

LETHAL SECRETS

LETHAL SECRETS: The Shocking Consequences and Unsolved Problems of Artificial Insemination by Annette Baran and Reuben Pannor, \$19.95, Warner Books, NY.

Two of the three fine authors who brought us The Adoption Triangle have joined forces to delve into the secret world of donor insemination.

I found the book surprising in two respects. The pleasant surprise is that rather than being an anticipated dull, dry, technical, statistical report is a most readable compendium of thought-provoking interviews with those whose lives have been personally touched by D.I. It is a credit to the authors that they employed the combined techniques of survey, interview and group sessions to draw out the subjects' most personal feelings. Many shared insightful, painful secrets never before shared.

Through the remarkable talents of the authors, the reader is afforded intimate knowledge heretofore unknown; a window into a world of darkness and deceit:

- the lack of infertility and grief loss counseling.
- the encouragement of secrecy by practitioners.
- the wives who paid the price of silence to "protect" their loved ones.
- the pain and desperation of unmarried and lesbian women longing to mother "fatherless children."
- the joy of some who chose a known donor and the regret of others who did.
- the entrepreneurs who lure medical students to create life with no regard.
- the secrets which lead to lies which erode the very foundation of the marriages and families they were intended to save.
- the helplessness and confusion of the offspring caught in the undercurrent of power struggles and game playing.

The evil web and all its entanglements are laid naked before our eyes.

And then, the second surprise: all that the authors suggest to rectify these ills is THE TRUTH. I felt

disappointment. I had high expectations based on my high esteem for Baron and Pannor as the innovators of adoption reform in this country. Perhaps I'm too old fashioned but I am confused by mores which condone women who chose to become single parents and believe that consciously deciding to do so makes them superior to those who unwittingly bring "out of wedlock" children into this world and that the end result is less harmful to the children.

I was disappointed with these authors, who know better, accepting, with no counter, the rhetoric "since adoption is no longer a viable option, with so few healthy, Caucasian babies available and with single women in competition with couples for these children . . ."

Perhaps what I initially saw as the book's least important failing is in fact its most significant. The introduction suggests a change of the name Artificial Insemination by Donor to Donor Insemination. My dictionary defines a donor as one who gives a gift, not one who sells genetic material. Ah, there's the rub.

If surrogacy is baby selling, why isn't the selling of sperm seen in the same context? Proponents of surrogacy have often made the comparison, saying if a man can sell his sperm why can't a woman rent her womb? They're right. Both need to be treated equally and both need to be outlawed.

"Donor" insemination can never be totally eliminated because it is too easily done without medical intervention (although "do-it-yourselfers" are, we are told, unable to screen sperm for AIDS). Perhaps the authors believe that removing the secrecy would decrease the commercialization of it. But I wonder if those who profit from buying and selling human genetic material will voluntarily employ practices which will reduce their profits. Yet no suggestion was made to legislate full disclosure or record keeping by clinics, or better yet, to eliminate the brokers entirely.

Despite its shortcomings (no pun intended) Lethal Secrets is an enlightening and in-depth investigative report that should be required reading for anyone considering being a party to any aspect of non-coital reproduction.

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