Who's Watching?

Daily Practices of Surveillance among Contemporary Families

Edited by
Margaret K. Nelson and
Anita Ilta Garey

Vanderbilt University Press

Nashville

Nashville, Tennessee 37235

13 12 11 10 09 1 2 3 4 5

This book is printed on acid-free paper.
Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Who's watching? : daily practices of surveillance among contemporary families / edited by Margaret K. Nelson, Anita Ilta Garey.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 978-0-8265-1671-8 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-8265-1672-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Home detention—United States. 2. Electronic surveillance—United States. 3. Families—United States. I. Nelson, Margaret K., 1944– II. Garey, Anita Ilta, 1947–
HV9469.W53 2009
649'.1—dc22
2008052793

To the new families,
Sam and Lani
and
Jeff, Becca, Maya, and Sadie
—MKN

To TyAnn Alys Garey,
who prompts me to think about these issues anew
—AIG

8

Turning Strangers into Kin

Half Siblings and Anonymous Donors

Rosanna Hertz

The release of my book *Single by Chance, Mothers by Choice* (2006) prompted me to follow through on a commitment I had made to the women I interviewed.[1] I invited them to a party at Wellesley College's bookstore. Sophie was among the women who came that day, and she brought her son, Sam, age ten.[2] She was anxious to share news about the discovery of her son's donor siblings.

Sophie had selected artificial insemination with an unknown donor as her route to motherhood because she believed that this method would minimize any legal entanglements with parental kin. She therefore presumed that she would not be including her son's biological paternal kin within her family's boundaries, because they would not be known to her. Her imagination stretched only to the donor and his legal family, however, and not to other children created from his seminal fluid.

When Sam was about seven years old, Sophie learned about a sibling registry website, and a startling possibility arose for locating a new category of paternal blood kin: *donor siblings*. Knowledge of this sibling registry website presented choices Sophie thought had ended when she selected an anonymous donor. Prior to learning of the website, the borders of Sophie's family lay dormant. Now, however, she could decide whether to search for donor siblings who traced themselves to the same seminal fluid she had purchased. And if these new kin should turn up, Sophie would have to more actively patrol the border of family life and decide whether to include these people within it. Moreover, if she chose affirmatively, she would also have to monitor the interactions between her family and these new additions. The quality and content of the interior of family life would also need watching.

The story of Sophie's response to this new possibility, supplemented by blog commentary, provides an in-depth case study of the discovery of donor

siblings and boundary maintenance from the mother's standpoint.[3] I argue that as much as mothers and children may want to embrace "new paternal family," women heighten the security around their watertight mother-child family before deciding to open up the boundaries to the child's discovered donor siblings. Because donor siblings have no precedent in constructing families, mothers and their children are cautious, and there is a lot of back-and-forth surveillance of the half siblings and their mothers. I use the information Sophie shared with me in a follow-up interview to illustrate the process that is set into motion as families discover half siblings and their parents. Margaret Nelson (2006) refers to this dynamic of creating social ties while maintaining boundaries as one aspect of "doing family."[4] The case under investigation here demonstrates that ties and boundaries emerge through strategic interactions. Mothers and their children, separately and together, try to figure out, first, whether to extend family membership to donor siblings and their relatives and, second, what direction these new relationships will take.

People-Finding Websites

"Shared identity" sites provide a connection for strangers who share something in common. In recent years, an incredible number of such sites have sprung up on the Internet, including identity sites for people who are contemplating single motherhood. In addition to providing information on such hot topics as sperm banks, these sites also encourage chats about common concerns, such as how to tell the prospective grandparents about the process of becoming pregnant, experiences with a particular sperm bank, and the use of known versus unknown donors. "People-finding" websites allow an exchange beyond simple information and foster a sense of intimacy between members. Such sites have developed to help people locate others in virtual space whom they hope to meet in the physical world.[5] While bulletin boards in the supermarket or in organization offices (such as the Red Cross) still exist as physical places to post want ads, missing ads, or sales ads, these websites—existing across time, place, and space—allow individuals to search worldwide. The Internet has also expanded the ability of people to search for their genealogical roots and existing family connections—a new technology serving a time-honored activity. Recently, however, the Internet has been used not only to search for family connections that may have been lost but also to find and possibly forge connections with people who share the same anonymous sperm donor, and even to find the donor himself.

The search for a child's donor siblings is an interesting twist on the gen-

eral idea of locating people. To support the goal of finding donor siblings, Wendy Kramer and her son Ryan, age twelve, founded *www.donorsiblingregistry.com* in 2000. Wendy, like the other individuals who register on her site, gave birth using an anonymous donor after purchasing sperm from a major sperm bank listed on another website. She had no idea that she had the right to search for her son's half siblings or donor.[6] Wendy learned from the sperm bank that other children were born from the same donor as Ryan. Although Ryan knew that his anonymous donor was not likely to be found, he wanted to meet his half siblings. Wendy, with whom I talked as I wrote this chapter, told me that she wanted to honor her son's wish:

> I told my son, "I can't guarantee that we will find your donor, but maybe we can find half siblings." We hatched the idea to try to meet some part of the paternal side of the family. If he could connect to other siblings, he said to me, "at least I could see the invisible side of myself in someone else and that would help answer some of my questions."

