

Karyn A. Hladik-Brown. "It's not about the parents": A Content Analysis of Representations of Sperm Donor Conception in Young Adult Literature. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. April, 2022. 82. Advisor: Casey Rawson

This study aims to examine how donor-conceived youth are portrayed in novels marketed toward adolescents. It categorizes how the developmental needs of donor-conceived youth are uniquely met, as well as the developmental needs of all teens, in these books. This is done through a qualitative content analysis of young adult novels that feature a character that was conceived via sperm donor. In conducting this research, the study hopes to help librarians make collection decisions regarding young adult novels that feature donor-conceived characters, as well as help donor-conceived youth identify books in which they can see themselves in the pages.

Headings:

- Children of sperm donors
- Collection development in public libraries
- Collection development in school libraries
- Content analysis
- Donor-conceived offspring
- Young adult literature

“IT’S NOT ABOUT THE PARENTS”: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF
REPRESENTATIONS OF SPERM DONOR CONCEPTION IN YOUNG ADULT
LITERATURE

by
Karyn A. Hladik-Brown

A Master’s paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April 2022

Approved by

Casey Rawson

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Introduction..... | 2 |
| Literature Review | 3 |
| Sperm Donor Conception in the United States | 3 |
| <i>Current Estimates of Donor Insemination</i> | <i>4</i> |
| <i>Genetic Testing, Anonymity, and Questions of Kinship.....</i> | <i>5</i> |
| Portrayals of Sperm Donor Conception | 6 |
| <i>Portrayals of Donor Conception in Young Adult Literature</i> | <i>7</i> |
| Donor-Conceived Children and LIS | 8 |
| Representation in Young Adult Literature | 9 |
| Identity Development..... | 11 |
| Research Questions..... | 13 |
| Methodology | 14 |
| Positionality / Researcher Role | 14 |
| Sample..... | 15 |
| Data Collection Methods | 16 |
| Data Analysis Methods..... | 17 |
| Results and Discussion..... | 19 |
| The Upside of Unrequited | 19 |
| Fade to Us | 24 |
| The People We Choose | 27 |
| The Other F-Word..... | 31 |
| Your Own Worst Enemy..... | 36 |
| The Secret of a Heart Note..... | 39 |
| Devil and the Bluebird..... | 41 |
| Sparrow..... | 44 |
| Silence Is Goldfish..... | 46 |
| Saving Montgomery Sole..... | 52 |
| School and Public Library OPAC Results..... | 54 |
| School and Public Library OPAC Discussion..... | 62 |
| Impact, Limitations, and Conclusions | 63 |
| References..... | 67 |
| Appendix A. Titles Included for Analysis..... | 73 |
| Appendix B. Carnegie Grant Application | 75 |
| Appendix C. Coding Table..... | 76 |

Introduction

One of the many ways in which prospective parents can conceive a child is through donor conception, the act of having a child using the sperm or eggs of a person who is not this child's parent (Arocho et al., 2019). This study focuses on sperm donor conception; specifically, how being conceived via sperm donor is portrayed in young adult novels. I conducted a content analysis of a sample of young adult novels that feature donor-conceived characters, analyzing whether these portrayals of donor conception align with the dominant narratives surrounding donor conception or with counter narratives, as well as if these books are meeting the specific needs for donor-conceived youth to form a positive identity along with the needs of all youth. I also looked at whether or not these books are housed in the collections of a convenience sample of three public and three school libraries in central North Carolina, and if they are, in what forms.

Through conducting this research, I hoped to help contribute to the literature surrounding positive representation for the donor conceived in literature, help librarians make collection decisions regarding young adult novels that feature donor-conceived characters, and help donor-conceived youth identify books in which they can see themselves in the pages.

Literature Review

Sperm Donor Conception in the United States

Donor conception is defined as “the use of sperm, eggs, both, or even whole embryos, sourced from a person or persons other than the intended parents of the resulting child” (Arocho et al., 2019, p. 718). Sperm donation and artificial insemination, which is the focus of my proposed study, is the oldest form of donor conception, dating back to the 1800s (Yuko, 2016; Arocho et al., 2019). The first physician to attempt donor conception via a systematic approach, J. Marion Sims, was the founder of the Women’s Hospital in New York, and in the hospital’s first few years of operation (the hospital opened in 1855), Sims performed 55 artificial insemination procedures on six women; they were largely unsuccessful, with only one procedure resulting in pregnancy, ending in a miscarriage (Yuko, 2016).

The first recorded instance of successful donor insemination performed by a physician was not until 1884, when William Pancoast of Philadelphia’s Sansom Street Hospital performed the procedure without the patient’s consent (Hard, 1909; Yuko, 2016). The woman, who came to Pancoast about her inability to conceive, and her husband were examined by Pancoast, who determined that the husband’s “spermatic fluid” was “void of spermatozoons,” most likely due to a case of gonorrhoea the husband had in his youth (Hard, 1909, p. 163; Yuko, 2016). As opposed to disclosing this information to the woman and her husband, Pancoast knocked out the woman with

chloroform and forcibly inseminated her with the sperm of the “best-looking” medical student observing the procedure (Hard, 1909, p. 163; Yuko, 2016). After the woman became pregnant, Pancoast disclosed this information to the husband, who was “delighted with the idea,” and the woman, a victim of assault, was never told the circumstances surrounding her pregnancy (Hard, 1909, p. 163; Yuko, 2016). The woman gave birth to a healthy child, who, according to the later account of one of the medical students who witnessed the assault, resembled the woman’s husband, as opposed to the “donor” (Hard, 1909). Thankfully, donor insemination today is a consensual procedure.

Current Estimates of Donor Insemination

There is no way to know exactly how many donor insemination procedures have been performed or how many of those procedures have resulted in live births; there is no law in the United States that requires fertility clinics to keep records of how many procedures they perform or for sperm banks to track how many vials of sperm they sell (Arocho et al., 2019; Nelson, 2020). There is also no way to track how many instances of donor insemination there are from donors outside sperm banks, such as personally known donors (Nelson, 2020).

Current estimates say that in 1995, approximately 170,701 women in the United States underwent donor insemination; this number rose, and between 2015 and 2017, approximately 440,986 women in the United States had been inseminated with donor sperm (Arocho et al., 2019). However, not all of these women were able to successfully have a child; there have only been an estimate of 60,000 live births in the United States as a result of donor insemination (Arocho et al., 2019; Nelson, 2020). These women are mostly white, urban, older, college-educated, and have high family incomes; the majority

of those relying on donor insemination are single women (50%), followed by same-sex and/or transgender couples (33%), with heterosexual couples representing a small portion of total cases of donor insemination (Arocho et al., 2019; Nelson, 2020).

