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Assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) have the potential to create an intricate web of connections both genetic and social, drawing donors and their partners, parents, and children into a broad kinship network with the donor offspring and their family. Kinship and relatedness have been widely theorised in the anthropological literature. Strathern (1992) described traditional understandings of kinship as ‘primordial ties’ that transcend social concerns, which have shifted toward understanding relatedness as a matter of choice. Actors use and discard different aspects of the traditional biogenetic model of kinship to create a complex ‘choreography’ of the biological and the social, assisted by technology (Carsten, 2004). The genetic has not been abandoned in the incorporation of the social into understandings of relatedness; indeed, Latimer (2013) has described the position of family as a ‘twin institution’ of biological and lived relations in the site of the genetic clinic. The ‘new genetics’ has brought with it renewed interest in family medical histories and genealogies and an emphasis on genetic inheritance encouraged by commercial genetic testing (Finkler, 2001, Nash, 2004, Finkler, 2005, Lindenmeyer et al., 2011, Raspberry and Skinner, 2011), though these genetic narratives of family history can also bring ‘troubling’ associations (McLaughlin, 2015). Ideas about what is inheritable further complicate these narratives; as Edwards (2005: 426) notes, ‘what is figured as biological or social are not necessarily or unequivocally biological and social elements’.

New reproductive technologies have created new challenges, both on the personal and the institutional level. Debate about donor offspring’s ‘right to know’ their genetic origins (Frith, 2013, Lalos et al., 2007, Raes et al., 2013, Turkmendag, 2012, Daniels and Taylor, 1993, Hargreaves and Daniels, 2007) have led to a turn towards legislating for openness in sperm donation in many parts of the world, including the UK in 2005 (Blyth and Frith, 2009). Until 2012, Danish law mandated the use of anonymous sperm for donor inseminationⁱ; this law was changed to allow both donors and recipients to choose anonymous or identity-release donation. Though in Denmark and the UK these changes have only applied to those who donated after the law was changed, in some

cases, such as that of Victoria, Australia, these changes have been made to apply retroactively to those who donated anonymously (Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment Act, 2016).

Much of the prior substantive work in this area has been from the perspective of recipient families of donor sperm (Nordqvist, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2015, Ravelingien et al., 2015, Freeman et al., 2009), although others have written in depth about donors and kinship. Mohr (2015: 171) has conducted one of the few existing studies on Danish donors. He found that 'donating semen impacts how sperm donors engage with life partners, family, friends and colleagues', and that these relationships were subject to change as donors' own self-perceptions were changed through donation. Previous studies of donors in various locations have found them to be invested in 'passing on' their genes to worthy mothers, regardless of their investment in parenting (Riggs and Scholz, 2011), and to have a broad range of willingness and active desire for contact (Kirkman et al., 2014; Speirs, 2007). Research into the parents' of donors who discovered their children had donated gametes reported a wide variety of reactions, ranging from enthusiasm and a desire to meet with the donor offspring to confusion and worry (Beeson et al., 2013).

In this article, I explore the ways in which Danish sperm donors imagine the potential relationships that are created through their role as a donor, not only between donors and offspring but also wider networks of connections that incorporate the families of both donors and recipients. Donors' imagined scenarios frequently involved fear of the unknown: uncertainty over whether any offspring existed and what they might want from their donor if they did. In navigating this uncertainty, donors regularly decoupled the social and the biological in their accounts whilst at the same time placing genetic relationships firmly at the centre of them.

Methodology

The main body of data collection encompassed in-depth semi-structured interviews with donors at several branches of a major Danish sperm bank. Participants were recruited initially by means

of information leaflets placed in the reception area of the sperm bank, and later via direct email mediated by the sperm bank manager. Out of 110 donors contacted, a total of 13 donors participated in the study; no information was available on non-respondents. The majority (n=9) of the interviews were carried out face to face, although for privacy and practical reasons, three donors opted to be interviewed via Skype and one via email. The interviews were transcribed as text and thematically analysed with the aid of NVivo software. All donors are referred to by pseudonyms within for confidentiality.

