

LETTER FROM THE PI

Dear Participants,

Happy Spring! Can you believe it has only been a year since the Known Donor Project launched? (Neither can we.) We are so thankful for your interest in our research as it moves in new and exciting directions.

As many of you know, we closed recruitment this fall and finished up our last few interviews in the following weeks. However, this change doesn't mean the project is over – quite the opposite! The research team has reviewed and analyzed every interview, and we are now in talks about the themes that emerged. These themes will quickly move from conversation to the page as we begin to write, publish, and present our findings.

The Known Donor Project team will present recommendations for clinicians working with known donor families at the National Association of Social Workers' annual conference in Framingham, MA this April. In March, we presented on a number of topics Eastern Psychological Association in New York City. See page 8 for details about both talks.

As mentioned in our last newsletter, seven graduate students at the Smith School for Social Work are writing their MSW theses on findings from the Known Donor Project. Topics include the influence of state and national policy on LBQ women's families, how crisis or conflict may impact donor-parent relationships, known donor families and the medical system, clinician-family relationships, and bioethical questions that known donor families consider.



The Known Donor Project team hanging out on a Friday morning!

We are also preparing to launch a spin-off study about known donor families' interactions with fertility clinics, and how these clinics' policies may help or hinder lesbian family formation. To protect participants, the details of this study are currently confidential, but we expect to share results with families in the next year.

As always, PLEASE feel free to contact us at knowndonorproject@smith.edu with questions, concerns, or cute family photos. After hearing your stories, we feel invested in every family and love to hear about what's going on in your lives. And let us know what you think of the newsletter – if there's something you want to see in the next issue, we want to hear about it!

With gratitude and best wishes,

Hannah Karpman

Hannah Karpman,
PhD, MSW
KDP Principal Investigator

REINVENTING LANGUAGE AND REBUILDING STORIES

Known Donor family quotes and questions



HOW ARE BABIES MADE?

“How do you get a baby in your tummy?”

“We joke that we’re gonna look at her and say ‘Okay, when two people love each other, they go to the doctor’s office, and they make a baby.’”

“How did we get to the planet?”

(the title of a book written by a known donor family)

WHAT DO YOU CALL YOUR KNOWN DONOR?

“‘I have a special uncle’...and for a while they had their own little story that they kind of got from Disney. They were like ‘Oh, we were like the two fairies that were born from the same laugh, so for a while they thought they were twins because they were born with the same laugh!’”

“‘Uncle Eric...special uncle...kinda my dad.’”

“We’ve jokingly over the years started calling him our genetic sponsor. And around the kids we used to call him that sometimes before their language developed.”

CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS WITH KIDDOS

Written by Shira Breen



As the Black Lives Matter movement continues to grow and spread across the country through cities and into more removed areas, more and more people have been showing up to protests and participating in anti-racist organizing efforts. Because so many other issues intersect with the way racism and anti-blackness work in the United States, people from many walks of life have come to make up the movement. Children and families are heavily connected to this work.

Because of the reality of racism that so many children and families experience on a day-to-day basis, family involvement in the movement has grown. From third grade children talking about the significance of protesting, to parents figuring out how and when to formally introduce children to the world of racism, families are inherently connected to issues of race and racism in highly significant ways. That being said, depending on the family's racial background and their other differing identities, they will occupy a different role in this work. Unlike white children who generally experience the privilege of not being forced to confront race, children of color are raised in a world that often necessitates conversations regarding how to stay safe.

In an article published by Progress Illinois, Leahia Franklin Acox, the parent of two eight year old girls, all of whom recently attended protests in Chicago, emphasized the need for conversations with kids and adults about racism in the United States.

However, she also stressed that conversations are not enough, and that concrete actions are needed to work against these complex systems of oppression.

The task of having these conversations with children falls on parents, grandparents, uncles, donors, aunts, godmothers, and all kinds of caretakers of children. This education can present itself in many forms. Educator and author Renée Watson suggests that to help young people process their feelings, time can be set aside to write in their journals, make art, listen to freedom or protest songs, and read picture books that teach values of respect and introduce the ideas of privilege and oppression (Ishizuka, School Library Journal, 2014).