Genetic Testing, Anonymity, and Questions of Kinship

The United States also lacks any policy regarding the anonymity of sperm donors, unlike other countries (e.g., Sweden, Austria, and the United Kingdom), which have established that donor-conceived children have the right to know their donor's identity (Hertz et al., 2013). Despite this, with advances in and greater access to genetic testing services, such as Ancestry.com or 23AndMe, as well as the Donor Sibling Registry, a website specifically for donor-conceived people to find their genetic relatives, it is becoming increasingly easy for donor-conceived people to find their donor siblings as well as their sperm donor (Harper et al., 2016; Zadeh, 2016; The Donor Sibling Registry, n.d.).

However, taking these routes to find genetic relatives requires time, money, and resources, as well as simply knowing your status as donor conceived. Among the donor conception community, this is known as disclosure. The idea of early disclosure (telling a child they are donor conceived as young as they can understand), is generally recommended by scholars, as early disclosure is usually associated with having a positive or indifferent feeling toward donor conception as a whole, as opposed to the feelings of betrayal and confusion that are associated with later disclosure (Hertz et al., 2013; Harper et al., 2016; Zadeh, 2016). The age of disclosure has also been seen to affect how the donor-conceived person refers to the donor, e.g., a social or relational status through the title "biological father," versus ignoring a social or relational status, but conferring

personhood through the title “sperm donor” (Hertz et al., 2013). A relationship has also been seen between a donor-conceived person’s age, age of disclosure, and wanting to contact the donor, with the older a person is before they learn they are donor-conceived being related to an increased interest in donor contact (Hertz et al., 2013).

There are also varied reasons behind the donor conceived wanting to know the identity of their donor. For most, they are interested in what the donor looks like, want to know more about their ancestry, and know more about their health history (Hertz et al., 2013). There is also a small percentage (38%) of those who are donor conceived who want to know the donor’s identity in order to form a relationship with him (Hertz et al., 2013). However, those who are in favor of letting the donor conceived have access to their donor’s identity are not always doing so out of pure advocacy for the donor conceived. Some, such as the authors behind the Institute for American Values-funded study on donor conception, argue that anonymous donation should be ended, while also arguing that donor conception is bad and has negative psychological effects on children (Marquardt et al., 2010; Blyth & Kramer, 2010). There are also scholars who argue that the donor conceived should be able to find their donor, because without that knowledge, they are “fractured, partial, and/or inauthentic,” and not yet “a complete person” (Kramer, 2011, p. 382).

Portrayals of Sperm Donor Conception

In 2010, there was an influx of mainstream American blockbusters that featured sperm donor conception: *The Switch*, starring Jennifer Aniston and Jason Bateman; *The Back-up Plan*, starring Jennifer Lopez; and *The Kids Are Alright*, starring Julianne

Moore, Mark Ruffalo, and Annette Bening (Nelson, 2014). While these works had the opportunity to portray the broad possibilities of what a family can look like, they fell into the trap of proclaiming the virtues of the nuclear family, composed of two parents and their biological children (Nelson, 2014). These films, along with 1993 film *Made in America* and 2011 film *Starbuck*, imply that it is the practice of sexual intercourse as a result of romantic love that creates the family — in some of these films, there is sexual attraction between the mother and the donor, and in some cases, the mother and donor end up forming a romantic connection (Nelson 2014). The messages that these films send to donor-conceived viewers is one that ultimately others them; while they are seeing an experience similar to their own in terms of conception, the ideas of creating a close familial bond with their donor, or their donor and their mother falling in love, are ultimately unrealistic and have the ability to create unrealistic expectations.

In contrast, picture books written about donor conception more realistically portray, and explain, the experience of being donor-conceived (Sarles & Mendell, 2010). These books tend to be self-published, written by parents of donor offspring and specialists in reproductive health in order to explain to donor-conceived children the unique circumstances of their conception (Sarles & Mendell, 2010). However, because these works tend to be self-published, it is rare to see these books on library shelves; despite this, these books still have value to the audience they were written for, as well as other readers (Sarles & Mendell. 2010).

Portrayals of Donor Conception in Young Adult Literature

The focus of this research, the portrayals of donor conception in young adult literature, have only been studied in-depth by sociologist Margaret K. Nelson, whose

2020 study, “The Presentation of Donor Conception in Young Adult Fiction” serves as the foundation of my research. The finding she noted that stuck out most to myself, as someone who is donor-conceived, is the fact that donor conception is largely normalized in these books, and not considered to be a strange way to conceive (Nelson, 2020).

Nelson (2020) also found that single mothers are considered to be brave and loving, as opposed to being stigmatized, as well as the fact that these books can provide additional information about reproduction that is not typically covered in sex education classes. However, Nelson (2020) also found that not only were there “consequences” to being donor conceived, but that they differed based on what kind of family the donor-conceived character is part of. For example, children of a single mother are “marked” by some sort of difference, and/or are put into danger (Nelson, 2020). Those who are put into danger are typically rescued by the end of the text, usually by a man who serves as a father figure; thus, these books both defy traditional gender roles, while simultaneously reinforcing them (Nelson, 2020).

Donor-Conceived Children and LIS

The Library of Congress did not create a subject heading specifically for books about people who were sperm donor-conceived — “Sperm donors’ children” — until 2012 (Sarles, 2012). These subject headings are applied to items in a library’s catalog, and are used by patrons to find materials about a similar subject matter; by not having a subject heading about donor-conceived children, library users looking for information about the subject will be met “with frustration in finding nothing, or they will find

something but miss important relevant materials” (Olson, 2002, p. 185, as cited in Sarles & Mendell, 2010, p. 19).