The majority of the donors (n=12) were native Danes. Eleven were white and two belonged to ethnic minorities. Four donors were married, five were in a relationship and four were single. Additionally, all of the married donors had children and none of the unmarried donors did. The majority were students (n=8). Other occupations in the sample included teaching, academia, and the military. Five of the sample were identity-release donors (i.e. they had chosen to allow their offspring to access information about them once they reach the age of 18) and eight were anonymous donors; all of the identity-release donors and five of the anonymous donors had also chosen the extended profile option. Most (n=11) were established and had been donating for between six months and three years, with varying degrees of regularity. One donor was brand new and had not yet made any donations, whilst another donor had been donating for over a decade. Three of the donors were planning to or had recently become inactive.

There are a number of possible reasons for the difficulty faced in recruiting. Firstly, the nature of sperm donation as a practice, particularly taking into account the anonymous donors in the sample, may mean men are reluctant to speak about it for fear that they may be 'outed' as a donor. Secondly, sperm donation involves a sexual act and is therefore a topic that donors may have felt uncomfortable discussing. It is also possible that this discomfort may have been exacerbated by the fact that I am a woman, though previous research has suggested this is not

necessarily the case (e.g. Grenz, 2010). Thirdly, conducting interviews in English may have limited the sample pool, and also potentially limited its demographics: we might posit that young, middle-class and/or highly educated Danes would be more likely to meet this criteria. However, the demographics of the eventual sample do not differ broadly from the demographic of the donor base at the time of the fieldwork. Finally, email as a recruitment strategy has been known to elicit low response rates to surveys (e.g. Koo and Skinner, 2005) and to elicit higher response rates when email invitations come directly from a researcher rather than a third party (Sutherland et al, 2013), which was not possible in this study. We could speculate that a more targeted face-to-face approach from the researcher may have been more successful. It is also possible that more donors could have been recruited to this study given more time.

Complications and the Knock on the Door

One of the main archetypes of the sperm donor in popular culture is that of the man with very many children, all of whom have the potential to show up, unannounced, at any time, to ‘hunt down’ their genetic origins. This is, for example, the premise of the 2013 comedy film *Delivery Man* in which the hundreds of offspring of a donor pursue a lawsuit in order to find out his identity (Scott, 2013). As in some previous studies of donors (Speirs, 2012; Kirkman, 2014), donors in this study used the language of the spontaneous ‘knock on the door’ to describe meeting their offspring. Some feared they may have a large number of offspring who might all ‘turn up’ at the same time and, perhaps more importantly, want something from their donor. Despite the presence of legislation in many countries to limit the number of offspring that each donor’s sperm is permitted to be used to create, this fear was not entirely unfounded for Danish donors who began to donate prior to a law change in 2012. This change was prompted by a scandal in which a donor from a Danish sperm bank was found to have passed on a genetic disease to at least five of his 43 donor offspring across 10 countries (Hansen, 2012). Following this incident, the Danish Health and Medicines Authority restricted the use of donor sperm to no more than 12 offspring

per donor, and also made it clear that sperm banks were obliged to withdraw sperm if there were any suspicions regarding genetic disease. Previously there had been a limit of 25 children per donor within Denmark, but where sperm was exported, as was the case in the 2012 scandal, any pregnancies produced abroad did not count against the limit. Often these were not tracked at all unless a clinic in a destination country reported back (Krag and Nielsen, 2013). This uncertain landscape meant that only one donor in my sample could correctly identify how many children his sperm was legally allowed to be used to produce.

Henrik, a 25-year-old anonymous donor, did keep track of how many straws of his sperm had been sold and how many pregnancies had been reported using information from the sperm bank's website—though this was contrary to rules about double-blindness and donors knowing their own donor number.

Henrik: You get to hear this romantic idea about people finding their father. But you quite quickly realise how the donations actually add up. For the moment being, it's close to 60 or something samples that have been sold. [...] if all of them actually turn out [to be successful], that could have some complications afterwards. It's not like I could have an optimal relationship to any of the kids anyway.