In this new world, a sperm-bank-assigned donor number becomes the means of locating others who share the same donor.[7] Just as new surveillance technologies decrease privacy (e.g., when a workplace monitors behavior such as using e-mail for personal matters [Fox, Anderson, and Rainie 2005]), this use of technology breaks down yet another barrier of privacy: personhood. Assigning people numbers has historically made them less than human, even if the numbers serve as a way to keep track of donors. In an ironic twist, the numbers that disassociate men from their gametes are used to connect the children who were sired from those gametes, and sometimes even to connect those children to the donors themselves. As these new websites break down the system of genetic anonymity, they can forge the most intimate of ties to newly discovered family members.

These new family members are without precedent and constitute an entirely new category of kin. Although half siblings are not new—they exist through extramarital affairs, through remarriage, and through relinquishing a birth child for adoption—another parent is part of the equation in these more conventional situations. These normative models are disrupted, however, when the donor's personal relationship with various mothers is not the basis for the creation of half siblings. Nor are donor siblings equivalent to long-lost kin. We hold the belief that there is always room in our hearts should someone claiming family membership show up on our doorstep. Such people are welcomed as family because they can trace their own genealogy back to common ancestors with those who are already family members. This is particularly true in the case of family members lost to circumstances beyond the family's control (e.g., slavery, the Holocaust, or immigration). This long-lost person has a place in the family, and he or she claims that place by showing up as the grandson of my grandmother's first cousin, the daughter of my uncle's third wife, or any other relation imaginable.

By contrast, the claim to family membership by donor children as offspring or siblings has no social basis and is purely biological. "Long-lost kin" has always been linked to the actions of individuals; donor siblings are "just" biological, and the idea is harder to grasp than the concept of families that include friends who become "aunties and uncles." While the idea of social kin (i.e., families we choose) is generally accepted, we have not accepted the idea of purely biological kin. In short, no cultural paradigm has existed for understanding the relationship between donor siblings, in which a donor number serves as a stand-in for a shared relative, a genetic father.

However, the public was soon to learn about this new possibility for kinship, and it was about to become a reality for many people. A *60 Minutes* segment that aired on television in March 2005 heightened the visibility of Wendy and Ryan's website.[8] As of December 2006, Wendy reported that her website had 7,002 members and estimated that one-third were single moms, one-third were lesbian couples, and one-third were heterosexual couples. Also as of December 2006, there were 2,764 matches, mainly between donor siblings. In addition, four hundred donors had registered, and some of these donors had located their genetic children. The largest match so far, Wendy told me, was one donor and fifteen offspring.[9]

Registering on a website is voluntary and does not obligate anyone to reveal his or her identity. However, whether or not registrants follow through on contacting their donor siblings, registering signals the wish for further information about children conceived through a particular anonymous donor. Despite the thrill of using the Internet as a source to locate potential paternal kin, it also can be a risky venture with the possibility for a less than "happily ever after" ending.

In this chapter, I discuss how locating a shared donor entails a form of familial border patrol: Will genetic kin be turned into "real" kin and kept? Or will they be relegated to a "shadowland," solely a curiosity satisfied? I explore these questions using the story of Sophie and Sam.

Earlier Stages: The Watertight Family Always Included the Donor

Long before the issue of donor siblings arose, Sophie, like other middle-class women who choose to conceive using artificial insemination from an

anonymous donor, had engaged in two stages of making choices and intense monitoring. She had selected a donor by carefully studying her options, and she had observed her child closely to craft an image of the donor she had selected. The possibility of meeting her son's donor siblings threatened to disrupt some of these accomplishments.

Selecting a Donor

Having tossed out the rulebook in order to become mothers, women who select an anonymous-donor-assisted route to motherhood do not rely solely on the sperm bank's selection to decide on a specific donor.[10] Instead, they develop sorting rules to pick among available donors. As part of their selection process they read paper profiles and turn the abstract stranger into a likable character.

Why a woman selects one donor over others is hard to puzzle out. The way a woman evaluates the many aspects of the donor profiles, calculating how the donor addresses her personal taste as well as her needs, means that there's much more to the choice than just pure, hard facts such as medical history. Almost all women look first to race as a primary determining factor, particularly since the sperm bank has already ruled out men with poor medical histories.[11] Most women choose someone whose appearance is similar to theirs, because they prefer that their child look like them. One woman, Corina Joseph, said, "If my child's only going to have one parent, he might as well look like that parent."

Women also look to the answers on the donor questionnaire to try to create a persona to go along with the physical descriptions. The personal taste of the woman determines how she perceives the importance of the various answers. Sophie laughed when she read that one donor was "proficient at playing the tape deck" (his musical talent), and so she decided right then and there that he was the donor for her. Ultimately, then, the women use these bare-bones profiles to turn a stranger into a likable, real person. The social questions anchor the man in the otherwise abstract world of donor profile descriptions.

