The Birds and the Bees (via the Fertility Clinic)

By

OP-ED COLUMNIST

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If you want to adopt a child in the United States, you’ll face an array of businesses and lawyers and involve a host of agencies. Adoption agencies will assess your finances, your relationships, and your desires as a potential guardian. The desires of the would-be parents will be treated as paramount throughout.

If you want to procure sperm or eggs, the process is completely different. You are free to go as far as you wish into anonymity, or even farther, into sperm or egg donation for a fee. Many women and men are in the business of donation, and it would be ridiculous to say that women in this business have no desire to know who they are related to on the maternal or paternal side.

The result is a fledgling fertility marketplace whose impact on American life is beginning to be seen. Here’s the argument for keeping sperm and egg donations private: Many children conceived through sperm donation are much more likely to say that “when I see someone who resembles me, I often wonder if we are related,” for instance, and much more likely to worry about accidentally falling into a romantic relationship with a person they do not know. They’re twice as likely to report feeling “confused about who is a member of my family and who is a stranger.”

Donor-conceived children access to their family histories once they turn 18. Many of the most permissive nations in Western Europe, including Norway and Switzerland, have banned anonymous sperm and egg donation, allowing donors to provide some background information to prospective parents. But they would also untangle some of the webs of secrecy and uncertainty that donor children find themselves born into, sometimes with a sense of profound and much increased emotional anguish. But they would also untangle.

Some of these burdens are inherent to a process that replaces natural conception with scientific technique. But some of them could be eased if the legal system treated sperm and egg donations themselves.

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