Interviewer: What do you mean by optimal?

Henrik: Well, I couldn't have like a social or personal relationship to all of them. I mean, if suddenly say 60 people got together and turned up, knocked on my door.

Here, an idealised narrative of sperm donors meeting their offspring is juxtaposed with the fear of having of multitudes of donor offspring. In Henrik's imagined scenario, the offspring have 'got together' and 'knocked on the door' without warning, which echoes pop-cultural narratives that set donors in opposition to their offspring: organising themselves as a group, taking him by surprise, and expecting something of him, in this case a personal relationship. For Henrik, the fear of being responsible for such a large number of offspring was his main reason for remaining anonymous, even though he was theoretically willing to become an identity-release donor.

Similarly, Erik, a 31-year-old anonymous donor, drew an explicit comparison with movies when discussing meeting his offspring. In opposition to the inconvenience and uncertainty of the 'knock on the door', in Erik's scenario, the donor offspring rescues the donor from an unhappy situation:

Erik: I've thought about it and I think, under perfect circumstances then... of course [I would want to meet them], but depending on where I am with my family life at that time, it may cause a problem.

Interviewer: What would be the perfect circumstances?

Erik: You know, like in those cheap American movies where the donor is, is drunk and left alone and then a child comes and says "you're my dad!", something like that [both laugh]. [pause] But I think it's going to be... complicated. At least if, I don't know how many pops up and says, erm, "hi!"

The idea that offspring might present 'complications' for donors' future lives is present in both accounts. They each fear losing control of the number of offspring they might have, and, furthermore, fear not having control over the circumstances of a meeting with those offspring.

However, the potential to have a large number of offspring was not necessarily entirely negative for donors. Though Bent, a 24-year old anonymous donor, feared a 'knock on the door', when I asked him how he would feel if he found out that his sperm had never been used, he expressed pride in the idea of having one hundred offspring:

When you asked me that, I must admit I felt a little disappointed! You know... there's something... inherently masculine with spreading your seed, it's just... so... even though it's a little scary to think that I might have a hundred children, it's a bit cool as well. So somewhere inside, I can think "alright, the [Bent] genes are out there, I don't have to worry".

Here, the language of 'inherent' masculinity is used to weigh the risk of becoming responsible for 'a hundred children' against the pride and evidence of virility that being accepted as a donor offers men. Bent feels relief that his genetics have been (potentially) passed on. The evolutionary psychology concept of the male biological imperative to 'spread seed' amongst many women helps to justify taking the role of sperm donor as a rational act that satisfies this imperative despite the 'scary' potential outcome.

“Real” Fatherhood

Similarly to the work of Almeling (2011: 145), many of the donors in this study defined themselves as fathers in some fashion. A divide between social and biological ‘fatherhood’ was highly visible across the donors’ accounts. Daniel gave a particularly succinct summation of this when he said: ‘biologically they are my children, yes. But I do not have any other affiliation with them besides that’. Jonas articulated this division through the statement: ‘we’re not related in any way, only by blood’. This echoes the work of Edwards and Strathern (2000: 160) on inclusion in English kinship. Relatedness for Jonas is a function of more than blood ties, but the biological connection is still flagged; this leaves space for him to ‘claim back’ potential offspring as related in the future should he choose to. Erik laid out this biological/social divide and the comparative value placed on the different relationships very clearly:

You know, in my mind, the children that I raise, of course, they’ll be most important. Because they will be my children. But then if somebody comes along and says “hi, erm, I tracked you down” then... I’ve been thinking, you know then... it’s going to be... strange to say, “I don’t want to have anything to do with you” but on the other hand, I can’t accept you like half my child.

