

E-sperm: evolution or regression?

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General evolution

Evolution in last 30 years: move away from the nuclear family of father, mother and their (genetically related) children.

- Lesbian couples
- Single women
- Gay couple
- Combinations of the categories above

General evolution: family making is more and more considered as a personal issue where people do what they like and/or what they believe to be right. Part of this evolution is the refusal to abide by regulation and laws regarding family building.

Alternative scenarios: online

Online family building: looking for a co-parent, sperm donor, egg donor online.

These are not small scale phenomena:

- knowndonorregistry.com has over 45.000 registered users (March 2019)
- Pride Angel has more than 27.000 members, with 5300 registered as sperm donors and 17.400 as sperm recipients
- Coparents.com: over 100.000 registrations (donors, co-parents and recipients)
- Free-sperm-donations.com has 4000 donor profiles

UK clinics recruit approximately 400 new donors per year.

The number of connection websites is growing and so are the number of users.

Alternative scenarios: online

Very few studies of this new phenomenon.

We know little about

- the number of people really participating in donation or co-parenting (for many are presenting, but few are chosen). E.g., 35% of the donors had yet to create any offspring (Whyte, 2017),
- the number of children being created via these channels. E.g., 29% of the donors on Pride Angel had donated and 70 men had created 150 children.
- the conditions in the actual interactions between subscribers: the subscribers are looking for a match on many different criteria



Find your free sperm donor or co-parent Now!

Looking for a

- ☐ coparenting
- ☐ sperm donor
- ☐ woman who wants a donor

Country

United Kingdom



 SEARCH

Find a Free CoParent or Sperm donor

Since 2008, we have connected thousands of aspiring parents and donors with one another, making parenthood a reality.

Our service connects you to over 65,000 potential sperm donors and co-parents from all across the world. Alternatively, if you are looking to help someone start a family – we have all the information you need to get you started with a series of in depth guides on becoming a sperm donor or a co-parent.



CHIRA3, SINGLE HETEROSEXUAL MAN

Looking To: Co-parentBecome a sperm donor

Location: Gent (Ghent), Belgium

Last Online: More than a month ago

Standard User



XOSE1, SINGLE GAY MAN

Looking To: Co-parent

Location: Bruxelles (Brussel), Belgium

Last Online: More than a month ago

Standard User



FILIPPO3, SINGLE GAY MAN

Looking To: Co-parent

Location: Bruxelles (Brussel), Belgium

Last Online: More than a month ago

Standard User



KJELDAHL881, GAY COUPLE

Looking To: Co-parentBecome a sperm donor

Location: Bruxelles (Brussel), Belgium

Last Online: More than a month ago

Standard User



ANDREW193, SINGLE HETEROSEXUAL MAN

Looking To: Become a sperm donor

Location: Peer, Belgium

Last Online: More than a month ago

Premium User



MAMA12, PARTNERED HETEROSEXUAL WOMAN

Looking To: Co-parent

Location: Bruxelles (Brussel), Belgium

Last Online: 7 days ago

Premium User



YASMINE4, LESBIAN COUPLE

Looking To: Find a sperm donor

Location: Antwerpen, Belgium

Last Online: More than a month ago

Standard User



AVIVA2, SINGLE HETEROSEXUAL WOMAN

Looking To: Co-parentFind a sperm donor

Location: Antwerpen, Belgium

Last Online: More than a month ago

Standard User



NUNYA1, SINGLE HETEROSEXUAL MAN

Looking To: Co-parentBecome a sperm donor

Location: Antwerpen, Belgium

Last Online: More than a month ago

Standard User



[Nieuws](#) [Agenda](#) [Informatie](#) [Oproepjes](#) [Verhalen](#) [E](#)

SPEEDDATE



Twee extra speeddates ingepland – Noord- Brabant/Gelderland – Amsterdam

5 april 2018

Er is veel belangstelling voor de
kinderwens-speeddates van Meer

dan Gewenst. Op deze speeddates kunnen wensouders die co-ouderschap
overwegen of de donorconstructie willen, elkaar ontmoeten. We hebben
daarom 2 extra speeddates ingepland! Op vrijdagavond 15 juni organiseren

...