Before 2012, the only subject headings the Library of Congress used in regards to donor conception were: Artificial insemination, Human; Ovum—transplantation; Human embryo—transplantation; Fertilization in vitro, Human; Infertility; Test tube babies; Babies; Genetics; Surrogate mothers; Sex instruction for children; Human reproduction; Human reproductive technology; Family (Sarles & Mendell, 2010). When Sarles noticed this in her research into finding books about donor conception, she contacted the Library of Congress, suggesting new subject headings; their response was that there was no need to establish a subject heading as their current ones were adequate (Sarles & Mendell, 2010). However, all of these subject headings either focus on the parents of the donor conceived, the science surrounding donor conception, or babies; there were none about the donor conceived or their experiences as they grow up (Sarles, 2012). This new subject heading, while it is a step in the right direction, still places the focus on and confers an ownership or affiliation between the child and their donor that may not, and likely does not, feel accurate to the donor-conceived (Sarles, 2012).

Representation in Young Adult Literature

Literature has been widely and popularly described through the terms Rudine Sims Bishop used in her 1990 essay, “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors.” Literature as a mirror can reflect your own experience back to you; as a window, it can let you see into the lives of somebody else; and as a sliding glass door, it can allow you to step into the world the author has created (Bishop, 1990). Readers often seek mirrors in

books, but when these mirrors do not exist, or show distorted reflections, readers are sent a message about their value, or lack of value, in society (Bishop, 1990). However, when readers can see a version of themselves or their experiences accurately mirrored, they can feel recognized and legitimized, and these books can help them understand their own experiences (Colvin, 2017).

For members of minority groups, like the donor conceived (note I referred to the donor conceived as a minority group, not a marginalized group), these accurate mirrors can act as counter narratives, directly going against the distorted mirrors, or dominant/master narratives. A counter narrative, also called a counter-story, is a way of telling the stories that are not often told, directly going up against the accepted narratives that are upheld by the majority (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Hughes-Hassell, 2013).

Counter narratives give a voice to young adults who have gone unheard and misrepresented, provide affirmation and validation of their experiences, and makes those who belong to the majority to rethink the assumptions they hold (Hughes-Hassell, 2013).

In the context of donor conception, the dominant narratives include the othering of the donor-conceived (whether this is due to teasing, a temporary or permanent difference from their peers, or the idea of accidental incest between donor siblings who are not aware that they are related) and upholding the nuclear family and the idea that the only “true” familial connection is a genetic one (Nelson, 2014; Nelson, 2020). Counter narratives about donor conception include the rejection of the nuclear family and the normalization of donor conception (Nelson, 2014; Nelson, 2020). By having positive and accurate representations of the donor conceived on library shelves, donor-conceived readers will be able to see how their experience compares to others and know they are not

alone in their experience; other readers will be able to learn about donor conception without putting the pressure of educating them on their donor-conceived friends and peers (Nelson, 2020). However, it is important to ensure that these representations are accurate, and as librarians, to ask ourselves the question: “If a reader read just these books, what images and understandings about [donor conception] might [they] construct?” (Parsons et al., 2017).

Identity Development

Research has shown that donor-conceived individuals are prompted to search for their donor and donor siblings by reaching a developmental milestone, “such as becoming a teenager, an adult, getting married or having children,” in order to “gain a more complete sense of identity” (Jadva et al., 2010, p. 531). Becoming a teenager and transitioning into adulthood is also an important point in time for adolescents when discovering who they are and how they want to be perceived in the world. Taking the active step to find their donor relations is a process of “meaning-making” which enhances their developing sense of self and identity (Jadva et al., 2016; Slutsky et al., 2016). In order to succeed and develop a positive sense of self, a list of 40 positive supports and strengths have been identified; half of which focus on external assets, which includes the relationships and opportunities youth receive from their families, schools, and communities, the other half focusing on internal assets, which include social-emotional strengths, values, and commitments (Search Institute, n.d.).

In addition to these 40 assets, donor-conceived youth require additional supports and information. For one, disclosure, or the knowledge that they are donor conceived, is

an important first step in allowing for the donor-conceived person to incorporate donor conception into their sense of identity, and are less negative about being donor conceived (Jadva et al., 2009; Nelson, 2020). Those who were told later in life reported feelings of shock, confusion, and “unmooring” (Jadva et al., 2009; Hertz et al., 2013, p. 61; Nelson, 2020). Though there is research out there that suggests that this results in donor offspring being more likely to “struggle with serious, negative outcomes such as delinquency, substance abuse, and depression” (Marquardt et al., 2010), this research has been disproven, and it is generally accepted that donor-conceived youth fare just as well as children who are raised by both of their biological parents (Blyth & Kramer, 2010; Golombok et al., 2002). Once donor-conceived youth are told about their conception, they are then able to take their identity into their own hands, and if they are part of the majority of donor-conceived offspring (83%) who want to contact their donor, they can use websites and resources such as Ancestry.com, 23andMe, and the Known Donor Registry to do so (Hertz et al., 2013).

Research Questions

This study examines how donor-conceived youth are portrayed in novels marketed toward adolescents. It categorizes how the developmental needs of donor-conceived youth are uniquely met, as well as the developmental needs of all teens, in these books. In order to achieve this, I answered the following research questions:

- How are sperm donor-conceived teens portrayed in contemporary young adult literature?
- In what ways do these novels address the developmental needs of teens, in addition to portraying the specific needs of sperm donor-conceived teens?
- To what extent are these young adult novels accessible to teens in public and school libraries in central North Carolina, and in what formats?

For the purposes of this study, I will define “sperm donor conception” as *the use of sperm “sourced from a person or persons other than the intended [parent(s)] of the resulting child”* (Arocho et al., 2019, p. 718) and “young adult literature” as *books marketed by publishers to adolescents aged 12 to 18.*

Methodology

For this study, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of books that feature a character that was conceived via a sperm donor. While known sperm donors exist, I chose to solely focus on sperm donor conception from a sperm bank or fertility clinic to try to standardize the method of conception. This is an appropriate approach for my research because finding one of these books in a library may be the first time a teenager has heard of donor conception, or the first time a donor-conceived teen has seen themselves in a book. By conducting a content analysis, I learned more about these portrayals that teens will encounter.

Positionality / Researcher Role

As the sole researcher for this study, I collected and read the books in my sample, coded their content for major themes, and then analyzed the resultant codes for how donor-conceived teens are portrayed and in what ways they address the developmental needs of teens, donor-conceived and otherwise. I also then searched the catalogs of three public libraries and three school libraries in central North Carolina to see if these books are available to patrons, and in what formats.

