

[Family Redefined by Infertility](#)

Posted by [Jen Gruskoff](#) on June 3, 2010 at 8:00am



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Silent Sorority, a book about accepting infertility

When I read the article in the [New York Times](#) last month about Pamela Tsigdinos' epic 11 year attempt to get pregnant I became fascinated by a few things: the drive women have to get pregnant; the will they have to continue with the often painful, clinical treatments; and the idea of family and what exactly it means. Of course, we all know that when you have children, you have “created a family,” but what if that doesn’t happen for you? Is your family any less a family?

Pamela and her husband, Alex, ran through the gamut of tests, tinctures, surgeries and hormonal treatments and finally, at the age of 40, Pamela was finished. But, not really, because this is where the heart of her story begins. In refusing to stay isolated and identify herself with what she couldn’t do, Pamela instead turned outward and began to help others deal with the issues and episodes that she had come to know so intimately.

Pamela is an amazing woman. Her book, [Silent Sorority](#) has helped thousands of women cope with the idea of not having children, and her blog by the same name has become a very popular community for women to share their grief, inspiration and hope. She has also created a blog called [Coming2Terms](#), which deals specifically with the difficulty of stopping fertility treatments and accepting your new path.

For many women, having a child is the focus of their universe for many years. In a sense, as women, many of us are programmed to feel like we need to become mothers since childhood; that if we do not, then our lives are somehow less significant. “What I’ve learned,” Pamela tells me, “Is that from society’s view if you’re in a relationship and don’t have kids then you’re not

part of the club. And that was very daunting. Biologically, it was one thing to know that your body has failed you, but once you get beyond the personal sense you become much more of an anthropologist and try to find your place in the world. The hardest thing is when you actually realize that the world doesn't want to embrace you."

In speaking to Pamela on the phone, she comes across as smart, clear and very positive. While she has clearly had her share of heartbreaking days and major disappointments, there is no trace of melancholy in her voice. "What I've come to realize is that there's a lot of benign ignorance out there about what it is to create a family that sits outside the 'first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in a baby carriage.'"

Of the many things that Pamela learned—and she could practically have a medical degree with all of the procedures she and her husband underwent to correct the issues that were in the way of them conceiving—was that while one becomes so focused on the science behind getting pregnant, there is very little in the form of information about reconciling and grieving the loss of your ability to have a child.

So, why didn't she just try to adopt? The answer is that it's just not that easy to switch gears. And for Pamela, there were other emotional issues to factor in, factors that put a new light on fertility technology and the way they can trigger emotions in a whole new way. "For me, I was in such a state of mourning from the loss of our alpha pregnancies. When you see your embryos, when you watch them being inserted for the transfer, you become attached. It even shocked me how much the association of motherhood seemed to come to me in that transitory state when we were hoping that everything took properly. I was in such pain and grief that it would have been the equivalent of me going to the funeral of a person who had just lost their child and saying, 'hey, it'll be fine, let's just head on over to this adoption agency and get a replacement.'"

Pamela then adds, "When you sign on for an open adoption, you need to write a letter to a birth mother explaining why you believe you are the best mother for her child." This was not something she could do with her full heart.

Pamela recognizes that for many women, they may not have such an intense reaction; perhaps they have a preexisting medical condition or they go into it with some trepidation, but that was not the case for her. Each step along the way, she kept hearing it should work, so she remained hopeful until the very end.

There was a period, after she stopped trying and before she started blogging, where she felt like a misfit and an outcast. "You can only stay in that state of mind so long, but it was really painful. That's when I decided to start writing. And the day after I had started my blog, I got a response from a woman in Australia who related to everything that I'd been through. And from that point on, every day I get emails from all over the world from women thanking me and sharing their stories."

What the women are responding to is that someone, Pamela, is acknowledging just how shattering this experience can be. For such a long time, women were ashamed of not being able to conceive and she has really been a forerunner in letting people know it's okay, that they're just

as important and that they deserve to be heard. *Silent Sorority* is their book, and it has given them a voice.

Kristin wrote on June 3, 2010 at 3:54pm:

Great article about a truly fabulous woman!

 [Reply](#)

Julie K. wrote on June 3, 2010 at 9:00pm:

Loved the article! Jen Gruskoff does a great job highlighting Pamela's story.

 [Reply](#)

Christina wrote on June 4, 2010 at 7:20am:

My copy of *Silent Sorority* is full of underlines and post-it notes. I'm so grateful that Pam is bringing this issue "mainstream." She really hits the nail on the head when she talks about anthropologizing the issue -- shifting your identity, carving out a place. And I agree -- that one of the toughest things is that, you can come to terms yourself -- but the world doesn't even recognize you, let alone welcome you and your difference. If people from traditional families want to know how to make it easier for their brothers and sisters who wound up without kids -- I'd say, try to think out of the box. Maybe understand that a childless couple may not want to spend each and every holiday in an event geared around your kids. They went down a different path -- often without choice -- let them pursue and enjoy that path without guilt.

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Lori Lavender Luz wrote on June 4, 2010 at 8:29am:

Pamela has given voice to many women (and men) whose dreams for a family don't go as planned.

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