The known donor community is inherently connected to the Black Lives Matter movement. From Civil Rights leader, Baynard Rustin, to the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza, queer people have been at the center of racial justice organizing forever. Additionally, all families and people raising children face challenges that come with introducing children to the injustices that exist in the world.

These issues and interactions push families to learn and grow through conversations with their children. Figuring out how to engage in these topics with kids can be challenging. If you need support engaging in critical conversations with your kids, or would like to share some of your experiences with other KDP families, reach out on facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/knownonorproject>.



COOK WITH YOUR KIDS: *CALLING ALL CIDER LOVERS!*

- 1 Put 8 cups apple juice, 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon (or 2 cinnamon sticks), 1/8 teaspoon grated nutmeg, 4 whole cloves, and 1 orange cut into slices in a 3-quart saucepan.
- 2 Cook over medium heat for about 5 minutes until hot. Stir often.
- 3 Strain the cider into a heatproof pitcher or mugs.
- 4 Feel free to add whipped cream and cinnamon sticks. Curl up, read a story, and enjoy.

Words that POP the Gender Binary

Historically, feminists have pushed for gender neutral language that is inclusive towards women. As gender neutral language becomes more commonly used and accepted across many parts of the United States, this language is evolving, and many people who don't identify as either male or female are searching for different words to express their differing gender identities. In English, this can look mean using words like;

- 'siblings' instead of sister or brother,
- 'parents' instead of mother or father,
- 'first year' instead of freshman,
- 'You all' or 'people' instead of ladies and gentlemen

The list goes on. In many romance languages where the entire language works within a gendered framework that categorizes each word as masculine or feminine, using gender neutral language can be challenging. However, because people who don't fit into the gender binary of male vs. female speak many different languages, there are new and different words being generated and used all over the world. For example, in Spanish*, an '@' can be added at the end of words to communicate gender neutrality.** Some examples of gender neutral words are provided in the tear out flashcards on the next page.*** Let us know about your experiences with language and gender!

*Spanish words chosen because of its rank as the second most spoken language in the United States.

**More information on gender in the Spanish language: https://www.uab.cat/Document/964/953/Guia_uso_no_sexista_lenguaje2.pdf

***Definitions may vary depending on location and dialect.

familia

family

amig@

friend (pronunciation
varies: amigow, amigi,
etc.)

donante de
semen

sperm donor

bebé

baby

herman@s

siblings (pronunciation
varies: hermanows,
hermanis, etc.)

te quiero
mucho

I love you

◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ THE TAXONOMY OF ◆◆◆◆◆◆◆◆ KNOWN DONOR FAMILIES

Written by Mallory Merryman

If there's one thing we've learned from interviewing so many families, it's that known donor families come in many shapes and sizes. This information is actually somewhat of a revelation in the research world. While researchers realize that donors' relationships to families and children are complex, existing academic work about known donor families has struggled to define the role of donors in family life (see Dempsey's 2012 paper "More like a donor or more like a father? Gay men's concepts of relatedness to children"). The Known Donor Team noticed that families came in many more varieties than donor or father, and we wanted to find a way to discuss and present these differences.

Our journey to find a model for describing known donor families has been a long and winding one. We initially started with a simple scale of known donor involvement in the family, which looked like the chart below.

When we tried to apply this scale to real families, however, we quickly realized that there was so much more to the donor / family relationship. Some questions the research team came out with included, "What about when the donor is close with the mother(s), but not with the child? Is that still family involvement?", "What if the donor is called Dad but rarely sees or interacts with the child?", and "How does this chart account for families in which the donor is biologically related to one of the mothers?". So, we went back to the interviews and we got more specific, eventually identifying 17 aspects of the donor-family relationship.

Our next step is to create comprehensive scale that accounts for all the domains of the relationship. We hope to use this scale not only to describe different families, but to create customizable tools for individuals and families to use when thinking about and creating their own families.

