Genes R Us? Making sense of genetic and non-genetic kinship relationships following anonymous sperm donation. *Reproductive BioMedicine Online* 2012; 24: 719– 726

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Abstract

This exploratory qualitative study investigates the experiences of eight adults conceived following anonymous sperm donation who had discovered the identity both of their donor and of donor half-siblings, and had established contact with each other. It focuses primarily on participants' reflections on genetic and social kinship relationships. Data were collected from this group as well as from the son of their donor and the donor-conceived half-sister of one participant by means of semi-structured interviews utilising asynchronous email and digitalised voice recording. Participants discussed their experience of genetic disconnection resulting from learning of their donor-conceived status and of revising their personal biographies and developing new kinship networks as a result of discovering the identity of their donor and the existence of donor half-siblings. The study highlights participants' agency expressed through their ability to draw on both genetic and non-genetic elements of their inheritance to redefine their self identity and extend their familial/kinship networks in meaningful ways.

Keywords: anonymous sperm donation, DNA, donor linking, donor siblings

Introduction

In recent years the twin assumptions that have historically underpinned donor conception - anonymity and secrecy - have increasingly been challenged, not least by the views and experiences of donor-conceived people who have been informed about, or have otherwise discovered, the nature of their conception. Often, donor-conceived people who have become aware of the circumstances of their conception have indicated a wish to learn the identity of their donor and of any donor half-siblings (see, for example, Baran and Pannor, 1989; Cordray 1999/2000; Turner and Coyle 2000; Engel, 2001; Stevens, 2001, 2006; Hewitt, 2002; Lorbach, 2003; Vanfraussen, Ponjaert-Kristoffersen and Brewaeys, 2001, 2003; Kirkman, 2004; Scheib, Riordan and Rubin, 2005; McWhinnie, 2006; Paul and Berger, 2007; Spencer, 2007; Jadva, Freeman, Kramer and Golombok, 2010; Mahlstedt, LaBounty and Kennedy, 2010).

Hitherto, knowledge and understanding of donor-conceived people's motivations for, and experiences of, searching for genetic kin have relied almost exclusively on individual (Stevens, 2001, 2004; Jamieson, 2006; Becky, 2007; Gollancz, 2007; Shirley, 2007; Shirley's Story, nd) and media accounts (see, for example, Harmon, 2005; Gloger and Sanderson, 2006; Goldenberg, 2006; Mar, 2006; Pfister, 2006; Romano, 2006, Skelton, 2006, Wilkes, 2006, Mroz, 2011). An earlier academic study of donor-conceived individuals' search for their donor and/or

donor half-siblings (Jadva, Freeman, Kramer and Golombok, 2010) explores both participants' motivations for searching and the outcomes of successful searches, emphasising that, from donor-conceived individuals' perspectives, 'genes matter'. However, this study did not permit explore in any depth the implications of the search either for the searchers or for those sought out.

At the same time it can be argued both that "no cultural paradigm [exists] for understanding the relationship between donor siblings" (Hertz, 2009: 159) and that interactions between donor-conceived people and their donors and genetic half-siblings are 'unchartered territory' (Kramer, cited in Skelton, 2006). Yet, adequate understanding of the implications of the search for, and the relationships between, genetic kin that are thereby developed is necessary . Statutory registers that facilitate access by donor-conceived persons to genetic kin are now operational (Blyth and Frith, 2009; Blyth, 2012), and informal and voluntary registries, such as the Donor Sibling Registry (Jadva et al., 2010) and the UK's DonorLink (Crawshaw and Marshall, 2008), are already enabling links to be made between donor-conceived people and their genetic relatives, who may comprise large multi-sibling groups (Blyth, in press).

Methods and Materials

The exploratory study reported here provides an in-depth examination of the experiences of eight donor-conceived adults who learned (1) of their conception following anonymous sperm donation provided by the same UK fertility clinic, (2) the identity of their shared donor, and (3) their relatedness to each other and analyses their efforts to understand and construct meanings of genetic and non-genetic kinship connectedness and relationships.