He makes a distinction here between ‘children that I raise’ and the children that are biologically his but not raised by him. The phrase ‘half my child’ suggests that to have a ‘full’ connection with a child involves both aspects, biological and social. It seems to imply that Erik’s intent to parent matters: children that he raises are fully his, but children that he is biogenetically related to but did not raise can never be fully ‘his’, though he acknowledges that it would be ‘strange’ to deny any connection at all.

Indeed, one theme across the donors’ accounts was pop-culture’s preoccupation with narratives about ‘biological fatherhood’. Two of the four identity-release donors I spoke to told me that seeing documentaries about children searching for their father motivated them to choose the identity-release option. Isak, a 26-year-old anonymous donor, however, was firmly against there

being an identity-release option at all, and dismissed these kinds of documentaries as ‘corny’, similar to Henrik and Erik’s dismissal of narrative of finding one’s father as ‘romantic’ and ‘cheap’:

I think I’m very much against the fact that they have a non-anonymous profile. I can’t see what that’s good for. I know some parents might tell their children, “hey, your dad is not your real biological father” but I think it makes it even harder for the children if they start some search finding their real father, it’s very popular in the TV right now to make some kind of television programs out of that. I think it’s corny.

Having defined the donor as the ‘real biological father’, Isak nevertheless goes on to position the donor-offspring relationship as a blank slate, free from the history or emotions required to be ‘important’:

Of course, I understand the children are probably adults when they start that kind of searching. But for me, I’m pretty sure that the parents have been doing everything they can to provide the best childhood for them and... yeah, I mean, why is it so important to find, like, your real biological father if a personal relationship between the mother and the father wasn’t established. Like, there is no history! It’s not the same if, like, the mom goes to a vacation, falls in love with some kind of... [trails off] Yeah, you know what I mean, right? There is no history, there is no emotions involved.

Describing the donor as the ‘real’ father serves to reinforce this hierarchy while rejecting knowledge and contact with him as necessary; genetic fatherhood remains indelibly and undeniably ‘real’, independent of any other social relationships and regardless of the donor’s desire to assume the social role of fatherhood.

Isak views the donor’s social relationship and interaction with the mother as the most important factor in whether or not donors and offspring should meet, and this was true of other donors too. Mikael, for example, considers himself an ‘actual father’, which he defines in terms of taking on both social and legal responsibility for the child, only in the case where he has a connection with the mother of the child:

Mikael: If I was forced to take part in, if I was forced to actually act as some sort of a legal parent to my offspring, that would probably make me

stop donating as well. If I have to be a parent, then I would like to have been part of the entire thing. Conceiving, pregnancy and all that. And even though the mother and I may end up leaving each other, I would still know that I was the... I would feel more of an actual father to the offspring.

Interviewer: Would you feel the same way if you'd had a child from a one night stand or something like that?

Mikael: Yeah, I would still feel more attached to the child than I would... feel attached to all the, erm [laughs] lab children that I may or may not have.

Several donors drew comparisons between donation and one-night stands or other similar cases of children they had not raised themselves suddenly coming into their lives. Isak's previous account, for example, makes comparisons with a child from a holiday romance, and Bent drew an explicit contrast between his donor offspring and an ex-girlfriend 'knocking on his door' with a child he had not known they had had together. In both cases, the scenario in which they had known the mother was the more compelling case for taking on the responsibility of fatherhood. The phrase 'lab children' in Mikael's account further serves to create distance, though here the divide is between the social and the *technological*. Similarly to Erik, he separates children he is an 'actual father' to from those which have only been produced through the mediation of the lab. For some donors, it seems that 'fatherhood' as a fully realised concept is based on participation, both in the physical act of conceiving a child through heterosexual intercourse and in the mother's personal and emotional history. They may accept their position as 'real' biological or genetic father, but order to become an 'actual father', a prior relationship with the mother must exist; the words 'real' and 'actual' seem to be functioning to describe the difference between biological and social in these accounts. We might draw comparisons here with narratives of kinship in adoption. In Carsten's (2000: 691) study of adoption reunions, kinship bonds were 'earned' through hard work and the effort put into caring for a child, not bestowed automatically by fact of birth. Here, the donors negotiate their responsibility in much the same way.

