

ANONYMITY, DISCLOSURE AND CONTACT WITH DONORS: HOW EXPERIENCES OF DONOR CONCEIVED OFFSPRING VARY BY FAMILY TYPE.



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Objective

To explore the relationship between family type (two-parent vs. single parent) and offspring response to donor conception and desire to connect with donor, controlling for parents' sexual orientation.

Materials and Methods

Data were gathered in two electronic surveys conducted by the Donor Sibling Registry (DSR), a non-profit organization established to help donor offspring and their parents connect with donors. Surveys were conducted between October 2009 and January 2010. Data were analyzed using cross tabs with Chi-square tests of significance.

Respondents

756 Offspring from the US (80.5%) and ten other countries .

473 (63%) are offspring of heterosexual parents (HET).
283 (37%) are offspring of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parents (LGBT).

Respondents range in age from 9 to over 40.

31% (224) Male and 69% (494) Female

52.6% (370) are 18 and under and 47.4% (334) are over 18

41.5% (192) of HET and 22% (58) of LGBT offspring came from single-mom families

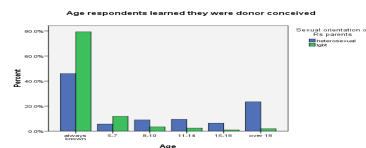
Disclosure

The majority of parents used an anonymous donor [90.2% (396) of HET and 75.5% (176) of LGBT]. However, parents sexuality was significantly related to using a willing to be known (6.4%, 28 for HET; 17.2%, 40 for LGBT) or known (.5% . 2 for HET; 4.7%, 11 for LGBT) donor [χ^2 (3, 671) 36, p<.001].

Offspring of single heterosexual parents and LGBT parents (both single and partnered) learned that they were donor conceived at an earlier age than those with heterosexual parents [χ^2 (5, 671) 96, p<.001].

79% of LGBT (161) offspring and 46% (194) of HET offspring report that they always knew they were donor conceived. 52% (294) of HET offspring report knowing by age seven compared to 91% (185) of LGBT offspring.

24% (99) of HET and 2% (4) of LGBT had not yet learned of the method of their conception by age 18.



Qualitative comments indicate that several HET offspring from two-parent families indicate that their social fathers are not aware that they know the method of their conception. Example: "My father doesn't want me to know, but my mom told me. I am still deciding whether to tell him that I know."

HET offspring sometimes find out from siblings, grandparents, other relatives, friends, finding paperwork, reading through emails, a medical situation or an argument between parents.

Finding Out

20% (82) of HET and 38% (75) of LGBT offspring do not remember how they initially felt about being donor conceived.

21% (87) HET and 31% (61) of LGBT offspring report that they felt it made no difference. The single most frequently reported response for HET offspring was confusion 26% (106). This was significantly different from LGBT offspring who ranked confusion as the least frequent response 10% (19) [χ^2 (1, 609) 21, p<.001].

The later in life that one receives the news that one was donor conceived, the more likely this information is to be emotionally charged. Examples:

"Pissed that I had been lied to for so many years." "Heartbroken, deceived, sad." "Angry, hurt, frustrated, abandoned, guilty." Occasionally, relief was the primary emotion: *"Relieved! I knew there was something being hidden."*

The 26% of HET reporting feeling initially confused drops to 8.3% (39) when asked how they presently feel. LGBT offspring feeling confused drops by more than half to 2.8% (8).

Quite often, it is the issue of not knowing one's biological parent and one's biological roots that is the focus of most negative feelings. Examples:

* *"It makes me angry that I am denied the basic right of knowing who my father was and what ethnicity I am."*
* *"Angry and frustrated that I can't get information about my heritage, genetics, looks, and medical history. I feel that half my identity has been stolen by the doctor, and that is unjust."*

Contact With Donors

Comfort Expressing Curiosity

A significantly lower number of HET offspring in dual parent families (55%, 87) were comfortable expressing curiosity about the donor than HET offspring in single parent families (85%, 116) [χ^2 (2, 357) 31, p<.001]. There was no significant difference between LGBT offspring in single (88%, 30) and dual parent families (87%, 85).

Desire to Contact Donor

83% (436) of offspring who are not in contact with their donors, wish to be. Respondents of LGBT parents were significantly more likely to express an interest in the donor at a younger age [χ^2 (4, 465) 63, p<.001]. 72% (100) LGBT offspring compared to 36% (118) of HET offspring expressed an interest by age 11. By age 18, 66% (216) of HET offspring and 95% (132) of LGBT offspring had expressed this interest.

Table 1. Offspring's reasons for searching for their donor

Reason for searching	Donors raised with heterosexual parents		Donors raised with LGBT parents	
	n	%	n	%
To see what the donor looks like	317	88.1	138	67.9
To learn more about my ancestry	285	79.2	93	59.2
To learn more about my medical background	265	73.6	75	47.8
To learn more about myself	279	76.3	110	65.0
So that they can know who I am	187	51.9	82	52.2
To establish a relationship with the donor	135	37.5	57	36.3

Reasons to Contact Donor

The most frequently stated reason for wanting contact with one's donor was to see what the donor looks like (see Table 1).

Over one- third of both groups say they want to "establish a relationship" with the donor.

Contact With Half Siblings

90% (347) of HET and 84% (152) LGBT offspring desire to connect with half siblings.

38% (126) HET and 73.5% (108) of LGBT offspring expressed this interest by age 13. (Many HET offspring did not know they were donor conceived by the time they were 18.)

Advice from Offspring

77% (268) of HET offspring and 70% (110) of LGBT offspring recommend that parents use a known or willing to be known donor.

Conclusions

Offspring of single heterosexual parents and LGBT parents learn about the method of their conception at an earlier age and are more comfortable expressing curiosity about the donor with their parents than offspring of heterosexual parents.

The great majority of all offspring wish to be in contact with their donors and half siblings and recommend that parents use open or willing-to-be known donors.

Contact information

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