Women realize that their child will invariably question the absence of a physical father in her or his life, and thus they make their decisions with an eye to positive and enticing information they can pass along to their child. Through the persona gleaned from the paper profile and other information, a woman can offer her child an identity that includes an imagined father figure (Hertz 2002, 2006). The mothers simply want to be able to, as Nadine Margolis said, "tell [their] kids about him, that he was a nice person, which was better than 'he had blonde hair' or 'green eyes.'"

A woman's selection process thus includes monitoring information to pass onto her children and finding socially acceptable bits of the donor's identity that can be comfortably inserted into the future family. However vague, the donor will thereby "live," to varying degrees, in the mother and child's life together.

Crafting the Donor in a Child's Image

A second stage of monitoring emerges once the child is born. Close observations of the child's gestures, expressions, behaviors, and likes and dislikes help women reconstruct the father. As the child grows, his or her unexplainable traits—from physical attributes to character, behavior, and interests—become attributed to the anonymous donor. That is, "he" may be the source of the child's traits that do not seem to emerge from the maternal line. In this way, the anonymous donor takes on a persona of his own. Although this creation may be more fiction than fact, the mother and child take comfort in giving this father role some meaning in their lives. Once the donor is acknowledged as being unlike other children's fathers, the mother and child begin to create an imagined man who is a positive yet invisible presence. The "nice" man who helped them to become a family makes him a worthy human being, if not an idealized one. In short, as the woman examines and monitors her child, she also transforms the donor into a man and crafts him in her child's image. The presence of the genetic father is a physical reality experienced by the mother through the children. She embraces the donor through embracing her children.[12] Yet without a visual image, women can only guess at the characteristics of the donor they observe in their children. As Nadine Margolis told her twin toddlers, "Mommy's never met him. . . . But he must be very smart and very handsome because look at you." Donor siblings, however, introduce the potential to both affirm and disrupt the mother and child's construction of the donor father.

Working Through the Idea of Donor Siblings

Like Ryan, Sophie's son, Sam, was very curious about his donor. As a precocious seven-year-old, he figured out that his donor's number was a clue that could lead to his paternal kin. As Sophie explained:

> He was very curious about the donor, just the sort of abstract idea that there is a donor, that is very important to him—he hasn't made him into a person. . . . He said at age seven, "Well, if you went to a sperm bank and got

> sperm you can't be the only woman who got sperm from this donor." And I said, "You are right." And he said, "So I must have siblings," and he continued, "I want to meet them. How can I meet them?"

Sophie wanted to help her son search for more answers to his paternal identity, which could also confirm the talented, successful paternal line they had crafted. Although she shared Wendy's wish to help her child, Sophie was not sure how she felt about what Sam had figured out. She had created a watertight family (mother-child dyad) with a particular explanation that might be challenged rather than confirmed by the discovery of half siblings. She knew that trying to locate the donor siblings would set into motion a series of events that would require inspection, control, and possibly the need to rethink paternal kin. Sophie had thought the borders of her family were tightly sealed when she selected donor insemination as a route to parenthood. Now, without even the help of a kinship terminology, Sophie would have to figure out how to "name" children who share only biological heredity with her son, and whose mothers are not part of a socially recognized kinship structure (such as polygamy). Since they do not fit within a cultural paradigm for understanding the social relationships of kinship, Sophie would have to be even more vigilant in how she filled the void of paternal kin. The paternal line would have to measure up to what she had crafted. That is, the donor children would have to share traits that everyone could agree come from the paternal line. Sophie hoped that the fantasy of paternal kin would live up to the reality. However, compared to the possibility of meeting blood relatives who are real and physically available people, the imagined father became a less satisfactory link.

Still, Sophie was not willing to grant these blood relatives automatic family membership; she needed to see whether they were worthy. Although she was not exactly sure what "test" they would need to pass, she knew she would have to restrain herself and Sam from automatically welcoming them as kin. Was a sibling claim based on seminal fluid from the same unknown source enough to open the borders of her family life? Although she would have embraced the donor, or at least the donor in the form of the man she and Sam had crafted, there were no guarantees how other donor siblings would turn out. Sophie's embrace of the donor was premised upon her reasoning that "family" shares genetics. Even though there was no relationship between Sophie and the anonymous donor to make them kin, the donor was her child's biogenetic father, or "bio-dad," to use another woman's term. The unanticipated consequences of scientific development and technical know-how created for her a new set of questions about who is and who is not kin.