At the commencement of the study the entire sibling group comprised thirteen individuals, of whom eleven were in fairly regular contact with each other, and of whom seven agreed to take part. Another donor half-sibling was identified following commencement of the study who also agreed to participate. All participants, five female and three male, were raised in European Caucasian, two-parent heterosexual households. They learned of their donor conception at the ages of 11/12, 18, 21/22, 23, 24, 32, 37 and 56 respectively. At the time of interview they were aged 44, 45[2], 49, 57, 60, 61, and 65 years respectively. Five were resident in the UK and three in North America. At the time of the study, four participants had no surviving parents, three had a surviving mother and one had both surviving parents. Two participants had been brought up as only children, two had an adopted sibling, one had a donor-conceived twin (who did not participate in the study), one had a donor-conceived full-sibling (who did not participate in the study), one had a donor-conceived half-sibling (i.e. who did not share the same donor), and one had two half-siblings (one of whom was donor-conceived but who did not share the same donor and the other was the child of the participant's mother following remarriage). Four participants were married, three were single

and one was cohabiting. Five had no children of their own, two had two children and one had a single child.

Interviews were also held with the DI-conceived half-sister of one participant (for reasons outlined below) and the son of the donor.

Semi-structured asynchronous email interviews were used to collect data from all but one participant who provided a digitalised oral recording of responses to the research questions because of difficulties manipulating a computer keyboard. This recording was transcribed verbatim and follow-up discussions and clarifications requiring relatively short responses were handled by email. These methods enabled rich and deep personally-salient accounts to be obtained from a relatively small, but geographically dispersed, group of participants, provided flexibility in exploring themes emerging from their accounts and mitigated the adverse impact of significant time zone differences between researcher and participants.

Data analysis utilised Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is especially suited to undertaking in-depth analysis of a sensitive and complex topic about which little is previously known, involving relatively few participants and for its facility to identify and facilitate analysis of both individual and shared experiences. Crucially, IPA acknowledges participants' expertise as regards their own experiences and facilitates the discovery of knowledge from their cognitions, narratives and behaviours as described in their own words, in as much detail as possible, and without being overly impacted by any preconceptions held by the researcher. However, IPA also recognises the active engagement of the researcher in attempting to understand the participants' world, and in interpreting the data they generate, rather than assuming researcher 'objectivity' and disengagement. An underlying presumption in IPA is that "the investigator does not come to the project *tabula rasa*" (Smith 1999: 282), an attribute especially relevant for this study since the researcher has been actively engaged in research in this field for more than 20 years.

The texts derived from the interviews were read numerous times to ensure familiarity with their content, to identify evolving themes, to endeavour to understand participants' attempts to make sense of their own experiences, and to ensure this understanding was firmly grounded in participants' stories. Coding of emergent themes and their further refinement led to the development of super-ordinate and associated sub-ordinate themes. Independent verification that the researcher's interpretations were grounded in the data was secured through checking of developing analysis by a colleague experienced in qualitative research, and findings were shared with participants. A further measure utilised in this paper to enhance the transparency of the analysis and to facilitate evaluation of the interpretations made is to provide illustrative verbatim quotations from participants' accounts, insofar as permitted by word limits. The paper focuses on one of the key themes that emerged from analysis of the data: participants' reflections on genetic and social kinship relationships.

The study was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number RES-000-22-3408) and complied with the ESRC *Research Ethics Framework* (www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/research_ethics/), the ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society (2007, 2009), the ethical guidelines of the Association for Internet Researchers (2002), and the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. Ethical approval was given by the School of Human and Health Sciences Research Ethics Panel at the University of Huddersfield.

Results

Participants described themselves collectively as 'Clan X' after the family name of their donor who provided sperm for a DI clinic run by his wife, Dr X. At the outset of their search for their donor, Dr X's clinic had ceased to operate and their donor had died several years before his identity was discovered . An extended account of the process through which participants located each other is provided in Blyth (in press). Summary details will therefore be provided here.

The Clan X 'project' began in the late 1990s when a donor-conceived brother and sister, who had been informed by their mother almost 30 years previously of their conception following DI provided by Dr X initiated the search for their donor. Their early research indicated that several of Dr X's male friends and colleagues had provided sperm for her clinic. Media interest in their search attracted the attention of other donor-conceived individuals who knew of their origins at Dr X's clinic (but usually little else), as well as the son of X and Dr X and a daughter of Y (a colleague, and donor, of Dr X), both of whom knew their fathers had provided sperm for Dr X. Contact between these individuals was established via email and personal meetings. In 1999, the first of several DNA tests was undertaken that linked one donor-conceived individual with X's son, and several other donor-conceived individuals with each other - but to neither X nor Y. In a parallel development, members of this group subsequently registered with, and provided DNA samples for, UK DonorLink, a voluntary register established in 2004 to facilitate linking between genetic relatives following a donor procedure undertaken in the UK prior to 1991 (Crawshaw and Marshall, 2008). Other individuals also began to register with UK DonorLink, while on-going media attention generated additional interest and contacts.

