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# I DONATED MY EGGS, AND I REGRET IT

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I wanted to help an infertile couple by donating my eggs, but I ended up hurting myself.

I sold my eggs in response to a Craigslist ad asking to “give the gift of life” and “help a couple in need.” Because I was young and without any other marketable skills, the \$8,000 payout advertised by the fertility clinic made selling my eggs outrageously more attractive than other job options. I believed that if I could sell my eggs as an open ID donor, I would make the world a better place. I also envisioned what I could do with that kind of money—record an album, visit Europe. It seemed like a needle-length journey to a brighter future.

How wrong I was. There are few things I regret more than that choice. I know this is a highly charged issue and one that many think is all about compassion, as if to suggest that to disagree is being mean to infertile women. But nothing could be further from the truth. I’m opposed to egg harvesting because I do feel deeply about women. Allow me to share my story.

## A LIFE-CHANGING DECISION

My egg donation experience was like a sci-fi movie. I filled out mountains of paperwork and had my picture taken so that strangers could judge the worthiness of my genes. I was given no information about the intended recipients other than their first names. Months after the procedure, I asked the agency if the conception attempt was successful. I was told that yes, there was a pregnancy, and a little boy was born in July of that year.

That's when it hit me. Few things I've done in my life have affected me as much—mind, body, and spirit—as that moment.

Let's start with how it affected me emotionally because that's the most vivid. Once I learned of the baby born from my eggs, the gravity of what I'd done set in. I had contributed to the creation of a new life. There was a human being out there to whom I was intimately and genetically connected, but I could never verify his well-being. There's no way to describe this feeling except perhaps comparing it to having a phantom limb. Only my phantom limb was a human being.

My "open identification" status as egg donor was one-way, meaning that my child could reach out to me if he wanted (a status that itself nods to the idea that my biological motherhood was real and matters), but if he didn't reach out to me, I would never be able to meet him.

This was just the tip of the iceberg, in terms of the mental anguish I suffered. I was overwhelmed with anxiety about my future fertility. What if for some reason I could not have other children? I would have to live with the knowledge that another woman was raising my only biological child. These worries burdened me immensely.

My egg donation experience has also affected me physically. After I sold my eggs, I experienced incredible pain in my right ovary for years up until I gave birth to my first child. The pain from having my eggs harvested is second only to the emergency C-section I incurred with my daughter. Recently, the pain has returned. I remember doctors at the time telling me what a great "performer" my right ovary was in contrast to my left. I suspect I suffered from what health-care experts call ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome. This is when fluid leaks into the abdomen, causing bloating, nausea, and swelling—or more severe symptoms such as blood clots, shortness of breath, or even death. For me, my body felt as stiff as an oak tree, and I could barely walk at a normal pace.

It turns out that health risks are not uncommon for egg donors; they're just not talked about much. Only a few sources, such as the documentary [Eggsploration](#) and the new short [Maggie's Story](#)—produced by former nurse and mother of four Jennifer Lahl—listen to egg donors who have critical views about their experiences. The women in Lahl's documentary describe being seduced and flattered into selling their eggs—only to be overstimulated with hormones, sometimes resulting in strokes, cancer, and surgical complications. Several of the interviewees are now infertile. Two women in the film developed cancers that had not run in their family. One died in her early thirties.

Unfortunately, it remains unknown exactly how common these outcomes are because a long-term study on egg donors has never been conducted—despite precedence for such studies in similar areas such as organ donation. Well-intentioned or not, this industry experiences much less scrutiny than others, and when it comes to health risks, that's never a good thing.

What we do know is that the main drug used in egg harvesting procedures and IVF is Lupron, a drug that [is not FDA-approved for fertility use](#). There is a [website](#) dedicated to collecting articles and testimonials from people who have had [serious adverse health consequences](#) from taking it.

My egg donation also made me question what reproductive justice for women really looks like. Women—who have a more limited window of fertility than men—often feel pressure to meet unrealistically high expectations regarding family and career balance. Rather than address the working culture, fertility industries such as IVF and egg donation capitalize on these pressures. Worse, they set many women up for failure: With a 70.6 percent failure rate, IVF [only results in a live birth for 22.4 percent of cycles](#).

It further floors me that [egg freezing](#) is somehow a totally kosher topic for employers and the public to casually talk about, though it remains incredibly taboo to mention plain biological facts about avoiding infertility. Like, say, how the quality of women's eggs plummets after age 30. Or how there is emerging evidence that as many as one quarter of all infertility cases are [caused](#) by a previous sexually transmitted infection. This is an upsetting figure, especially in light of "[Tinder and the Dawn of the Dating Apocalypse](#)" and the changing dating culture we're experiencing. If we really care about infertility, shouldn't we be talking about these things? Instead, all we hear are the IVF ads playing between our favorite tunes on Pandora.

## THE BIGGER PICTURE

It's not just the inner feminist in me that gets riled up when I think about my egg donation, it's also the anti-consumerist. Billion-dollar industries stem from the natural human desire to mate and procreate. Despite our attempts to pay for solutions, sometimes Mother Nature still wins out. I think that reproductive technologies often overlook the widespread collateral damage that results from their work—valiant as it might be trying to combat a person's unwanted childlessness.

The hormones that are injected into women in the process of egg harvesting, for instance, [are known to be associated with](#) cancer development. Surrogate mothers have not only died "on the job" but have also experienced a range of [health risks](#). Childbearing is a wonderful and necessary thing for the human species. But when a phenomenon as priceless as procreation becomes a monetary transaction, we can't deny the risk of exploitation. When women are seen as tools to perform a function—as opposed to seen as a person, mother, family member—women's health and medical care is undermined; she has simply become a service provider.

As I said earlier, my own fear of infertility was among the gravest of my life. As it happens, I married not long afterward, and my husband and I now have two amazing children—a girl and a boy. I am eternally grateful for them both. But my egg donation continues to haunt me. The legalese in my contract denied me and my children a relationship with our flesh-and-blood kin. This is a bond that no one can deny—this transferral goes beyond the donation of one's kidney.

As many challenges as this experience has given me, I have learned and grown a lot since. I have a much larger perspective now on the value of family. I hug my two kids at home a little tighter and more often because I know what it's like to be separated from one. And I think of my faraway son often, sending my thoughts and prayers his way.

In fact, I have a large, special box on a shelf in my home that I am slowly filling with letters and pictures for him (or any other children that may exist from frozen embryos I was not privileged to know about). In the letters I try to paint scenes of who his sister and brother are and how we are as a family; I mention that I think of him often and that I hope the parents raising him are treating him well. It heartens me to think that if anything should happen to me, and he comes searching for me, he might know that he would have always been welcome in my home. I consider him a person worthy of cherishing—not as a means to a paycheck. Overall, I now value life and people more as a result.

*Photo Credit: [Tina Sosna](#)*