Nevertheless, Sophie was curious about these donor siblings and, with great trepidation, called the sperm bank she had used:

> I thought, "Shoot—this opens up something so unknown, and I don't know how to put it in my brain." I called the local bank. They told me to call the national bank. It was their catalog that had the donor I had chosen. The administrator I spoke to at this bank said, "Yes, this has become a common question—one that we didn't anticipate. We have this sibling registry." And she told me how I could get onto the registry. She was surprised that Sam was only seven at the time he asked this question because kids don't usually ask until they are twelve or thirteen. So I went to the website and signed up and waited. There was nobody else already registered under this particular donor number and Sam would ask periodically if I checked the website—it wasn't actively on my mind.

Sophie registered on the website because of Sam's push to know more about his paternal kin, thickening the stock of information he already had. Donor siblings were more science fiction than reality for her, as they stood outside anything she knew. Were they the "real thing" or a substitute for paternal kin? Sam legally had no paternal kin; even his birth certificate said "father unknown." However, if individuals who shared the same genetic matter from a common donor came forward, would Sam gain a deeper understanding of himself and, somewhat like Pinocchio, feel transformed?

You've Got Mail

As much as Sophie wanted to help her son search for paternal siblings, she worried about protecting her family's borders from the invasion of strange donor children related to her child. As odd as it might seem, they shared a common thread: the donor's number gave them a genetic tie that she could not overlook. Slowly, however, Sophie began to apply bits of conventional relationship norms as a basis for kin ties. Doing so also meant that she had to change her views on motherhood by coming to terms with the fact that she was not the only woman to have children from her particular donor. Women do not think about other children sired from "their" donor; instead, when they purchase seminal fluid, they think about it as theirs alone. A mother's decision to sign up on websites to meet her child's half siblings entails accepting that the donor is not exclusively hers and that his act of kindness, commercialized by a sperm bank, has resulted in producing other children.

In rethinking motherhood, Sophie was already engaged in a form of monitoring the boundaries of her family since the act of registering the donor's number could electrify the borders of kinship prior to an e-mail answer. Sophie explained that it took two years to receive an e-mail response:

> Two years later we got an e-mail, when Sam was nine. [It said] "Dear Sophie: We have two children by donor number 1360 and we would like to make contact." The "we" is a lesbian couple who turned out to have two children by the same donor as Sam. I waited a little while because I had to digest the news, and then I told Sam, "I have big news." He thought it was work-related, and I said, "It is even bigger news: we heard from somebody who has two girls from donor number 1360." He was ecstatic, jumping up and down. I was more stunned, I was more ambivalent. I had hoped for my sake I never heard from anybody. This was unknown and I was uncomfortable—I didn't know how I would process the information—there is not a cognitive slot for this kind of relationship.

Sophie wanted to feel the same joy as her son over finding "family," but she was at a "moment of pinch," or discrepancy between what she wanted to feel and what she actually felt (Hochshild 1979, 562). She reminded herself that her confusion at that moment was okay, as her situation was uncharted territory. She redoubled her efforts to be cautious since there was much at stake—meeting these people could disappoint her and Sam's expectations of close kinship or result in the unraveling of her fabrication of her son's donor family. Indeed, one of the reasons women like Sophie turn to anonymous donors is because it is a way to take control of their lives, after years of feeling that motherhood is dependent on a man and marriage. Women say that an anonymous donor is less "messy" than a known donor because a known donor might change his mind and want more of a relationship with the child than the original contractual agreement specified. Now Sophie, in spite of her previous choice of an unknown donor, had the potential for a messy situation. This possibility made her uncomfortable. She alone was the gatekeeper, patrolling the borders of her small family: "I kept thinking, what if they have one digit off, because then they would mean nothing. This news could mean everything or nothing. It is so abstract. If they have the right number my son has two sisters and if they are one number off my son has nothing. It just seemed so enormous."

Sophie knew that she had to reframe her thinking if she wanted the possibility of paternal kin for her son. The ideology of "two sides of a family" (maternal and paternal) outweighed her other concerns. Although she never said so directly, the family narrative that "male and female gametes make a baby" was the catalyst for responding to the e-mail.[13]

Sophie was relieved that the e-mail sender was not part of a heterosexual couple. This way none of the three children had a social dad, an important parallel between the siblings. A social dad might trump a genetic donor and make the half siblings less important to some of them. Sophie explained the social importance of a paternal tie with no legal "dad" who can offer up his family as a paternal substitute: "Since neither of our kids had dads, that seemed to be an important issue. It was important to me in terms of Sam's comfort or the feeling of Sam feeling comfortable with his sisters. Sam's not having a dad is a significant part of his identity and not necessarily bad, but he is fully aware of it. The sisters shared the same position as he did by not having a dad, but also having the same donor."

This news allowed Sophie to feel more comfortable because both families shared one of the same circumstances. Rapidly more of Sophie's fears dissolved: "I sent them a picture of Sam. And then they sent me pictures in the follow-up e-mail. And then it was absolutely unquestionable because the older daughter looked just like Sam. We were all amazed by the resemblance."