I have a personal connection with the topic of my research: I was conceived via an anonymous sperm donor, and I am currently in the process of finding out who my donor was and getting in contact with my half-siblings. Because of this, I have a strong

opinion toward how I believe donor-conceived people should be portrayed in media. Growing up, I've seen donor conception portrayed as a plot device in romantic comedies, as something weird or wrong on social media, and a general absence of my own experience in the books I've read. I've also experienced othering for being donor conceived, like once when a nurse asked if I really had a sperm donor or if I just called him that after I explained that I only knew half of my family's health history. Because of this, I am critical in my examination of the books in my sample, and made a conscious effort not to limit my analysis to the lens of my personal experience.

Sample

From the population of all young adult novels that contain a character that was conceived via sperm donor, I used purposive sampling to select English-language young adult novels published in 2015 and later by major publishing houses, which excludes independent presses and self-published works. I used these criteria because they match up with the type of books that would most likely be found in a public or school library. I located these books with NoveList Plus, Goodreads, and the blog YA Books for Donor Offspring, which is run and maintained by librarian Patricia A. Sarles (Sarles, n.d.). Within each book, I analyzed the text. I also used convenience sampling to select three local public and three local school library catalogs in which I searched for the books in my sample to see if they are available to patrons and, if so, in what format(s).

The biggest limitation of this sampling method is that I most likely did not analyze a representative sample of these books. However, I used criteria to limit my sample in a similar way to how a collection development librarian would be selecting

books, as well as the type of books a reader would most likely find and check out from their library's shelves.

Data Collection Methods

My first step was to conduct research on NoveList Plus, Goodreads, and YA Books for Donor Offspring to find books that met my sample criteria. I was able to initially identify 12 books that met my criteria. Titles, authors, publication years, and publishers of these books can be found in Appendix A. However, upon reading *After the Woods* by Kim Savage and *You're Welcome, Universe* by Whitney Gardner, I discovered that the donor-conceived characters in both books, who are also both named Julia, were conceived using a known donor that their mothers were friends with with, therefore, not meeting my sample criteria and were excluded (Savage, 2016, p. 47; Gardner, 2017, p. 176).

I applied for and received a \$165 Carnegie grant to pay for physical copies of the books in my sample. My application for this grant can be found in Appendix B. After acquiring these books, I read and hand-coded each book for how donor-conceived characters interpret their identity as a donor-conceived teen, as well as for the 40 developmental assets identified by the Search Institute. I also coded for examples of these novels perpetuating dominant narratives, as well as introducing counter narratives, both of which came to light while conducting my literature review. I kept hand-written notes in a notebook as well as on the book's pages, as well as in a Google spreadsheet. After my first pass through each book, I returned to the books I coded first and did a second pass in order to see if I missed any examples in my first pass.

Data Analysis Methods

Quotes from the books that I highlighted and wrote down were typed up and I created a Google spreadsheet of identified themes for each book. To make this easier, I color-coded my highlights, notes, and tabs based on theme(s). I also created a Google spreadsheet of libraries and books for when I searched for whether these books (and in what formats) exist in the libraries I sampled.

I used qualitative analysis to examine the themes that emerged in each book, as well as the presence (or absence) of the Search Institute's Developmental Assets and the context in which they appeared in the sampled books (Search Institute, n.d.). By using qualitative methods to explore the themes that emerge in each book, I was able to explore the underlying messages that these books are sending readers about donor conception and what it means to be donor-conceived.

I also used quantitative analysis to examine whether these books can be found in various school and public libraries, as well as how many copies exist and in what formats. By using quantitative analysis, I was able to track how accessible these books are to readers. To maintain privacy, I assigned each school district and public library system a pseudonym.

I adapted the coding guide used in Nelson's 2020 article, "The Presentation of Donor Conception in Young Adult Fiction." This coding guide focuses specifically on aspects of a donor-conceived teen's identity, and I added the Search Institute Developmental Assets, as well as additional donor-specific themes and categories that represent "othering" and counter narratives, all of which are included as a result of my

literature review. My coding guide, which includes themes, categories, and definitions, can be found in Appendix C.

Results and Discussion

The Upside of Unrequited

“Here’s the part where I should probably mention that Cassie and I are sperm donor babies. So that’s a think in my life: that tiny niggling idea that everyone I meet might actually be my half sibling.”

—Becky Albertalli, *The Upside of Unrequited*

The Upside of Unrequited (Albertalli, 2017), the second book in Becky Albertalli’s *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* universe, follows 17-year-old, donor-conceived Molly who has made it her mission to get her first kiss after being a serial crusher, and after her twin sister Cassie has finally found the girlfriend of her dreams, Mina, leaving Molly behind. Luckily for Molly, Mina comes with a crush-worthy hipster best friend, Will, and if Molly is able to win him over, not only will she finally get a boyfriend, but she also will be able to win her sister back. But then there’s Reid — the nerdy son of Molly’s bosses who works with her at the kitschy boutique, Bissel. Reid is not crush-worthy in the least, but Molly can’t seem to get him out of her head, forcing her to make a choice between the two, all while trying to keep up with her sister, deal with her insecurities, and plan the perfect wedding day for her two moms in a single summer (as the novel takes place during the summer when the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage in the United States).

It is implied that Molly is donor-conceived because she has two moms, who she refers to by their first names, at the time of the book's action and at conception. Molly is female, white, Jewish, and presumably straight; Cassie is queer, and the twins also have a one-year-old little brother named Xavier who was conceived using the same sperm donor as Molly and Cassie, but was carried by a different mother (who is Black). Age of disclosure is not specified, and it is implied that Molly and her siblings have known about the nature of their conception from an early age, as the family has an openness of talking about sex and conception, as one of Molly's moms is a midwife.

Because *The Upside of Unrequited* (Albertalli, 2017) focuses on Molly and her perspective, the majority of themes that I coded for were only seen in relation to her character and to her relationship to her siblings. One recurring theme throughout the novel is the fact that Molly and Cassie are opposites — Molly is a fat brunette, who is often characterized as awkward and inexperienced, whereas Cassie is a willowy blonde, who is characterized as confident and experienced when it comes to more “adult” things, such as drinking and sex. Molly repeatedly exemplifies the “restraint” developmental asset (Search Institute, n.d.), especially in relation to her sister and their friends: she sarcastically jokes about how she shares a name with the street name for a drug and how she's the “last virgin standing” of her close friends (Albertalli, 2017, p. 47). However, this restraint does not make Molly feel empowered or provide her with a positive sense of self, but instead makes her feel like she's behind her peers, leading to her going against this restraint and having her first alcoholic drink. However, despite Molly drinking alcohol, she limits her consumption and ends up arguing with her sister over her insistence not to drive after having a drink at a party and her concerns after combining

alcohol with Zoloft, a medication Molly takes for anxiety. And even after Molly realizes that she wants to be with Reid and the two officially become girlfriend and boyfriend, the pair does not engage in anything other than kissing, as both of them express to each other that while they want to engage in sexual activity one day, they do not feel ready to do so.