Imagining Recipients

Part of uncoupling the social and biological involves donors considering their potential relationships with recipient parents as well as with offspring, but also the connections that other members of donors' families have with DI recipients and offspring. This has been evident in the discussions around fatherhood and participation: the emphasis on, conversely, the *lack of* relationship between donors and recipient mothers helps them to define and articulate their connection to their offspring. However, there was also a subset of donors who had considered the kind of people that would be selecting them as a donor and had preferences for who the recipients of their sperm might be. In many cases, this was expressed as concern about the child's general welfare; some donors were worried that their 'biological child' might potentially be raised by someone who treated them badly. Lars was able to mitigate his worries by reassuring himself that the steps that donor recipients had to go through in order to produce the child in the first place meant that they would treat the child particularly well:

I thought about before that I really don't hope that it's a kind of... bad persons, so to say, that get my... yeah, my biological child. But after I just rationalised and say that if they go to these lengths then evidently they really want it and will do a good job.

As a donor, Lars fits the stereotype of the self-motivated anonymous donor: he was an anonymous donor, was not interested in meeting his offspring due to the threat to his privacy, and consciously and actively worked to maximise the payment he received from donation. However, unlike previous findings which suggest that this kind of donor is not interested in knowing about his offspring (Almeling, 2007), Lars had thought about them and about their welfare. Rather than indifference toward his offspring, he had actively considered whether they would be raised by someone who would do a 'good job', demonstrating a desire to be responsible toward his offspring within the bounds of his desire for privacy. Privacy and children raised 'well' also intersected in Erik's account, though in a slightly different form; similarly to Isak, he expressed

the hope that if the recipient parents raised the offspring properly, there would be no need for them to 'knock on the door'.

A number of donors had fixed ideas about who it was they thought, or hoped, would be using their sperm, based on the information that the recipients had access to about them as donors.

Erik, for example, pictured recipients who chose him having a similar social profile to him:

Erik: It shouldn't bother me that much, because right now it's only single cells, but I erm... I have a feeling that the people using me as a donor are, [long pause] are... you know, responsible people, and I think in my profile it says that I'm a PhD student and very clever and blah blah blah blah, so I think, I think maybe it's maybe the same profile, same type of people that – [pause]

Interviewer: The same people?

Erik: Because I think if you look at the... social side of it, then people using In-Vitro Fertilisation, they're already on a higher social level, so... so, I'm thinking that the people wanting to use my donation, they're, you know, well educated, and they want "well educated sperm", however awful that may sound!

I interpreted Erik's trouble articulating his thoughts here as discomfort he felt at hoping that any recipients would be people 'like him' (i.e. his statements such as 'it shouldn't bother me' and 'however awful that may sound'). Isak used similar disclaimers when describing how he imagined recipients selecting a donor:

I would assume that if a childless couple in the US who both had a higher education, I would think they would prefer a Caucasian white, maybe, from a higher educational, institutional background, I don't know. Again, I think it goes that way, rather than a carpenter and a person working at a convenience store selecting a child. I mean, I think people from, which might come out wrong, but from a higher social setting would also have that as a criteria for them.

There seems to be an implication here that, for these donors, being a good parent implies a certain level of wealth and social status. In Erik's account, 'responsible people' and people 'on a higher social level' are explicitly conflated. Some donors went beyond hoping that recipients would match their idea of a good parent to suggest that donors should have a measure of control

over recipients, in a similar way to recipients selecting donors from the online catalogue. Jonas, for instance, wanted the opportunity to agree in 'general terms' who could purchase his sperm:

- Jonas:** Right now, I don't know anything about which people are getting the sperm. I would like it to be some good people, of course!
- Interviewer:** Ok. What kind of people would be good people?
- Jonas:** Yeah, that's very interesting, very difficult, right?! [...] someone who's physically capable of taking care of a child. Erm... maybe also somebody who is economically capable of taking care of a child. I think you should look into some of the same terms you use when you're picking parents for adoption. Well... but again, I don't really know that process either. [...] What I mean is just physically capable. If... if they can't, if they don't have any arms or any legs and they're just laying in a wheelchair all day, [it] might not be the best idea.