Siblings as Windows

Sophie immediately realized that Sam's half siblings were indeed his, and that there was no chance of being "one digit off." She was in awe of the donor's genetic imprint clearly stamped and immediately recognizable in the children's photos. When I asked specifically what traits they shared, she told me, "They both really like math, they both are really kind—being nice is really important to them. [The other mother and I] would have phone conversations, and I would go, 'Oh my God, Sam, too.'" Sophie could see even more similarities in the photos: "The way they hold their bodies, the way they move their bodies, the gesture and facial expressions are the same. It is remarkable." The unanswered gesture that caught a mother's attention now appears in the half sibling, confirming its belonging to the paternal side.

Sophie could now see the donor through the siblings. Meanwhile, Sam had a revelation of his own: he could see himself in his half sisters. He no longer had to rely only on his mother for assurance and help in imagining how his donor might see him. Now he had sisters who would reinforce the self-identity he wanted. He saw traits in his half siblings that he recognized.

Photos were not enough, however; he wanted to meet the girls to find out firsthand what else they might have in common.

As Wendy, the founder of the donor-sibling website, told me (and as various Internet blogs confirm), some families only exchange photographs, and that is enough. Others decide to extend the relationship to another level of intimacy. Sophie and Sam's decision to meet the other family would disclose even more common ground between the children.

The Frontier of New Families: Opening the Borders

Sophie was initially ambivalent about Sam's having paternal kin, but her son was eager to meet the other family. She didn't want to let him down, but she also wanted to make sure this family passed "the test" before meeting them. Talking on the phone was a way that she could keep a distance while gathering information. Sophie wanted to like the family because these were the people raising the only paternal kin Sam knew. When Sophie picked up the phone to call them, she was nervous about how to proceed, even though she hoped for a genuine connection. The phone conversation was a search for finding commonality so that she could share her son's enthusiasm and reduce her vigilance. Sophie was listening for something that would lead her to incorporate these strangers into her family or at least give her a reason to want to get to know them more. Sophie relayed the conversation to me this way:

> She [one of the donor siblings' mothers] seemed to be right on the mark in what was important and interesting, and she spoke about Sam's siblings in ways that I talk about him, emphasizing the same aspects of what is important about him as a person. She asked questions that I thought were interesting, and there were similar values in terms of describing their personalities. We both selected the same traits to explain our children to each other. We were amazed at the same sorts of things about our children. I especially liked that we both approached the issue of having really smart children in the same way—it seemed important to say they were smart but not braggy.

Sophie was intrigued and comforted by the fact that she and Jess and Amanda, the mothers of the half siblings, shared "similar values in terms of describing their personalities." That similarity is part of what enticed Sophie to pursue the relationship. She needed something familiar and affirming to help her want to open the borders of her family to include this family. And

Sophie found this affirmation in her new knowledge that the donor siblings were also "bright" children. If the donor siblings shared the traits of the imagined father that Sophie and her son had crafted, then she would further her claim that the donor was a "good man." It would help her confirm that she made a good choice when she sorted through the paper profiles to find the right donor.

Sam and the older daughter (age seven) talked by phone once their mothers finished talking, and the children continued to talk by phone weekly. Since both families lived on the East Coast, they decided to meet in a public spot between each family's home. Sophie recalled that day in detail, as it gave her clarity on how she felt about her son's newfound family.

> We decided we all really liked each other. I really liked the way they were with their kids (balance between letting them do what they want and setting limits). I loved Sam and [the] girls together. All three of us [mothers] were very cautious. But we really are in this relationship on behalf of our children. It had to do with our kids, not us. We all had a stake in this relationship between the kids, but as the day went on I realized we (myself and the girls' two moms) shared a lot in common, and I thought, "I like them." At one point I said to Jess, "Oh my God. We are so lucky," and she said, "I know." And she said that she said the same thing to Amanda. They are women I could be friendly with. We all had the same concern: would we get along and like one another? And how would we negotiate this because we were going to have to have a relationship on behalf of the kids, because they are siblings.

These families bond around their social similarity (e.g., shared values, social class, employment status). Of course, the women who turn to sperm banks as a route to motherhood often share the same social class position from the start.[14] Still, it is possible that Sophie might not have liked this family, or that the family might not have liked her and Sam. For instance, if Sophie had been homophobic or if Sam's half sisters had a social dad that made Sam feel jealous, Sophie might have revised her position, deciding after one meeting not to make additional plans. Sam and Sophie also could have disagreed about liking this family.

While finding donor siblings relieves women of the "emotional labor" of imagining the paternal donor, at the same time mothers must monitor these new relationships.[15] Sophie and Sam met Sam's donor sibling family a second time over the summer in Boston at Sophie's home. This time they recognized that they were establishing a level of closeness reserved for kin members. As much as these families were "choosing" one another to be kin

(Weston 1991), they were creating the presence of paternity based on socially engineered relationships that have no legal basis or even definitive scientific basis. For instance, no one suggested taking a DNA test or viewing the donor profiles to make sure they matched:

> It was really easy and relaxing and the kids were adorable together, really acting like siblings: got into a little fight—they were siblings. The level of comfort and the ongoing relationship is amazing. We all presume the relationships are important, but also intimacy was there immediately. This relationship is very important and the children say they love each other. Sam said, "I don't miss my father any more now that I have sisters." So, this has been profound for him to discover something about his paternal side and have a connection on that side. It ends what in some ways is a mystery: who is this guy? He can see himself through viewing his sisters.