Molly also receives a bevy of support from her moms as well as other adults in her life, namely Reid's parents and Molly's bosses, the Wertheims. Molly feels safe turning to these adults with her problems, and they provide her with support and advice. They also celebrate Molly, her accomplishments, and the positive things that happen in her life. The Wertheims also make Molly feel empowered, especially when she is at work and the Wertheims nurture Molly's talents and celebrate her skills. However, Molly's moms also uphold boundaries — they expect their daughters to make responsible decisions when it comes to drinking and sex, for Molly and Cassie to be honest with them about their whereabouts and when they make mistakes, and for them to uphold family commitments. Molly and Cassie both show their interpersonal competence and their dedication to their personal values throughout the novel. The sisters make the time and effort to support their friends when they are having a tough time, but are also willing to confront their friends when they do something the sisters think is wrong. At one point in the novel, Cassie calls out one of Mina's friends for saying that having sex is necessary to become a woman, something Cassie calls "pretty fucking problematic" (Albertalli, 2017, p. 75), despite the potential for a negative reaction from the friend.

Donor conception does not play a large role in this novel, outside of the discussion of why the legalization of gay marriage made such a positive impact on Molly's family. Since Molly, Cassie, presumably the sperm donor, and the mother who

carried the twins are all white (Patty), there are multiple moments where Molly describes having been made to feel by outsiders that because she is not biologically related to one of her moms (Nadine), and that Nadine and her brother are Black, they are not actually a family. Molly describes situations where strangers have told her that Xavier is just her half brother as opposed to her “real brother” (Albertalli, 2017, p. 19), or strangers have assumed that Nadine is Molly and Cassie’s nanny, and not their mom. This othering upholds the idea of the nuclear family — that the parent who is not biologically related to the donor-conceived child is not actually their parent, despite the role the parent played in the raising of the donor-conceived child. However, this idea is repeatedly rejected by Molly and her family, reaffirming the role that the non-biological parent plays in the life of their child. Molly also briefly considers the donor and his ancestors when thinking about her relation to her little brother, expressing joy in the fact that even though it’s through a donor, they still share DNA and have mutual ancestors.

In addition to being othered through the upholding of the nuclear family, Molly is constantly being othered for her fatness, by herself and by other people. Molly attributes her lack of kisses to her fatness — she compares herself to her sister, and posits that it is easier for Cassie to get into relationships because she’s skinny and believes that the only boys who do like her must not be aware of her fatness. She also criticizes her body and her breasts, and imagines that the first boy to see her naked would “flip his shit” (Albertalli, 2017, p. 60). This attitude can be attributed to how her classmates have bullied her for her fatness; she describes boys making “*womp womp womp* sounds” as she walked by in the cafeteria and another boy whispering the word “*gorda*” (the Spanish word for fat) in her ear every day in her eighth grade Spanish class (Albertalli, 2017, p.

65; Albertalli, 2017, p. 129). The role of fatness in these narratives of donor-conceived children is one that kept appearing as I was reading the novels in my sample, as will be further discussed as they appear. In the context of *The Upside of Unrequited* (Albertalli, 2017), I interpreted fatness as a way to explain why Molly is not confident enough to approach her crushes and is consistently comparing herself to her skinny twin sister. However, I do believe that there may be a connection between the idea of fatness, desirability, and donor conception; the female donor-conceived characters in these books lie on vastly opposite sides of the desirability spectrum; they either are fat and undesirable, or hypersexual. While this might not have been intended on the author's part to be related to the fact that the mothers of these daughters relied on donated sperm to have a child, it could be interpreted as a reflection of the desirability of their mothers — that the only women who would resort to using a sperm donor are women who are not worthy of being desired by men, and their daughters either take after them in that, or are the complete opposite. While I do not believe this to be the case in this novel, as previously stated, I did have this thought niggling in the back of my mind every time a character's weight was brought up while reading these novels.

As a whole, I appreciated the way *The Upside of Unrequited* handled the concept of donor conception. While it was mentioned, it was not the sole focus of the book — it was just a fact of these characters' daily lives. I also believe that the inclusion of donor conception in this novel also sends the message to young, queer, assigned female at birth readers that they could have children and a family one day without having to rely on adoption or intercourse with a man.

Fade to Us

“*Jill wanted you so badly*. I loved those words. I loved what they meant. It drained the energy from my anger.”

—Julia Day, *Fade to Us*

In *Fade to Us* (Day, 2018), 17-year-old, donor-conceived Brooke decides to give up her summer job so she can volunteer at a theater camp her stepsister Natalie is attending. Natalie has Asperger’s (which Day does specify, as opposed to an autism spectrum disorder), and occasionally needs a family member to come support her when she has an episode. Since Brooke’s mom and her stepdad are both busy with their own jobs, Brooke decides to step up and help, since Natalie’s attendance at the camp was Brooke’s doing in the first place. At the camp, Brooke meets Micah, the director’s son, and they bond over their shared care for Natalie and eventually begin to date. But Brooke suspects that Natalie also has a crush on Micah, and to prevent Natalie from having an episode, she decides to keep the relationship with Micah a secret, which becomes harder and harder to do as Brooke and Micah get closer. When Natalie finds Brooke and Micah kissing at camp, she feels betrayed and Brooke decides that she needs to break up with Micah. But Brooke cannot stand being apart from Micah, and after she finds out that Natalie was upset about Brooke lying, and not the fact that she was in a relationship with Micah, Brooke declares her love for Micah at the final cast party, and the two get back together.

