‘Curious Connections: On the relational and personal life significance of donating egg and sperm’

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In a culture that emphasises the importance of genetic connectedness and which holds that vital and enduring family relationships pass through genetic reproduction (Edwards 2000), the decision to give away one’s eggs or sperm is radical indeed. The connections that ensue between an egg and sperm donor and the donor conceived child are puzzling and foreign within contemporary family cultures; evidence suggests that they give rise to sensitivities and secrets in family networks. Through recent changes to law and policy, donor conceived offspring can now seek contact, and so donors are likely to deliberate on how to manage this trend towards openness within the context of their own everyday lives and relationships. To date, we know very little about how the practice of donating, and the shift to transparency, impact on donors’ experiences. This paper introduces a new ESRC study, starting January 2017 at the University of Manchester, which seeks to understand these experiences better by exploring the impact of donating egg and sperm on donors’ personal lives and relationships. In particular, it attends to why it is that personal life is significant to consider in the context of people donating egg and sperm, and how it may be conceptualised and understood.