In 2004, further DNA tests were undertaken because of a growing suspicion of errors with the original DNA profiling. By this time DNA profiling had become more sophisticated and its accuracy further enhanced by the increased number of DNA profiles available for testing. The later tests identified two separate groups of donor-conceived half-siblings, Clan X and Clan Y. A crucial revelation at this time was that the brother and sister who had initiated the search, and who had for almost 30 years believed that they shared the same donor, were instead the offspring of X and Y respectively. Simultaneous with the discovery that she was no longer a

member of Clan X – and therefore 'only' the half-sister of her brother and unrelated to other Clan X members to whom she had believed for the previous five years she was genetically linked - the sister discovered the existence of members of Clan Y, including both Y's children and donor half-siblings - and their descendents.

The experiences of these participants therefore provide a unique opportunity to examine the sense that donor-conceived individuals make of, and the meanings they attribute to, both genetic and social kinship. The subsequent sections of this paper discuss in turn, awareness and experiences of genetic disconnections (as evidenced by the disclosure or discovery of their donor-conceived status and the revelation of erroneous DNA profiling), the discovery of genetic kin and the emergence of social relationships between them, and attempts made by participants to synthesise their accumulated knowledge, understanding and experiences into revised personal biographies and new social networks.

The experience of genetic discontinuity

All participants described discovery of their donor conception as a 'shock', and most subsequently experienced some form of disruption to their sense of identity (Blyth, in press). For some, discovering the nature of their conception was accompanied by the realisation that they were no longer connected to family members in the way that they had thought previously: "I felt a great sense of loss (of my father, of my brother - who was now only a half brother - and of my wider family, particularly my cousins and aunt) and I felt very lonely". One participant described with regret their mother's request to keep from their father their knowledge about their conception: "I wish so much it had not been necessary as I loved him dearly and wished he could have known how irrelevant the DNA was to my affection".

As noted earlier, the particular experiences of the brother and sister who had initiated the search for their donor encompassed the discovery that they did not share the same donor, and further, that the sister's belief she had held for the previous five years of being the half-sister of another donor-conceived individual (Z) was false. An enforced re-appraisal of these relationships was, therefore, necessitated within a brief time-frame. Her reflections convey her ability to transcend the straightjacket of genetic essentialism:

> "When [brother] and I first had an inkling that we were in fact not full siblings after all, I can remember having a conversation with him where we both agreed that whatever the science results were, we still wanted to remain as close as we were. We reminded ourselves that we were brought up together, have the same mother and we were not going to let these things get in the way of our established relationship (...). I think that by that time, particularly after all the work that we had done together on this project I was confident that I was not going to ever 'lose' [brother] and [Z], but could expand and begin to include more people into my extra-ordinary family (...). Time has proved that I

> have not 'lost' [Z] or of course [brother] (...) [Z] and I decided that even though we were no longer genetically related, we still were both conceived at [Dr X's] clinic (...) and still wanted to consider each other 'siblings'; the fact that each of us is a sibling of [brother] does connect us; Z's' children still wanted me to be their 'aunt' as well".

The discovery of genetic kin and the emergence of social relationships between them

Similarly to participants' discovery concerning their conception, learning the identity of their donor and of donor half-siblings, either simultaneously or as separate events, was described as an emotionally charged event although, in contrast, this was invariably described in overwhelmingly positive terms: "I was filled with joy. It was incredibly exciting - not just siblings, but brothers!!"; "With having had no siblings of any sort – full, half, or in-law – it has been quite momentous to meet people who share the same biological father." However one participant described this more as a means of helping to repair the damage caused by DI in the first place: "Knowing [X's] name and some minimal information about him has certainly taken the edge off".