Brooke is female, presumably straight, and presumably white. She had a single mother at time of conception, but Brooke’s mom got married to Brooke’s stepfather, Jeff, who had Natalie from a previous marriage. It is stated that Brooke is donor conceived because her mom had been in a relationship with a man who did not want to have kids,

but Brooke's mom had waited for years to change his mind. After eight years of him not changing his mind, they broke up, and Brooke's mother "practically drove straight to the fertility center" (Day, 2018, p. 61). Age of disclosure is not specified, but Brooke says that she "always knew" that she was donor conceived (Day, 2018, p. 61). While Brooke does have a positive relationship with her mom at the time of the book's action, she has strained relationships with her stepfather and stepsister. The strained relationship with Natalie has to do with Natalie's disability; Brooke seems to always been on edge about upsetting Natalie, and also expresses frustration when Natalie does not abide by neurotypical social norms, such as telling Micah that Brooke is donor conceived. Brooke's relationship with her stepfather is greatly impacted by Brooke's desire to make have a close father-daughter relationship, and Jeff keeping his distance. Natalie's presence also puts strain on the family, as Jeff and Brooke's mom have differing parenting styles, while also trying to balance supporting Natalie's needs with their own responsibilities. While Brooke is curious about her sperm donor and what he looks like, Brooke is more interested in having a dad and wants Jeff to fill that role. By the end of the novel, Jeff asks Brooke if she wants him to adopt her, and they submit the paperwork, officially giving Brooke the father figure she wants, while also rejecting the traditional nuclear family — while Brooke does end up with a family unit that consists of a mother and a father, the fact that her father is not biologically related to her bucks against the idea that genetics is what makes a family. This is the only book in my sample where a father figure joins a family later in the donor-conceived child's life.

Brooke also possesses many positive assets (Search Institute, n.d.). She participates in creative activities through her work for the theater camp, shows

responsibility when she tells her mom and stepfather that she wants to earn the money to buy a used car, and engages in peaceful conflict resolution when she has disagreements with Natalie. Brooke also receives support from her mom and Jeff: Brooke's mom tells her that she is proud of her, and Jeff hires Brooke to work part-time for him after she has to quit her job to volunteer at the camp. Jeff and Brooke's mom also have boundaries in place, though they mainly come from Jeff, who created formal, written-down rules to make the transition easier for Natalie.

Like Molly in *The Upside of Unrequited* (Albertalli, 2017), Brooke is also fat, and she assumes that she inherited that trait from her donor, as her mother is thin. While Brooke's weight is rarely mentioned throughout the novel, it does make an appearance when Brooke is feeling insecure. In one scene where Brooke is trying to buy professional clothes to wear to her original summer job, Natalie tells Brooke that her butt would look fat in a pencil skirt, embarrassing Brooke in front of the cashier. Brooke's weight is also mentioned when engaging in romantic situations; for example, Micah lifts her onto a table, as if she "hardly weighed anything, which was far from the truth—jiggly thighs and big butt and all" (Day, 2018, p. 200). It was slightly jarring to me every time Brooke's weight was mentioned, as it seemed so disjointed from the novel's narrative that it appeared to only be thrown in randomly for an attempt at representation. Brooke only recounts being othered when talking with Natalie about being donor conceived, and how her grandparents believe that her mom "cheated" to conceive, and how she always had the feeling that she is "not a real grandkid since [she] wasn't the result of an actual relationship" (Day, 2018, p. 62). In other conversations about donor conception, it is largely normalized. There is one situation where Natalie tells Micah that Brooke is donor

conceived without asking Brooke if it was okay, but Brooke specifies that she was not upset about Natalie telling because it was a secret, but because Brooke has the right to decide who knows about the nature of her conception. Brooke also explains to Micah how she does not have any strong feelings either way toward her donor, and that she wanted a father in her life, but not the donor to fill that role.

The People We Choose

“Because no matter what, I don’t actually want him in my life. It’s not about that. No. I don’t need him to start playing dad. It’s just about knowing. Scratching an itch.”

–Katelyn Detweiler, *The People We Choose*

In *The People We Choose* (Detweiler, 2021), donor-conceived 17-year-old Calliope is faced with making the decision whether or not to request information about her sperm donor when she turns 18, while also starting to fall in love and beginning a relationship with her new neighbor, Max, despite her no-dating-in-high-school rule. After turning 18 and deciding that she wants to know who her donor is, she puts in a request for contact and is given a piece of earth-shattering information: her sperm donor is her neighbor Max’s dad. Calliope is then forced to come to terms with the fact that she is in love with her half-brother and decide what kind of relationship she wants with him, her donor, and the rest of her donor’s family moving forward.

Calliope is presumably white, presumably straight, female, and the only child of her two moms. It is implied that Calliope is donor conceived because of her family type, and the age of disclosure is not specified, though it is also implied that Calliope has known for most, if not all, of her life. Before the halfway point of the novel when

Calliope turns 18 and submits the request for her donor's information, she expresses multiple times that she's curious about the donor's identity, though she is not sure what she wants out of the information and what she is looking for out of this potential relationship. She also has further reservations after meeting Max's dad, Elliot, who is shown to be an awful father — he cheated on his wife (the reason why Max's family moved to Calliope's small, rural town), is generally sex-obsessed, and very distant. The following quote is especially sad in its irony after the reader finds out that Elliot is the donor (for additional context, Frank is what Calliope calls the donor before she learns his identity):

“Meeting Elliott—meeting a dad like *him*—has me thinking about Frank again, too. Eighteen. In less than two weeks. Eleven days, to be exact. If there are dads like Elliot in the world, maybe I'm better off not knowing Frank. But then...there are a lot of great dads, too.” (Detweiler, 2021, p. 94)

However, Calliope's curiosity is described as an “endless loop” of wondering (Detweiler, 2021, p. 78), and decides to request information from the cryobank to break that cycle.

Calliope does possess a few of the Search Institute's developmental assets, namely “family support” (Search Institute, n.d.). While her moms are not necessarily enthused that Calliope is requesting information about her donor, especially considering that they will not even tell her who carried her so she does not think of one of her moms as less of a parent, they still support her and her decisions, acknowledge that it is normal to be curious about where you come from, and tell Calliope that any information they find out about her donor would never change the love they have for her. Also, after finding out that Elliot was Calliope's sperm donor, Calliope's moms make an effort to start spending more time with Elliot, his wife, and their children, in an attempt to merge the two families together. Calliope also shows a commitment to learning through her

motivation to succeed at school so she can go to university for environmental science, and at the beginning of the novel, she expresses restraint when it comes to not wanting to date before she goes to college — though this rule is more so she does not have to directly reject her friend Noah's romantic advances, and she does lose that restraint when it comes to Max.