Here, not only is financial ability a signifier of good parenthood but so is physical ability. Though Jonas' bias against disabled recipients was not shared overtly by other donors, these accounts do seem to demonstrate a questioning of what kind of lives are fit lives and who is fit to parent. They are bound up in assumptions about the kind of people who obtain donor sperm, including their race, educational level, and social class. These assumptions are not, perhaps, necessarily unfounded; Inhorn and Birembaum-Carmeli (2008), for example, have described the global inequalities of access to reproductive technologies, based on the high financial costs of treatment. In Denmark, however, while public funding for IVF treatment was cut in 2010, it was re-implemented by 2012 (Folketinget, 2011). Bryld (2001) has described the ART debate in Denmark in the 1980s and 90s, arguing that certain recipient mothers, in particular lesbians and single women, were figured as 'monstrous' along with 'mad scientists' in opposition to the child's 'benevolent saviour' father. Larsen (2015) argues that IVF in 2010 was harnessed by right-wing politicians as a symbol of 'welfare state excess' via 'self-interested' infertile couples (no longer only lesbians or single women). Though for Larsen this represents a shift toward a critique of government rather than specific patient groups, I would argue that the stigma of self-interest still settles on recipients of ART treatments, and reflects ideas about what the right reasons to become

a parent are. We can place the donors' ideal financially capable, middle-class, physically able recipient in the context of these debates; there are certainly echoes of the self-interest argument in Jonas's desire to 'vet' his recipients in advance.

Donors and Wider Networks

One of the consequences of donation is having to make a decision about whether, how, and to whom to disclose one's donor status. Some, although not all, donors had discussed their donation with their wives or partners. One of the complicating factors is that the connections that are formed through donor insemination are wider than the triad of donor, recipient, and offspring. They also encompass the family members of both donors and recipients. The majority of donors said that they had hesitated before sharing their donor status with their friends and family, and some, like Erik, had not told anyone. Mikael felt that the taboo around donation prevented him from sharing his status as a donor with his family, particularly his mother, whom he thought would be 'against it'. However, others were more concerned about how their mothers would feel about their potential offspring. Henrik's mother, for example, had suggested donation as an option for him in the first place, but was slightly perturbed after he found out that there had been a successful pregnancy:

She knows that I'm doing it. As do my dad and brother. yeah, I mean, she finds it a bit strange, and the only time she was actually sort of [...] Not offended but a bit taken aback was when I realised that the first pregnancy had come through. And I told her that she could now unofficially call herself a grandmother.

Again, this emphasises the fact that the connections that are formed during this process are not only between donor and offspring, but between a larger web of people. In this case, the donor and his mother imagine a relationship between her and the offspring—but they have had no contact with the recipient and do not know for certain that a child has been born, despite knowing that there has been a successful pregnancy. This raises the question of how to talk and think about such issues. For instance, if donors do not perceive themselves as fathers, are their mothers

permitted to perceive themselves as grandmothers? Kinship relationships are complicated by sperm donation, not only for the recipient families.

Moreover, the fear that having donor offspring might potentially ‘detract’ somehow from the relationship between a sperm donor and his children has informed multiple donor accounts in this study: it was part of Erik’s reasoning for being anonymous, for example, and was one of the consequences of donation that Bent worried about. It seems to stem from a zero-sum model of responsibility and attention in which these things are finite resources that must be then split between the children of donors and their partners, and donor offspring created through DI. Donors almost uniformly reported that their partners did not view the connection between donors, offspring, and recipients the same clear-cut and detached way as they themselves had positioned them. Indeed, several donors reported that a current or past partner had objected to them donating on the grounds that donor insemination created an obligation that might affect their family in the future. Andreas, for example, said that his wife was sometimes uncomfortable with him donating:

She doesn’t think about it much, er, as I think is proper, because it really doesn’t have anything to do with my family, that’s the whole point. And so she knows, and she’s comfortable with “it”... but you can also sometimes tell that it’s sort of a bit of a strange – she feels a bit sort of odd about it. And I can sort of understand that, it makes sense. But I try to sort of, calm her down and explain to her that this is, at least, not another family I’m making, that I’m going to be visiting on the weekends, nothing to do with that. That my focus is still exactly where it used to be.