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Laatste oproepjes

Zij en Haar op zoek naar droomvervuller (onbekende donor)

22 mei 2018

Hoi! Wij zijn een lesbisch stel van 31 en 27 jaar uit Amsterdam. We hebben al een aantal jaar een ... »

Wenspapa's zoekt wensmoeder(s) omg Arnhem-Doetinchem

22 mei 2018

Wij, mannenstel, zijn op zoek naar een lieve wensmoeder (hetero of lesbisch) en/of een stel om de wens van ouders ... »

Lesbiennes zoeken zaad(donor+)

22 mei 2018

We zijn een energiek, enthousiast, reislustig (backpacken door o.a. Azië, Australië, Zuid-Afrika en Colombia) en sportief (wielrennen, fitness, hockey) lesbisch ... »



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Connection websites

Many different types of websites

- Some websites mainly focus on gay and lesbian couples as their target audience.
- Some take a particular moral stance on specific issues. E.g. knowdonoregistry mentions several times explicitly that anonymous donation is completely unacceptable. Others reject natural insemination and/or payment for gametes (apart for proven expenses).
- The registration fees are fairly low, supporting the idea that these are altruistic initiatives. But not always transparency regarding income from advertisement etc.

Perspective of recipients

Why do people look for a donor on the internet? (Jadva et al., 2017)

Reasons are partially overlapping with online dating

- More control
- Abundance of choice
- Possibility to contact or meet the donor
- Possibility to negotiate level of involvement (continuum from pure donor to co-parent)
- Possibility to obtain (specific) information on donor (e.g., (self-ascribed) personality traits)
- Possibility to select the donor
- Lower financial cost
- No need to justify one's plans or situation

Perspective of recipients

Disadvantages:

- The donor may not have been screened (genetics and sexually transmitted diseases)
- Donors may be dishonest / have other motives (sex)
- Recipients are not legally protected against paternity claims by the donor if the transaction takes place outside a licensed clinic and/or the relationship status is not legally recognised (lesbian). See numerous court cases.

Perspective of donors

Characteristics: 80% hetero, 20% gay or bi; 55% single and without children (Freeman, 2016; Woestenburger, 2015)

Why do people want to donate on the internet?

- 1/3 wanted anonymity (higher for heterosexual men)
- Possibility to contact or meet the recipient and/or the child
- Possibility to obtain information on recipient and/or select the recipient
- Avoid restrictions of sperm banks (mainly age)
- Procreative motivation (wanting to reproduce, be informed about outcome)
- Avoid bureaucracy
- More control

Significantly more gay men wanted contact in the future. What are the possible effects on the child and do recipients know this?

Perspective of donors

Disadvantages:

- No legal protection against paternity claims. See numerous court cases.
- Possibility of unwanted contact with recipients and/or offspring

Grey circuit

Important: the distinction between the official and the grey circuit is not clear-cut.

- A large minority of sperm donors donates in both circuits (maximum number of offspring per donor?)
- Some connection websites recommend people to go via a clinic mainly to ensure genetic and serological testing. Oocyte donation is only possible via a clinic.
- Many sperm banks and clinics allow recipients to obtain information on their donor and to select him/her.
- Intermediate recruitment strategies (like putting advertisements and calls in newspapers, social media etc.) have been used for a long time for egg donors.

Co-parenting

Co-parenting is when two persons who have no romantic relationship decide to conceive and raise a child together while living separately. Both genetic parents will have an involvement in the child's upbringing.

On websites are pull-down menus that allow to select

- the type of donation (sperm, egg, embryo)
- The method (artificial insemination, natural insemination, cryobank deposit, shipped on dry ice)
- The degree of contact desired (contact after 18, limited contact, uncle/aunt, friend, co-parent)

Co-parenting

Characteristics (Jadva, 2015):

- 1/3 heterosexual; 1/2 male; 70% single; significantly more heterosexual persons were single
- Main motivations: 'wanting the child to know both biological parents' and 'Wanting to know the person who provides the sperm/egg to create the child'
- Of 102 would-be co-parents, only one woman had a child through co-parenting.
- Expected to be able to start after knowing each other between 1 and 12 months.
- Most women wanted the child to live with them and half of the men wanted the child to live half the time with them.

The welfare of the child

There is at the moment no evidence that these practices or rules are harmful to the offspring.

Looking for a gamete donor online or making private arrangements with donors also has no known detrimental effects. More studies are needed.

What about co-parenting?

- Quality of relationship between parents is strongly correlated with children's psychological development and well-being. Affective and supportive relationship between parents provides emotional security. These elements are missing since there was not and will not be such a relationship. Consequences for the child?

The welfare of the child

What about co-parenting?

- Parental collaboration between parents is associated with positive childhood outcomes. Consequences for the child?

Some thoughts:

- A romantic relationship is no guarantee for a stable relationship (Belgium: divorce rate over 50%)
- If such co-parenting relationship breaks down, does it have worse or better consequences than when a marriage breaks down?
- Are the chances of such arrangements breaking down higher than those of 'regular' relationships?

