

LETTER FROM THE PI

Dear Participants,

Thank you so much for your involvement with the Known Donor Project! We unexpectedly received a phenomenal response when our study was launched last winter and have been furiously interviewing, transcribing, and writing ever since. At the moment, we have over 200 participants and potential participants in our database, and new families contact us every day. If our replies to your queries occasionally take some time, this is why. However, we remain deeply grateful for every new signup, and are increasing our recruitment efforts in specific areas to make sure our sample is representative.

We purchased ads and posted study details in relevant Facebook groups throughout the spring and are continuing to do so. We also sent recruiters to LGBTQ Pride parades in Seattle, Philadelphia, Chicago, San Diego, and Minneapolis (see left). One of our most important sources of new participants has been our current sample; interviewees often connect us with their family members and with other friends who have used known donors. Our sample continues to grow exponentially as we tap into our participants' social networks. We are currently seeking more families of color, families and donors who met online, and known donor families who have had more challenging experiences.

This summer, we welcomed nine new research assistants to our team from Smith's MSW program. They will be conducting, transcribing, and analyzing interviews through the summer and fall and ultimately writing their theses on our findings. The entire team will be developing other papers and conference presentations as well through the rest of 2015. We are very excited to announce that we are beginning a book project which will include stories from known donor families (see page 4 for details and how to submit). We also hope to use findings to develop a comprehensive website with resources for known donor families or people considering using or becoming known donors.

The team is also looking ahead to the next



Team member Meg Ruppel recruiting at Seattle Pride!
Did you meet her?

phases of our project. We are using current findings to develop a quantitative survey, which will likely be sent out to our participants within the next few months. Next year, we plan to launch a longitudinal study. For this study, we will recruit families early in their journeys who are willing to share their experiences with us periodically so we can understand how known donor families evolve over time.

Our project would be impossible without your generosity and willingness to share your stories. We hope it's clear that YOU are always at the heart of our research: this project was launched to benefit known donor families, and we always want you to feel comfortable contacting us with questions, concerns, or other thoughts. We hope you enjoy our first newsletter; see page 4 for a chance to share what you want to see from future issues.

With gratitude and best wishes,

Hannah Karpman

Hannah Karpman,
PhD, MSW
KDP Principal Investigator

WHO WE'VE TALKED TO SO FAR...



61% of families and donors were friends prior to conception

40%* of donors are gay

48% are from CA, MA, or NY

...AND WHO WE WANT TO TALK TO

Before we close recruiting in August, we want to make sure the following groups are represented in our sample. Please share with friends!

families of color

families who found donors online

donors who are related to the non-carrying parent

families who have experienced conflict

*statistic included because many participants have asked

EXISTING RESEARCH ON KNOWN DONOR FAMILIES

Many people question the right of LGBTQ women to raise children. Since most researchers want lesbian families to be accepted, they focus on the things straight parents and lesbian parents have in common. Their aims are good, but they miss key differences between lesbian-headed and straight-headed families. Straight couples who don't become pregnant through sex usually adopt or use sperm from a bank. Therefore, most research on lesbian families is about people who adopt or use anonymous donors. There's very little work on families who become pregnant using sperm from people they know (Agigian, 2004; Chabot & Ames, 2004; Goldberg, Downing, & Richardson, 2009; Ryan-Flood, 2009).

Researchers want to prove that having lesbian parents doesn't hurt kids. They often focus on kids' outcomes (e.g. how happy and well-adjusted they are) to prove that children raised in lesbian-headed households turn out fine (Baetens & Brewaeys, 2001; Bos & Gartrell, 2007; Bos & Hakvoort, 2007; Bos, Van Halen, & Van den Boom, 2005; Fedewaa, Blacka, & Ahnb, 2015; Riggs, 2008a). Most researchers don't think donor type affects children's wellbeing (Bos & Gartrell, 2010; van Gelderen, Bos, Gartrell, Hermanns, & Perrin, 2012). One study (Bos & Hakvoort, 2007) found that children with known donors have more social problems. On the other hand, children with anonymous donors often want to know more about their donors (Agigian, 2004; Daniels & Taylor, 1993).

Some research examines the structural factors (e.g. whether parents can afford to buy sperm from a bank) predicting whether women will use anonymous donors or known donors (Bos & Hakvoort, 2007; Mamo, 2007). In a lot of places, lesbian couples

who use known donors have limited legal rights. Many people use anonymous donors because they're worried that a known donor could get custody (Agigian, 2004; Baetens & Brewaeys, 2001; Barrett, 1997; Mamo, 2007; Tourini & Coyle, 2002). On the other hand, concerns about discrimination, cost, or transparency may make couples wary of sperm banks.

Some people have studied gay men who donate sperm to lesbian couples. Most straight men become sperm donors out of a desire to help others or because they need the payment. Gay men often see donation as a chance to procreate and prefer more contact with their offspring (Dempsey, 2012b; Riggs, 2008b). Therefore, gay men are more likely than straight men to become known donors (Riggs, 2008b). Some researchers think LGBTQ women prefer gay male donors (Agigian, 2004; Dempsey, 2012b; Riggs, 2008a). However, some couples fear gay donors will want more contact with the kids than the mothers are comfortable with (Almack, 2006; Dempsey, 2012a; Riggs, 2008a).

The eventual relationships between known donors, LGBTQ women, and their kids vary a lot. Some donors never see the children, some are full parents, and most are somewhere in between (Almack, 2006; Baetens & Brewaeys, 2001; Barrett, 1997; Dempsey, 2012a; Donovan, 2000; Goldberg & Allen, 2013; Ryan-Flood, 2009). Some couples plan out their family structures in advance, while others don't (Dempsey, 2012a; Goldberg & Allen, 2013). Initial plans sometimes stay the same and sometimes change (Barrett, 1997; Dempsey, 2012a; Goldberg & Allen, 2013). There's not a lot of research about any of this, which is why we started the Known Donor Project.