Here, Andreas and his wife are framing his connections to recipient parents and donor offspring very differently. As previously discussed, Andreas views his potential relationship with his offspring as ‘pure’; for him, donation is a discrete activity separate from his relationships with his wife and child. However, Andreas reports that his wife fears his donation is exactly the opposite: donor recipients and his potential offspring are a threat to their own family unit, existing as ‘another family’ in a similar way to the products of previous divorce and remarriage or of infidelity. Other donors with wives, such as Mikael, reported similar responses: objections to the idea that

they were 'going to have kids with someone other than me'. These accounts, while they are filtered through the perspective of the donors and not directly from their partners, suggest that perhaps the distinction between social and biological is less clear or meaningful to donors' partners than it is to donors. This is predicated on the idea that they will be required to deal in some way with these children as if they were products of infidelity or of past sexual relationships, with all of the emotional consequences that that entails.

Four of the donors in the sample had children of their own, though they had only imagined how their children's relationship with their donor offspring might play out; none felt that the children were 'old enough' to talk to about donation yet. Andreas intended to tell his son about being a donor in the future, since his potential donor offspring would be half-siblings; he said that it was 'even more important for [his son] to know than [his] wife'. Here, despite the fact that Andreas had previously discussed his relationship to his donor offspring as 'pure' and without baggage, he still positions the biological relationship between his son and his offspring above any social or emotional connection his wife might have. This also ties into a number of narratives about secrecy and disclosure in donation: we often talk about recipient parents' disclosure to donor offspring, but rarely has the idea that donors themselves may want to, or perhaps should, disclose to their own children that they may have siblings been explored. This seems particularly important in light of the fears about potential incest between the offspring of donors that a number of donors raised (for previous discussion on this issue see e.g. Edwards, 2004). Whilst some literature exists on donor offspring, or parents of donor offspring, who have searched for their genetic half-siblings (e.g. Daniels, Kramer, & Perez-y-Perez, 2012; Freeman, Jadv, Kramer, & Golombok, 2009), very little information exists on the non-donor-conceived children of donors and their responses to being told that their father is a sperm donor.

Discussion and Conclusions

The theme of the imagined relationship is central to this research; none of the donors had offspring old enough to make contact with and the majority of them were not sure whether or not any offspring had been produced at all. Therefore, the accounts of donors here are based on their hopes and fears about the connections they and their families could have with donor offspring and donor parents, and may be far removed from the realities of the lives of those offspring and parents, and, indeed, from the feelings of the others in the wider web. However, I wanted to show these potential, 'imagined' relationships can still have concrete effects on donors and their partners and families. At times, the potential existence of offspring was comforting and an implicit validation of their virility and masculinity, whereas at other times, sometimes for the same donor, their potential existence was a looming threat to family stability. This potential for donor offspring and their parents to be 'out there' therefore seems to act as a kind of residue of donation for these donors and their kin, informing the spectre of the 'second family' that made Andreas's wife uncomfortable, for example, or Henrik's mother's identity as 'unofficially' a grandmother.

Donor offspring and their parents may not know the identity of their sperm donor, but they know that he exists or, at least, has existed; a similar situation applies to adopted children and their parents, both birth and adoptive. In contrast, the donors in this study were imagining relationships with people who they could not be certain ever existed at all. This uncertainty was created through the double-blind nature of the donor insemination process and mediated through the lab in a similar process of 'ontological choreography' to the one that Thompson (2005: 145) described, in which particular aspects of kinship, such as parental intent, are foregrounded and others minimized in order to legitimate the 'real parenthood' of the recipient parents. While the donors in this study agreed that this severing of emotional and physical

connection to the recipient mother lessened their responsibility to act as an 'actual father' to their offspring, they nevertheless expected that any offspring they did have would want to seek them out, with the tacit understanding that the key to the construction of identity and 'true personhood' is located in and transferred through gametes (Nordqvist, 2011: 299).