Participants noted that when meeting donor half-siblings for the first time they found themselves looking for similarities in physical appearance, behaviour and other characteristics. Indeed, some who had met in person before confirming their genetic relatedness recounted doing precisely this to search for clues to suggest shared genetic kinship. However, caution was expressed that pre-existing knowledge of genetic relatedness might well encourage perceptions of similarity and familiarity "... perhaps because people want there to be one". Alternatively, it was acknowledged that shared characteristics might as easily derive from similar family environments and experiences as from a mutual genetic heritage: "I put it down to the fact that in every case our parents had to be open-minded and willing to experiment and go against the mainstream"; "All the parents (or at least the mothers) must have been liberal in attitude, reasonably affluent, and well-informed to have embarked on DI in the first place". In the event, the extent to which shared physical characteristics were recognised was varied: "I find it rather perturbing that I can see no physical resemblances between myself and my donor conceived siblings"; "physically there is no feature by feature resemblance, just an overall 'look'". The common physical attribute most frequently cited was short stature. Facial similarities between one specific Clan member and a photograph of X, and between other members were commented on, and one participant recounted that on first meeting the son of X, his wife had commented: "You don't need to tell me that this is one of your relatives - she's just like [two other members of Clan X]!", while another reported that seeing a Clan X member on a TV programme "made me aware of him being my brother". More frequently reported than identical physical characteristics were similar behavioural and attitudinal traits and mannerisms – most commonly regarding idiosyncracies - "a slight quirkiness (…) is a common factor, though it's hard to pin down" - and an affinity with words: "we are, on the whole, lively and talkative.

It's hard to get a word in edgeways with most of us”. Several also claimed to recognise comparable writing styles. Communications between Clan members operated at both an individual and group level and by means of email, Facebook, Skype, telephone and face-to-face contact; the level and frequency of which was described as “variable”, “sporadic” and “ad hoc”, dependent on “peoples' lives and energy levels”, geographical proximity, individual affinity, and topical issues that had generated “lively discussion” within the group. Several participants reported being in regular and frequent contact with a small number of half-siblings with whom they had developed a particularly close relationship; most had met their other half-siblings in person, several staying in each others’ homes; several larger gatherings had taken place in the UK in which some of those resident in North America had also participated.

Participants identified two principal benefits of having identified their donor and half-siblings. First, the extent to which this had become integral to the ways in which they redefined their identities: “Knowing my half siblings is a way of being in touch with my genetic heritage, who I am (...)Finding out who my bio father was and meeting half siblings has given me a much fuller sense of who I am”. A second gain was the pleasure of meeting, getting to know, and interacting with, a group of people who had previously been strangers, but with whom so much in common was discovered. Thus, interactions with genetic kin acquired greater significance than the acquisition of knowledge, however much sought after: “A feeling of being backed up, of having a protective band of brothers (and sisters) standing behind me (metaphorically speaking of course!)”; “I can always find a sib to ‘help me in my hour of need’ :-) :-0 :-)”.

At the same time, participants noted the idiosynracies of their group. Several used quote marks when they referred to Clan X as their family. One noted that their frequent use of ‘sister’ or ‘brother’ to describe Clan X members “has a tinge of irony if I have not met them”, while another noted the “strange combination” of “know[ing] lots of personal information about them and their families, yet they are complete strangers”.

Notwithstanding the overwhelmingly positive implications emanating from establishing their membership of Clan X, participants nevertheless identified some tensions associated with this particular social group and the relationships between its members. The first concerned the practical aspects of making and maintaining meaningful contact with individuals living in three different countries in two different continents: “I am frustrated by not being able to see more of them”; “it's a lot of birthdays to remember. :-)”. Even so, participants knew that the potential membership of the Clan could be much bigger than presently constituted, speculating that their number could exceed several hundred, most of whom “we will never know personally”. One wrote: “it is a little unnerving that siblings might be turning up for years to come” and another that: “it would be good to have more (but not so many that we 're not so special any more !!!!!)”. However, one participant said it was “scary” to imagine a large number of half-siblings with shared characteristics, “like a DI version of ‘The Boys from Brazil’”. Several commented on the late stage in life at which they had connected and at having missed out on knowing each

other as they were growing up, conveying a sense of lost time and opportunities: "It sure would have been nice if we could have known about each other when we were children". Knowledge of other Clan members who had chosen not to engage with their half-siblings was also troubling to most participants and one felt "..... somehow responsible that I didn't reach out more". By definition, of course, it was not possible to ascertain the perspectives of these individuals, although a glimpse into possible factors was provided vicariously by one Clan X member: "My sister and I 'lost' a stellar heritage when [X] turned out to be our dad and she deep down resents it. While [another Clan X member] perhaps 'found' his roots she certainly lost hers. (....) [Sister] has been damaged and, after all, that is not such a surprising outcome". If nothing else, this indicates that not every donor-conceived person, even given the opportunity, would necessarily wish, or feel compelled, to interact with their half-siblings.