Sam and Sophie stayed at Jess and Amanda's house on the third visit together, and it was during that trip that Sophie realized, as she told me, "I have fallen in love with [Jess and Amanda] and their children." However, Sophie also reminds herself that she needs to be vigilant and delineate between her child's kin and her own kin:

> My family boundaries are very solid and unambiguous. Sam is not their son and they are not my daughters. It does not even feel like they are nieces. They feel like my son's siblings, and this is a new psychological construct. I do not feel like I am in any way their parent, like I might to an extent if I had stepchildren. I am not a stepmother. These children are none of my business as a stepparent role assumes some degree of responsibility and authority, and I don't feel like I have either of those. . . . Now, almost a year later, [this situation] feels natural and normal, but for quite a while—I remember the very first time Sam and I spoke with them, and he said, "I am emotionally exhausted," and I said so was I. This is so new that I had to carve a new place in my mind for these relationships to go.

Sophie's story thus suggests that donor siblings change the interior of family life for single mothers who choose artificial insemination from an anonymous donor. Instead of guessing about paternal traits, other donor kin substantiate (or refute) Sam's socially constructed paternal identity. Sophie and Sam have formed a new kind of extended family with Jess and Amanda and their two children. Yet they may not be close kin. Donor siblings and their respective mothers may become important to each other, but they may remain distant kin. Even though Sam and his half sisters are close genetic

relatives, and even though Sophie does embrace the girls and their mothers as family, a year after receiving the initial e-mail, she still locates them more as distant cousins. She knows they will stay in touch and visit sporadically, but they will not be family members that routinely tell each other everything, nor will her feelings toward these children be as close or similar to the closeness she has with her best girlfriend's children. These women are not co-mothers to each other's children, yet Sophie is grateful for their presence in her and her son's life. In short, Sophie's monitoring (and Sam's immediate acceptance of the girls) led her to conclude that these are good people. But they are also "Sam's siblings and their parents," not Sophie and Sam's kin.

Not All Happy Stories

Wendy and Ryan have not been so lucky. All matches are not "love-fests." Twice they heard about potential half siblings, but neither case had resulted in a meaningful or exploratory family connection, despite a common donor. One teenager figured out she was Ryan's half sister, but her mother forbade her from further contact with Ryan. For now that teenager has obeyed her mother, who does not want their nuclear family disrupted. The mother, single when she had her daughter, had married, and her husband had adopted Ryan's half sister, accepting her as his own child. Male infertility caused another couple to become pregnant using a donor, which produced two half siblings who were toddlers at the time of my research. The wife saw Ryan on television and wanted him to know she had birthed two children related to him. She and her husband were not sure when or if they would tell their young children about the use of a donor to create their family. The mothers in these donor-sibling families are vigilant keepers of a certain kind of blood-kin nuclear family, even if that family was created by seminal fluid from a donor. These are examples of tightly woven secrets and legal ties that the adults do not want to alter. Ryan remains hopeful that other siblings will someday appear.[16]

Conclusion: Reimaging Kinship through "Extraordinary Extended Families"

Sophie's decision to become a single mother may have initially been a choice about a route to motherhood that appeared to give her control over family life and to reduce the amount of monitoring she would have to do. However, even though she engaged in monitoring when she selected a donor and then

again when she noticed behaviors in her child that might be linked to biological paternal traits, it was the surprising possibility of searching for donor siblings that presented Sophie with a new issue of monitoring. Donor siblings might mean that she and her child would open up the borders of their watertight family to a potentially messy situation. Borders are monitored in order to watch the coming and going of people who fall into different categories (whether temporary or permanent occupants). Activity on the border (such as contact through the Internet) presupposes that some people might want in, and allowing outsiders in can be risky. Donor siblings might reinforce the mother's or child's vision of paternal kin; however, real individuals might also provide revisions or alternatives to imagined donors. Donor siblings might also provide additional ways for a child to figure out pieces of his or her self-identity, which previously rested only on the mothers' assessments; this new information might not be welcome.

Donor siblings share biogenetic matter and nothing else. This is a "pure" case in which blood roots family. This basis of family emerges at a time when other sociological directions (such as fictive kin, chosen kin, etc.) have become a test tube for family inclusion. That is, "social kin" challenge the traditional idea of family relatives as related only by blood or marriage (and adoption). The claim (and obligation) of donor siblings as relatives is without any shared family history or initial consensus as part of a socially chosen group, making this new blood family difficult to grasp. The women, who cleverly traced paternal blood kin through the Internet, have good reasons for worrying about how and in what ways to embrace these strangers as relatives. Donor siblings ended up as genetic kin arbitrarily, a by-product of the rise of reproductive clinics.