COOK WITH YOUR KIDS: SUMMER SMOOTHIES



1

Mix 2 cups of pineapple chunks, 1 cup of firmly packed spinach, 1 cup of green grapes, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of coconut milk, 1 $1\frac{1}{4}$ cup of fresh orange juice, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of vanilla yogurt.



2

If you want, add two tablespoons of honey to sweeten it.



3

Puree the ingredients in a blender and serve the results to your children.



4

Delicious and rich in iron, protein, vitamins, and minerals.

OUR RECENT & FORTHCOMING WORK



Team members Mallory Merryman (left) and Emily Ruppel (right) presented initial findings at Celebrating Collaborations, a student-faculty research conference held at Smith in April.

ABSTRACT SUBMITTED TO NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

As many as six million children and adults in the United States have a LGBT identified parent (Williams Institute, 2015). As the policy context shifts to provide more rights and recognition to same-sex couples and their children, LGBT couples are increasingly adding children to their families. Increased recognition of LGBT families also drives increased access to health and mental health services (insurance eligibility) and clinicians and other health practitioners are, or should expect to see more same-sex families in their practices. To date, there is very little empirically supported literature about how to best serve these families. Previous research focused heavily on child level outcomes, with the goal of defending the rights of queer parents. Our work aims to further explore the processes and experiences of queer families, both negative and positive, in order to enhance services available to these families.

Using a qualitative grounded theory approach, we conducted narrative interviews with women in same-sex relationships who used the sperm of friends, family members, and acquaintances to achieve conception. Current legal and therapeutic interventions focus on establishing and protecting firm roles pre conception, yet our findings suggest that there are a wide range of ways in which known donor family structures evolve over time, often in directions not initially desired or anticipated during the conception process. Interventions might better focus on establishing ways to communicate about changes to family structures than on establishing a family structure that may not be sustainable, or even desirable as the family development process advances.

PAPERS IN PROGRESS

“The Family Thicket”: Family Structures in Queer Families with Known Donors

“Intentional Families”: How and Why Queer Women Choose Known Sperm Donors

Complete Trust, Complete Understanding: Initial Negotiations with Men Selected as Known Donors

Queer Family Research and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity: Who and How Should we Be Recruiting based on Gender/Sexual Orientation?

“A Different Kind of Intimacy”: Relationships between Adults in Known Donor Families

“We Started Out with a Donor and Ended Up with a Family Member”: Evolution of Known Donor Families

Communication Patterns: Case Studies in Known Donor Families

“Heterosexuality in a Jar”: Lesbian Women’s Reflections on Conception Using Known Donors

“We’re Proof that You Don’t Need to Mess Around with Doctors if You Don’t Want To”: Known Donor Families and the Medical System

STAYING INVOLVED WITH THE KDP

CONNECT YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

As you know, it's our goal to talk to as many members of each family as possible. If you haven't had a chance to pass our study along to your family members (or your family members along to us!), this is a great time for it.

If you have friends who are or who have used known donors, please consider passing our study along to them! We're especially interested in talking to families and donors of color, couples who have met their donors online (such as through the Known Donor Registry), and families who have experienced conflict or challenges in their known donor relationships.

CONNECT ON FACEBOOK

You've probably visited the KDP official Facebook page... but did you know we run a secret Facebook group for families who have used or are considering using known donors? Group members can connect with each other, share their stories, and ask for advice. Send **Mallory Merryman** a Facebook message to join.

ADVISE THE KDP

We are in the process of developing a research council to advise our study. This council would include all kinds of peo-

ple with an interest in research on known donor families - members of the families themselves, naturally, as well as other researchers, representatives from sperm banks and fertility clinics, and family law attorneys. Members of the council would be expected to participate in a few two-hour conference calls a year and might receive occasional emails with thoughts and questions about the direction of the study. **If you are interested in serving on the council, please email us at knowndonorproject@smith.edu.** People of color and/or members of low-income families are especially encouraged to contact us.

SUBMIT YOUR STORY

Throughout our project, we've sought to understand and share known donor stories as families themselves understand them, without imposing our own expectations and theories. If you've already been interviewed, you know that our interview is structured around how YOU conceptualize your experience. With this in mind, we hope to compile an anthology of known donor family stories, written by the families themselves. Amidst these stories, we will include writing from our research team about the themes the essays range and our findings in the rest of the study.

We are currently accepting submissions from anyone who

sees themselves as part of a known donor family. Though you may provide whatever context you wish, we are particularly interested in stories that center on one particular part of the known donor experience. For example, essays might focus on the decision to donate, experiences on websites such as the Known Donor Registry, a conflict surrounding the donor contract, a friendship with the donor's mother, the child's first trip to visit the donor on their own...whatever experience you're most interested in sharing.

Suggested length is 2000-5000 words, but we will consider stories that fall outside of this range. Writers of selected essays will be paid \$150. If you have any questions, feel free to contact us. **Submit your stories (with name or a preferred pseudonym included) to knowndonorproject@smith.edu with "Anthology Submission" in the subject line.** We look forward to reading them!

READ OUR NEWSLETTERS

Congratulations, you're already doing this one! It's very important to us that the content of our newsletters be relevant to YOU. **You can share your thoughts on what you'd like to see from future newsletters at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/YZVDZJ3>.** The results of the poll will be used to inform the development of the next newsletter, and will themselves be shared.