Enjoyable though participating in group interaction was, several noted that this was accompanied by emotional pressures: "The emotional strain of meeting people who are both genetically close and total strangers"; "Over-sensitivity to any perceived neglect or negativity from siblings (not having been hardened off by normal youthful sibling warfare)"; "I think the whole process raises a lot of issues about belonging to a 'family' group or not, and a lot of anxiety about that".

Discovery of the identity of their donor and making contact with donor half-siblings impacted not only on Clan X members themselves, but also on their existing family relationships, with surviving parents, siblings, partners and children. Few participants had been in a position to discuss this with their fathers, although one who did reported: "Dad didn't enjoy talking about it much (...) but I know he felt genuinely happy for me to have an answer, and he was interested when I first shared the news to look at [X's] photograph". Two participants whose mothers were aware that they had become connected with donor half-siblings were said to be happy about this, while one whose mother had actively participated in the registration with UK Donor Link was described as: "quite chuffed (…) But she didn't much like me talking about half-siblings, because she felt excluded – as she explained to me, for 40 years she had been the person who knew most about and was closest to me. Suddenly here were other people with a claim to connection with me, who were nothing whatsoever to do with her. When she put it like that I could understand".

Discovery of donor half-siblings appeared to present a significant challenge for some half or adopted siblings with whom Clan X members had grown up (but who were not themselves Clan X members): "it is a difficult subject for my sister. She ignores the existence of my half siblings and has never asked anything about them"; "Finding the other half-sibs has made it harder for me and my brother to bond over and talk about the DI issues, but hasn't got between us in a more general way". However, not all participants reported difficulties, even if their siblings demonstrated relatively little interest: "I told my (adopted) sister once I knew I actually had siblings (…). She has in fact shown very little interest in meeting them"; "As for my

sister and myself discussing this, we did discuss it once (…). Other than that it never came up in any conversation I can recall”. Finally two participants, both married women, recalled the impact of identifying and making contact with their donor half-siblings on their husbands: “My husband's only sibling (…) died when I was making all these connections. It was difficult for him as he felt that as my 'family' was expanding his had shrunk. But he has loved meeting them all and feels warmly about them, as though they are family for him too”; “[My husband] was worried about being left out at first but found that the sibling group was inclusive of partners and then felt happier. My children were interested and pleased for me, but didn't really feel as personally involved as I did. My extended family (on my mother's side) was interested, cheerful and typically pragmatic about it”.

Revised personal biographies and new social networks

By the time participants shared their experiences of donor conception for this study, they had come to locate and define themselves within what one described as “a vast, extended ‘family’” and were able to reflect on the impact of both genetic and non- genetic factors on their understanding of personal biographies and how these were synthesised and integrated:

> “I have a much bigger family in which to define myself. The picture is now more complete for me. I feel as if I ‘belong’ to a clan, that I am connected to the past on both sides of my family, my mother’s as well as my two fathers’. I now find myself in a comfortable place and being the offspring of a known donor has become an integral part of the way that I define myself, though of course is only one of many facets that make up who ‘I’ am”.

> “At one point (…) I stumbled on my dad's mother's (unpublished) autobiography (…). What struck me as I read about her life and about my father as a little boy and a young adult was how much her life and her attitudes had influenced him and therefore had influenced me indirectly, two generations and many thousands of miles apart. (…) It made me realise that even though I don't have my father's genes or resemble him physically in any way, I am very much his daughter and his mother's granddaughter”.

For some, establishment of new family relationships had promoted re-appraisal of the dynamics underlying existing ones:

> “Meeting and reading the emails of my other sibs, made me realise that the personality of each person matters much more than a genetic link. It let me look at the relationship

with my father as being less than perfect, because he was less than perfect; not because he was not genetically related to me".

