor-conceived offspring are using communication and genetic technologies to search for, and find, their sperm or egg donors, half-siblings and other genetic relatives.

No one has been more influential in this movement to end donor anonymity than author Wendy Kramer, who with her son Ryan founded the [Donor Sibling Registry](#). In this stunningly honest book, she and her coauthor, family and adoption law expert Naomi Cahn, make a compelling case that secrets have a corrupting influence on family life.

Opponents of openness justify their position with the argument that what matters is the social relationship of the intended parents to the offspring, not the genetic tie to the donor. Yet, as the authors make clear, this is a highly hypocritical stance given that many families choose donor conception over adoption precisely because they want at least one parent to have a genetic connection to their child.

The authors draw on the experience of many donor-conceived offspring and their family members to convincingly argue that openness about donor conception is the best path to strengthening bonds with social parents and other family members, as well as providing more complete medical information. Openness, in their view, is essential to the self-esteem and healthy identity formation of the donor-conceived child and adult.

Chapters in the book are specifically addressed to parents, offspring, and prospective parents. Personal experiences of many members of the “donor community” are interlaced with research findings and sensitive advice for negotiating the social and emotional challenges of each stage of the process of disclosing donor conception, searching for, and connecting with genetic relatives. Moving accounts of Wendy and her son’s often frustrating, but ultimately successful, search for his anonymous donor and the discovery of half-siblings keep the reader turning pages.

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The authors stop short of questioning the unbridled commercialization of human gametes in the US. They accept the euphemistic use of the term "donation" for what are, in fact, sales of eggs and sperm — usage that reveals our cultural ambivalence about these practices. Yet they acknowledge the discomfort among some donor offspring that one's biological parent "so easily sold their genetic heritage."

The concluding chapter makes six excellent recommendations for reforms related to the fertility industry, the most significant being a call to end donor anonymity. If implemented, these would go a long way toward humanizing reproductive medicine in the US and bring us more in line with practices in other developed nations.



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