It is the children that join these mothers together in a loosely knit family, not as co-parents but as women who share children from the same purchased product. A biological connection might allow donor siblings temporary family membership while they go through a trial period before possible acceptance. However, genetics alone does not make people kin. For example, donor siblings who only exchange photos over the Internet establish shared genes that satisfy curiosity and nothing more. They may say they have found half siblings, but "sibling" is a social relationship as well as a biological one. We have no language for Internet lookers, those individuals who leave after seeing their physical resemblance in another person. Even if these individual families meet, they are still not automatic family. Donor-sibling families gauge each other (as a group and as individuals) as they try to find consensus about how they will be together. The possibility exists that they will not agree. The process of learning about new kin makes family a complicated interplay of genetics, social interaction, and cultural expectations.

So far Sophie's decisions are in line with the needs and desires of the others involved. However, the possibility of conflict is huge. Sophie and Sam could have disagreed about liking the new kin. Or if both Sophie and Sam did not like this family, they could have kept their names on the website list hoping another family, one they might click with, would answer their request. Sam may want to meet other donor siblings, but his mother may not want the added responsibility of multiple families and relationships to manage with more donor-sibling kin. When do the mother and child take their names off the list and stop searching for more donor siblings? And what if Sophie took her name off the list, but Jess and Amanda did not, and they discovered more donor siblings? Would Sophie and Sam feel obligated to open up the borders of their family to the donor-sibling families discovered by the donor-sibling family they had already embraced?

Donor children who have met their donors or donor siblings have entered a new world in which social obligations and responsibilities are murky. Family citizenship is not automatic. Donor siblings (such as Sam and his sisters) have no legal rights or obligations to one another, nor does their anonymous donor, should he come forward. Further, a sperm donor might have a legal birth daughter and donor children. What is their relationship? Are they half siblings? Genetically they are, but socially how will these families determine the boundaries of who qualifies as kin and in what ways? If the donor meets his donor child, is he just a genetic father, or will he become something more: a dad? And, if so, will the partner of the donor and the donor child's mom weigh in—and what will their relationship be? These have become sociological issues that are at the nexus of how blood kin becomes accepted. Are donor children equal family members, or are they second-class citizens only marginally included at the dinner table? The ways in which families develop guidelines for embracing their genetic kin who fall outside conventional reproductive narratives will be fascinating to observe over the coming years.

Notes

I thank Alyssa Thomas for her research assistance. Peggy Nelson and Anita Garey's excellent comments strengthened this chapter. However, I take full responsibility for the contents.

1. Between 1995 and 2004, I interviewed sixty-five women about their families (Hertz 2006). I interviewed each woman, on average, two to three times.
2. Aside from Wendy Kramer, founder of *www.donorsiblingregistry.com*, all names in this chapter are the pseudonyms I used in my book. Fifteen women became pregnant using anonymous sperm donors, and thirteen women became

pregnant using known donors. I only discuss the known donors as a contrast in limited ways in this chapter.

3. For blog commentary, see, for example, *www.mothering.com*.
4. See also Naples (2001) on death in her family, a lifecycle event that sets in motion a rethinking of inclusion and exclusion of family members as boundaries are redefined and alliances are reworked.
5. For instance, single strangers who desire to attract a romantic partner or date can register on sites such as eHarmony or JDate. The dating sites offer seekers a fast and easy way to find a "match" using their desired qualities and from the comfort of their own home. Slowly, these sites are beginning to replace the local "looking for" magazine ads for single individuals.
6. Wendy and her husband, who divorced when Ryan was one year old, had fertility problems. They turned to donor sperm to have a child.
7. Fertility banks code donors using a number tracking system. Buyers purchase the gametes of a specific donor using this number. Most women buy enough vials to last through three to six months of fertility treatment; no one, however, knew if they bought out a donor's entire "stock." Since the banks are self-regulated, they can decide how long a donor can contribute his gametes. Even if a buyer purchases all the available vials from a specific donor, she has no way of knowing whether the donor will continue to donate. Women do not know whether (or how many) other children were born from that same donor.
8. Sometime after 2000 the major sperm banks also added donor registries, and their website policy statements changed to allow for the *possibility* that, if both donor and offspring expressed interest in contact, sperm bank personnel would try to facilitate this. This is not a guarantee that donors will reveal their identity. See Spar (2006), who argues that human reproduction has become a $3 billion annual industry. An estimated 30,000 children are born in this country each year to mothers who have been artificially inseminated with sperm from an anonymous donor. This multimillion sperm bank industry, built on anonymity, is beginning to talk about proposing a national registry.
9. These websites point to the need for U.S. social policies surrounding donor anonymity. Presently, other countries have established donor registries (such as Britain, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, and Switzerland) banning anonymous sperm donors. At age eighteen, a child born using donated gametes can go to the registry, look up his or her donor, and contact the donor. These registries give children the right to know who their genetic father is, placing the rights of the children as the priority. The United States needs to establish a national registry.
10. Sperm banks offer both the men who donate sperm and the women or couples who purchase the gametes legal protection via "a system of bilateral ignorance of paternity among donors and recipients" (Sullivan 2004, 53). The donors leave behind a paper profile and a promise to never lay claim to the children that result from insemination. The women I interviewed settled for this arrangement. Sullivan (2004), who studied lesbian couples, observes that the erasure of paternity easily allows for second-parent adoption among the lesbian couples she interviewed. The second mother can become the second parent without another person relinquishing parental rights, as I note about known donors (Hertz 2002, 2006). However, only a few states allow for adoption by a second parent. Interestingly, all but one of Sullivan's couples were able to secure "yes" donors, which meant that these children could someday meet their genetic father. The women I interviewed discovered that these donors were in such high demand that they were unavailable. Unwilling to wait for "yes" donor gametes, they ultimately selected donors who would forever remain anonymous.
11. While sperm banks have a large number of white donor profiles, donors of color are few. At the time of my study, the major bank listed Hispanic, Asian and black donor categories, but within each of these broad racial groups there were only two or three donors. Women of color in my study reported few options, something they found frustrating because they wanted donors to share their race.
12. See Hertz (2002) for a conceptualization of Cooley's (1902) "looking glass self" and its importance to these mother-child relationships.
13. I asked Sophie if she asked the girls' moms why they decided to contact her. Sophie told me they were curious because they had friends who had had a positive experience meeting other donor siblings.
14. While we have only anecdotal information, the individuals who purchase gametes are most likely middle- and upper-middle class. They most likely have medical insurance and are able to afford the cost of the gametes and the medical procedures (e.g., new reproductive technologies) that may be necessary to become pregnant.
15. Hochschild (1979) discusses an interactive account of emotional management beyond the scope of this chapter.
16. On prime time television in 2007, after this chapter was written, Ryan did meet a half sibling.