Overall, participants articulated a deeper and more informed understanding of genetic and social relationships and their interactions than they felt they would otherwise have possessed had they not experienced the disjunctions to their biographies occasioned by discovery of their DI conception, and the identities of their donor and half siblings. Most described it as y a voyage of discovery that had included numerous vicissitudes: "I suppose I would say that I have come to know myself better (...) but that that has been a painful and difficult process". At the same time, the 'unfinished' nature of this journey was emphasised by the emergence of a new Clan X member as the study was in progress and whose engagement with the group had generated further development of individual and group identity.

Discussion

The legitimacy of donor-conceived people's interest in learning the identity of their donor and/or other genetic relatives resulting from donation is not universally accepted (see, for example, McTavish, 2011; Tipton, cited in Motluk, 2011). Nevertheless, some service providers have begun to recruit identifiable donors because of recognition of the "deep desire" of some donor-conceived people "for the answer to the perplexing questions about who they are genetically" (Melbourne IVF, 2010), informal registries have been established to facilitate information exchange and contact between individuals personally involved in donor-conception (Blyth and Speirs, 2004) and some governments have mandated the availability of "open-identity" donation only (Blyth and Frith, 2009). Currently, however, there is little relevant empirical data that can be used to inform practice or policy development.

This study, the first to provide an in-depth exploration of the perceptions and experiences of donor-conceived individuals who have learned about the nature of their conception, discovered the identity of their donor and made contact with donor half-siblings and with a child of their donor, will help both to inform practice and to foster future research in this currently under-explored field

However, it has a number of limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, it was based on the experiences of a small self-selected group who learned about their donor conception during early adolescence to late adulthood, all of whom were raised in European Caucasian, two-parent heterosexual households. Their experiences may therefore differ in significant ways from those of donor-conceived individuals who learn of their donor conception at an earlier age and whose donor is identifiable.

However, it is worth noting the existence of significant individual differences among such a small group , and which could reasonably be expected to be found among an even less

homogeneous group. The cross-sectional method used provides insight into participants' experiences and perceptions at a single point in time only – and these may well change – and reliance on recall, especially of long-past events, may be subject to bias or other error (Gilhooly and Green, 1996), although such limitations may be exaggerated (e.g. Brewin et al., 1993; Neisser, 1994; Blane, 1996). Participants themselves described their responses to their transformed biographies as an evolving and dynamic process and which was evidenced during the course of the study by the identification of a new Clan member. Similarly, current Clan members' perspectives and experiences may well be impacted by the discovery of new members. As regards distant experiences and events that left a deep impression on participants, such as those that were investigated in this study, several claimed that their recollections remained fresh, even after many years (Blyth, in press). A final limitation relates to the methodology. Practical considerations determined the employment of asynchronous email interviewing as the most feasible research tool, although this of necessity lacks the visual and aural clues that can facilitate engagement between researcher and study participants who are in face-to-face or telephone contact with each other. Nevertheless, effective rapport was established. In particular, email interviewing readily enabled the researcher to seek clarification or expansion of participants' responses and did not appear overly to restrict meaningful and thorough dialogue between the researcher and participants. Communication via the written as opposed to the spoken world also allowed discovery and exploration of ambiguities in participants' accounts, such as the use of quote marks when referring to 'family', 'brother', 'sister', that probably would have remained undetected if exchanges had relied on oral communication only. A practical advantage of using email was that participants' responses could be transferred to a "Word" document, thus obviating subsequent transcription of the interview data, a necessarily resource-intensive element of the conventional research process that also allows for the introduction of errors into the data.

Tensions inherent in the nature/culture dualism in contemporary Western discourses are specifically articulated within the context of donor conception (Grace and Daniels, 2007). The focus of this paper has been to explore to what extent, based on the experiences of a small group of donor-conceived individuals who have learned about the nature of their conception, discovered the identity of their donor and of donor half-siblings, genes may or may not 'matter'. Similar to the conclusions drawn by Grace and Daniels in their discussions with parents who had built their family using donor conception, the cognitions and behaviours of participants in this study challenge the integrity of the dualist construct. Thus, far from being enslaved to, or unreconstructed apologists for, genetic essentialism, or of being insufficiently appreciative of the parents who raised them (Blyth, 2010), donor-conceived individuals seeking information about their genetic biographies very clearly display their agency in determining what it is about their genetic and social histories and relationships that matters to them. At the same time, donor-conceived individuals who are identifying and forging links with genetic kin

are beginning to establish the parameters by which the shifting "latent web" of donor half-sibling linkages (Riley, 1983) becomes more firmly embedded as a new family form in the 21st century.

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