Donors often drew on pop-cultural narratives to inform their imagined scenarios. Foremost among these was the 'knock on the door' and reunion between father and child, which was rejected as a romanticised ideal. The fear and uncertainty surrounding the potential for hordes of children to 'turn up' seems to be based in the donors' lack of control over how and by whom their sperm will be used. Anonymous donors such as Erik would perhaps have been more willing to be identity-release if they felt that they could guarantee that only one or two offspring would ever contact them. Whilst some donors were open to contact with their offspring, a number of donors spoke of their fear of being asked to take responsibility, either in concrete financial or emotional terms, for them. They therefore often foregrounded social connections over genetic ones, minimising the potential legal responsibility, whilst at the same time viewing those genetic connections as in some way intractable. However, social responsibilities seemed to be a paramount concern when it came to donors' partners' objections to donation. Some donors drew comparisons with other children that they might have from previous relationships or one night stands, and the idea that donation might be viewed as a form of infidelity was common. The connections formed between donor and recipient parent, even if they never meet or know anything about each other, have the potential to disrupt relationships between donors and their partners, even though a number of donors viewed a prior connection to the mother as a prerequisite for fatherhood.

One implication of this research can be found in the pervasive discourse of the 'knock on the door' and the fact that so many Danish donors are happy being anonymous and have no intention to

become identity-release donors, despite the incentives offered for them to do so. Donors who discussed this issue drew on ideas around privacy and protecting the interests of their family: they feared being approached by a large number of donor offspring with no warning and no control over when or where they met, causing disruption and seeking financial and/or emotional support. This suggests that there may well be other men who would be willing to be donors but who are discouraged by the current rules. The UK removal of donor anonymity in 2005 was highly influenced by the discourse of the 'right to know' of donor offspring and moves towards openness in other countries (Turkmendag, 2008; 2012); it appears unlikely that this policy will be reversed, given this wider context. It therefore seems paramount to tap into the concerns about loss of control and educate potential donors on the procedures for contact and the restrictions in place to prevent the 'one hundred children' scenario from occurring. I also found that the donors in my study had rarely considered these possibilities before becoming donors. This is partly because the stigma of donation prevented them from discussing issues with their friends and family, but even donors such as Henrik, whose mother had encouraged him to donate, had not fully considered the consequences until much later. This suggests that a more robust approach to counselling potential donors about the consequences of their donation could be warranted.

Perhaps the most obvious limitation of this research lies in the small sample size. Though this clearly does limit the potential for making claims about the population of Danish donors, it does tell us something about the continuing difficulty of accessing this particular population for research purposes. I have attempted to treat donors' narratives as narratives, and not necessarily as full and accurate representations of donor realities. A further limitation lies in the diversity of the sample; further research in this area would ideally aim to increase the number of non-white donors in the sample in order to explore this issue in greater depth. Further research might also choose to widen its scope to include the experiences of the wider networks that have been

discussed in this paper: the families and partners of donors, for example. This study relies on donors' perspectives.

In conclusion, potential donor offspring represent a threat to the stability of donors' family lives, and were perceived as having the potential to force unwanted financial and/or emotional responsibility onto donors, their partners, and their wider families. At the same time, those potential offspring becoming concrete represent donors having successfully passed on their genetic material, and could be a source of pride as well as fear.

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ⁱ Though sperm banks had permission to obtain identity-release sperm for export, and a loophole in the wording of the law allowed midwives and other non-doctors to inseminate women with identity-release sperm. The loophole was closed in the 2012 law change when the wording was updated to refer to 'healthcare professionals' rather than only 'doctors'.