We should be careful not to mix-up a normative idea of the family with effects of certain family compositions on the family members.

Moral evaluation

Important points for the evaluation:

- If the mean well-being of children in a co-parenting setting would be lower than in other types of families, that does not imply that these arrangements should not be allowed, or that they would be wrong. That can only be concluded if you use a maximising principle.
- It is very well possible that the well-being is above the threshold of 'reasonable well-being'.
- the question is also 'what is the alternative?' Would it be better if single persons would raise the child on their own? Or that a lesbian couple does so without help from the male genetic parent?

Alternative scenarios: online

Online family building is part of a broader phenomenon:

- **Cross-border reproductive care:** reproductive tourism

Tens of thousands of people travel abroad to access treatment they cannot access at home. Example: 12,000 cycles of oocyte donation were done in Spain for foreign women in 2014 (SEF, 2015).

Main causes of CBRC:

- law evasion (legal restrictions)
- shortage of gametes (especially eggs but sperm is shipped so no travelling by patients) also frequently caused by laws and regulations.

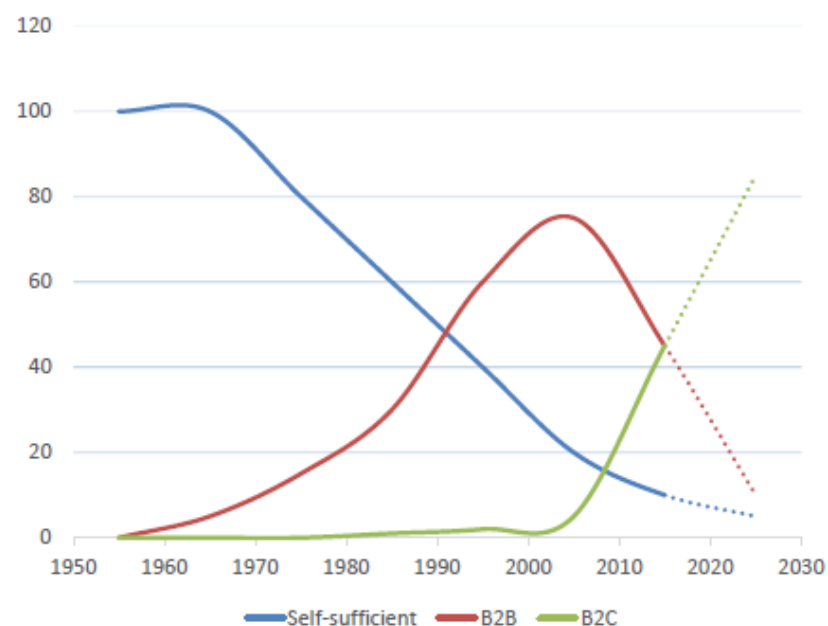


Alternative scenarios: online

- **Direct to consumer shipping**

Market Trends in Europe

From self-sufficient → B2B → B2C



© Ole Schou, Donor Conception, 27-28th August 2015, Ghent Belgium

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Alternative scenarios

An important reason for people to move away from clinics are the restrictions in the official gamete donation practice. This raises a number of interesting questions:

- Are law makers and clinics co-responsible for people moving to the grey area?
- Should we re-evaluate the existing rules? Why can't people in Belgium not receive information on their donor or select their donor?
- Does legislation have mainly/only a symbolic function of signaling the moral code of the politicians?
- What is the use of legislation if only a minority of the citizens enters the official circuit and follows the laws?

Multiparenthood construction

Many cases of co-parenting on the internet assume more parents than is legally allowed.

- Gay couple with woman (not a surrogate)
- Lesbian couple with gay man or gay couple

Legal limit of number of parents does not fit the social construction.

Question: should the law change to allow for more than 2 parents? Should the concept of 'legal parent' change to fit foster parents, unmarried couples, stepparents ...? More flexibility, more subdivision of rights and obligations among different 'parents'?



Conclusions

The trend of moving to informal settings to realize one's wish for a child is to a large extent due to restrictions in clinics and gamete banks imposed by laws and regulation. A serious evaluation of the current rules is recommended.

Contrary to what one would expect, some 'new alternatives' on connections websites are based on conservative ideas about families:

- Heteronormativity: a child needs a father and a mother, and
- Geneticism: superiority of genetic parenthood

Finally: since anonymity can no longer be guaranteed (and will be unlikely in the future), the gap between formal and informal settings decreases further.