References

Cooley, Charles Horton. 1902. *Human Nature and the Social Order*. Repr., New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1983.

Fox, Susannah, Janna Quitney Anderson, and Rainie Lee. 2005. *The Future of the Internet*. Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project.

Hertz, Rosanna. 2002. The Father as an Idea: A Challenge to Kinship Boundaries by Single Mothers. *Symbolic Interaction* 25 (1): 1–31.

———. 2006. *Single by Chance, Mothers by Choice: How Women Are Choosing Parenthood without Marriage and Creating the New American Family*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hochschild, Arlie. 1979. Emotion Work, Feeling Rules and Social Structure. *American Journal of Sociology* 85 (3): 551–75.

Naples, Nancy A. 2001. A Member of the Funeral: An Introspective Ethnography. In *Queer Families, Queer Politics: Challenging Culture and the State*, edited by Mary Bernstein and Renate Reinmann, 21–43. New York: Columbia University Press.

Nelson, Margaret K. 2006. Single Mothers "Do" Family. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68 (4): 781–95.
Plotz, David. 2005. *Genius Factory: The Curious History of the Nobel Prize Sperm Bank*. New York: Random House.
Schmidt, Matthew, and Lisa Jean Moore. 1998. Constructing a "Good Catch," Picking a Winner: The Development of Techno-Semen and the Deconstruction of the Monolithic Male. In *Syborg Babies: From Techno-sex to Techno-tots*, edited by Robbie Davis-Floyd and Joseph Dumit, 21–39. New York: Routledge.
Spar, Debora L. 2006. *The Baby Business: How Money, Science, and Politics Drive the Commerce of Conception*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
Strauss, Anselm L. 1959. *Mirrors and Masks*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
Sullivan, Maureen. 2004. *The Family of Woman: Lesbian Mothers, Their Children, and the Undoing of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Weston, Kath. 1991. *Families We Choose*. New York: Columbia University Press.

9

The Powers of Parental Observation

Constructing Networks of Care

Karen V. Hansen

Parents are expected to vigilantly observe their children and those who interact with them; they accept the task of careful monitoring as part of responsible parenting. In turn, others observe parents as they rear their children. Once children are in school, parents have less control over their children's environments and less ability to see interactions firsthand. Nonetheless, parents continue to monitor and screen people as they construct networks of care.

This chapter explores the ins and outs of this process of monitoring as parents exercise their prerogative to include and exclude other adults from their children's lives. Simply being related, being a good friend, or living nearby is not sufficient to qualify a person to become a member of a network of care. However, a shared philosophy of child rearing is indispensable. Parents seek to establish a firm basis for trusting the care of their children to adults they know only superficially, if at all. Screening potential members—kin and non-kin—for networks of care is a long, ongoing, and subtle process.

In this chapter, I investigate a specific kind of network: one focused on helping parents care for their school-age children. As a society in which 79 percent of mothers with children ages six to seventeen are in the labor force and there is an inadequate supply of before- and after-school programs, we face a "care gap" for elementary school children. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (1998) estimates the difference between school hours and parents' working hours to be as high as twenty to twenty-five hours per week. My