The relationship Calliope has with Max is what I found most troubling while reading this book, and also what makes me hesitant to recommend this book to others looking for representation of donor conception in young adult novels. The fact that the potential for incest being one of the first things people think of when they consider the fact that there are children who are conceived via an anonymous sperm donor is incredibly troubling, especially considering that it is very rare. I could not find any evidence of this happening, other than an anonymous submission to Slate's *Dear Prudence* column (Yoffe, 2013). Concerns about donor-conceived siblings falling in love are also only generally written about by those who wish to outlaw donor conception, such as in an opinion piece published by *The Spectator* (Clark, 2018). By having Calliope and Max falling in love, Detweiler is perpetuating a narrative that others the donor conceived that is largely untrue and misleading, and has the potential to create harmful situations for donor-conceived youth if their peers believe that being donor conceived naturally leads to incest. After Calliope finds out that she had been dating her sperm donor's son, she does research into donor siblings who have met and only finds sensational stories, which leads Calliope to believe that this is the reality of donor conception, and uses this to make the argument that in the United States does not do enough to prevent this from happening. The language Detweiler uses surrounding this situation can also be seen as othering —

Calliope waits to tell Max about the identity of her sperm donor until after she can confirm that the Elliot Jackson who donated his sperm is in fact Max's father. When it becomes time to tell him, she refers to communicating this information as a "confession," as if she is admitting to committing a crime, even though she did not fall in love with her donor's son on purpose (Detweiler, 2021, p. 183). Calliope also refers to herself as a "science experiment" when talking to girls from her school about how she has two moms (Detweiler, 2021, p. 276). This view of herself as a science experiment is also why she refers to her donor as Frank before she finds out his true identity — Calliope says that the term "donor" sounds "too cold, like a science experiment from a lab" (Detweiler, 2021, p. 19). The novel ends in a similar way to a film about donor conception, with Elliot being redeemed. While he's described as "far from perfect," getting contact with his donor offspring and having the two families begin to merge into one is shown to have a positive impact on Elliot, encouraging him to go to marriage counseling, therapy, and spending more time with his family.

However, the depictions of donor conception in *The People We Choose* are not all negative. The novel regularly rejects the idea of the nuclear family, tying into the novel's title and the idea of a chosen family. Even after Calliope finds out that Elliot is her sperm donor, she still maintains that she is not looking for a father or a father figure, and that she has and always will have two parents who love her, no matter if they are biologically related to her or not. I did find it a little strange and unrealistic that Calliope did not know which of her moms carried her, as I do not know how it would be possible to keep that a secret, and it would be just as easy to posit that biological relation does not matter even if Calliope knows which mother she's biologically related to, like Albertalli did in *The*

Upside of Unrequited (2017). Ultimately, as a donor-conceived person, reading this book made me feel incredibly uncomfortable, as I have had people make comments to me about the possibility of me dating a donor sibling and it has always made me feel weird and like an other. I believe that the same point — that family is “the people we choose” — could have been made without the implication of incest between a donor-conceived person and her donor’s child.

The Other F-Word

“It’s not the same, anyway. Giving away a kid and giving away sperm. They’re just...not the same.”
—Natasha Friend, *The Other F-Word*

The Other F-Word (Friend, 2017), follows a group of donor siblings as they try to track down their donor. The novel focuses mainly on the perspectives of 14-year-old Hollis, who at first has absolutely no interest in finding out anything about her donor or her donor siblings before she changes her mind, and 15-year-old Milo, who wants to find his donor so he can finally get answers to why he has such severe allergies. Hollis and Milo had met for the first time years ago, after their mothers had used the Donor Progeny Project (a website similar to the Donor Sibling Registry) to track each other down. The two had not been in contact since then, until Milo’s allergist suggested he get the donor to undergo genetic testing to see if Milo inherited a specific gene that causes severe allergies. Knowing he could not do that himself, Milo reaches out to Hollis and uses the Donor Progeny Project to reach out to three more of their donor siblings: Abby, Noah, and Josh. While Josh has no interest in finding the donor, Abby and Noah agree to help, and the four donor siblings use the limited information that they know to track down their

donor. When they finally are able to track him down to an ultimate Frisbee tournament, they discover that their donor is expecting a child with his wife, and the four siblings decide to leave the donor alone. After Milo is hospitalized after a waitress accidentally puts almond milk in Milo's hot chocolate, a doctor tells him about an experimental treatment he could use to help with his allergies, and he does not need to get any information from the donor after all. The four siblings go their separate ways, but promise to stay in touch.

Hollis is female, presumed white, and presumed straight. She has a single mom at the time of the book's action, but had two moms at time of conception. However, a major tension in the novel is about how she does not consider her second mom to actually be her mom. At the time of Hollis's conception, her mom lived with her female life partner, but due to laws preventing the two from getting married, Hollis's mom's partner was never legally able to be considered Hollis's second mother. When Hollis was seven, her mom's partner died, and Hollis resents how her mother is still grieving a dead woman that Hollis barely remembers. However, by the end of the novel, Hollis realizes how much her mom's partner meant to her, and how hurtful it was when her mom's partner was on her death bed in the hospital and Hollis and her mother were not allowed to go into the room to say goodbye. Age of disclosure is not specified, but it is implied that Hollis knew she was donor conceived from a young age.

Milo is male, presumed white, and presumed straight. He had two moms at time of conception and at the book's action, and has a positive relationship with both mothers, though one is more strict than the other. Age of disclosure is not specified, though it is implied that Milo knew he was donor conceived from a young age.

Abby is 15 years old, female, presumed white, and presumed straight. She had a mother and a father at time of conception and at the time of the book's action. She has a positive relationship with both parents, but did not tell her father that she was looking for her sperm donor out of fear of making him upset. Age of disclosure is not specified.

Noah and Josh are 17 year old male twins, who are presumed white and presumed straight. They had a mother and a father at time of conception and at the time of the book's action. Noah has a strained relationship with his father at the time of the book's action because he does not share any of his father's interests, but Josh and his father are very close. Josh chooses not to help his donor siblings find their donor because of the close relationship he has with his father. Age of disclosure is not specified.