1.0 Potential for access, but no involvement	Donor has had no contact with child but there is potential for future contact.
2.0 Family Acquaintance	Donor is a family acquaintance and has had contact with the child as a result, but involvement is limited.
3.0 Family friend / "Special uncle"	Donor is a family friend and has a special relationship with child, often an uncle relationship.
4.0 Parenting supporting, but not co-parent	Donor provides some direct parenting supporting (e.g. regular babysitting) but the family does not identify him as a parent.
5.0 Co-parent with less involvement than mother(s)	Family identifies the donor as a co-parent, but he has fewer rights / responsibilities and less contact with the child than the mother(s).
6.0 Co-parent with equal involvement to mother(s)	Family identifies the donor as a co-parent and he has equal rights / responsibilities to the mother(s).

OUR RECENT & FORTHCOMING WORK

PAPERS IN PROGRESS

“How Lesbian Couples with Known Sperm Donors Navigate Ideologies of Family”

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

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

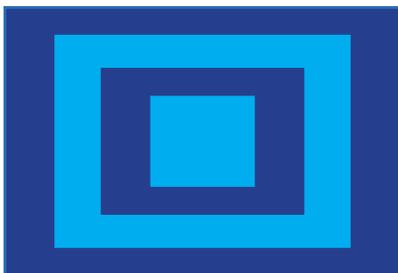
“The Family Thicket”: Structures of Queer Families with Known Sperm Donors

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

“The Ethics of Known Donor Families in their Own Words”

“Putting Relationships before Procedure: Advice to Mental Health Practitioners in Interactions with Known Donor Families”

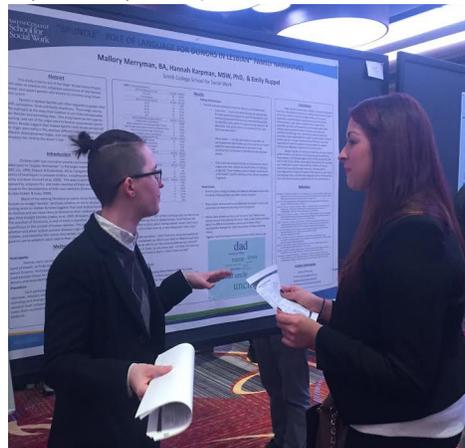
“Blazing New Paths to Conception: Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Women with Known Sperm Donors’ Experiences of Health Care”



RECENT PRESENTATIONS

Karpman, H. E., Merryman, M., & Ruppel, E. H. (2016, March). **Intentional families: Choice points and family structures in lesbian known donor families.** Poster session presented at the Eastern Psychological Association.

Merryman, M., Karpman, H. E., & Ruppel, E. H. (2016, March). **‘Spuncle’: Role of language for donors in lesbian family narratives.** Poster session presented at the Eastern Psychological Association. (Below: Mallory presents ‘Spuncle’ poster)



Ruppel, E. H., Karpman, H., & Merryman, M. (2016, March). **Conflict in lesbian known donor families.** Poster session presented at the Eastern Psychological Association

UPCOMING PRESENTATIONS

A KDP-adjacent paper under review at the American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology

Ruppel, E. H., Karpman, H. E., Delk, C. E., & Merryman, M. **Online Maternity Information Seeking among Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer Women.** Paper to be presented at Celebrating Collaborations: Students and Faculty Working Together.

Karpman, H.E., Merryman, M., & Ruppel, E. H. (2016, April). **Known sperm donor families: Guidance for clinicians.** Paper to be presented at the National Association of Social Workers.

STAYING INVOLVED WITH THE KDP

Stay updated with the Known Donor project by liking us on Facebook. Email knowndonor-project@smith.edu to join our Facebook group for families who have used or are considering using known donors! If you are interested in joining our advisory council and contributing your much valued thoughts and time to our research, shoot us an email. Lastly, send us your stories, artwork, and photos for our social media outreach, as well as for future newsletters.

LET US KNOW

What are we missing? What would you like to see? Questions? Comments? Concerns? Critiques? Compliments? Ideas? Let us know at knowndonorproject@smith.edu.