Because the narrative focuses on the perspectives of Hollis and Milo, readers do not get any deep insight into the thought process of Abby, Noah, and Josh when they consider whether or not to be in contact with their donor or their donor siblings. At the beginning of the novel, Hollis is staunchly against having any sort of contact with the donor and also does not seem to be too enthused about being in contact with her donor siblings, especially as her contact with Milo was decided for her by her moms. Hollis resents her donor and the method of her conception, and blames him for her being a "freak of nature," a "lab experiment," and "half a person" (Friend, 2017, p. 11). However, Hollis later changes her mind after she and her mom visit Milo in New York and sees how much having contact with the donor means to him and the fact that she will have a choice as to whether or not she actually meets him. While Milo does express resenting the donor for his method of conception, unlike Hollis, Milo had always been curious about the donor's identity and interested in having contact with his donor

siblings. Both Hollis and Milo possess developmental assets, namely “family support” (Search Institute, n.d.). While one of Milo’s moms is on the fence about Milo contacting his donor, both of his moms and Hollis’s mom assist their children in the pursuit of finding information about the donor, Hollis’s mom going as far as flirting with an alumni office worker to get information. Milo’s mom, Frankie, also upholds boundaries, and while she is sometimes seen by Milo as overly strict when she flushes Milo’s friend JJ’s pot down the toilet, she tells Milo that she’s “just doing [her] job as a responsible mother” (Friend, 2017, p. 19).

Throughout the novel, Hollis, Milo, Abby, and Noah are all othered, though in different ways. Hollis others herself when she considers the nature of her conception, stating that donor conception has nothing to do with love, and was “fast, cold, and impersonal” (Friend, 2017, p. 12). Hollis is also bullied by her peers, slut-shamed, and objectified because of her body and is depicted as hyper-sexual. Like Julia in *Your Own Worst Enemy* (Jack, 2018), which will be discussed later, it seemed to me that Hollis was depicted in this way to be the opposite of her mother, who did not date after her partner’s death, though she is not depicted as undesirable. Hollis is also bullied by her peers for her family type, having recalled an incident on the playground when a classmate told Hollis that her family’s “lifestyle is an abomination” (Friend, 2017, p. 133). Hollis also experienced othering when dealing with the hospitalization of her mother’s partner, as discussed earlier. Like Hollis, Milo is also othered by his peers; because of his allergies, his classmates saw him as “the weird, skinny kid” (Friend, 2017, p. 27). Milo also experiences othering when looking up information about donor conception, finding articles that describe donor-conceived children as being more likely to get into legal

trouble, struggle with substance abuse, and deal with depression and other mental health problems. As discussed in the literature review, this has been disproven, though that is not addressed in the novel. Milo also repeatedly upholds the nuclear family and expresses the belief that a boy needs a father and the idea that genetic ties creates an instant connection. At the end of the novel when Milo and his donor siblings discover that their donor is going to have a baby with his wife, Milo is jealous that his donor was going to be “a *real* dad” who will have the conversations and the relationship that Milo desperately wanted from a father (Friend, 2017, p. 301).

However, there are also multiple examples of counter-narratives throughout the novel. Donor conception is normalized, usually in the context of discussions Milo has with his friend JJ, who is unfazed by the nature of Milo’s conception. The nuclear family is also rejected, with characters affirming the fact that the act of parenting is what makes someone a parent, not genetics. Hollis and Milo also consciously center offspring and call out others who make jokes about donor conception. Milo’s friend JJ, who is adopted, also specifies how adoption and donor conception are not the same, even though the two are often conflated. For a book that had a plot that revolved around and characters whose identities centered on donor conception, I thought the representation in *The Other F-Word* (Friend, 2017) was well done. I believe that the conflict that especially exists in teen years around resenting a sperm donor while remaining curious was depicted well, and I appreciated that different types of families and relationships with the idea of donor conception were featured.

Your Own Worst Enemy

“You couldn’t place her in any census bureau racial identity box; she was Other—a beautiful, mysterious Other.”

—Gordon Jack, *Your Own Worst Enemy*

Your Own Worst Enemy (Jack, 2018) follows the perspectives of multiple students at Lincoln High School as they participate (or assist) in the race to become the next Student Body President. Donor-conceived, 16-year-old new girl Julia is one of the candidates, much to the displeasure of frontrunner Stacey Wynn. After one of Julia’s campaign signs is defaced with the slogan “Build That Wall,” the Latinx students of Lincoln High School rally behind her, and they plan a quinceañera-themed protest to show their school that racism is not okay. But Julia is keeping a secret: despite her tan skin and her last name (Romero), Julia does not know if she actually is Latinx because her mother is white and she does not know anything about her donor. She confides in Jenny, a member of the Latino Student Union, who encourages Julia to take a DNA test so she can find out once and for all while still keeping up appearances for the sake of protesting racism. When the day of the protest rolls around, everything devolves into chaos after Stacey tries to blackmail Julia after Stacey discovers the nature of Julia’s conception and when Tony Guo, the stoner who is running for president on the platform of bringing chocolate milk back to the cafeteria, skateboards through the protest while wearing a cow suit. All three candidates get in trouble, but they are allowed to stay in the race, and while sitting in the principal’s office, Julia finds out that she is 9 percent Latina, which is enough for her to feel like she was not deceiving her classmates. Tony wins the election, but realizes that he does not actually want the role, so he calls the cops to break up his election party, and the role of president goes to the elected vice president, James.

Stacey and Julia end up working together to create a new leadership class that allows the Lincoln High School student body get involved in school-wide decision making, but without having to run for a position.

Julia is female and multi-racial, as established later in the novel when she receives her DNA breakdown from her mother. It is hinted that Julia may be queer, though it is not explicitly stated. She had a single mother at the time of conception and at the time of the book's action, but her relationship with her mother was strained throughout the novel, as it is later revealed that Julia had cyberbullied a classmate of hers at her old school in Canada, and after the classmate attempted suicide, Julia's mother decided it would be for the best that she moved in with her aunt in California. Julia and her mother also disagreed heavily over whether or not it mattered that Julia knows the ethnic heritage of her donor. Julia's mother is of the belief that Julia should "choose [her] own destiny, not let [her] chromosomes do it for [her]" (Jack, 2018, p. 173), whereas Julia believes that because the donor is part of her, as she inherited half of his DNA, she deserves to know something about him. Age of disclosure is not specified, though it is implied that Julia had known from a young age.

Julia possesses two developmental assets: "achievement motivation" (Search Institute, n.d.), as she is depicted as trying to succeed in school as well as her run for Student Body President, and "family boundaries" (Search Institute, n.d.), as her aunt upholds strict rules to prevent Julia from making the same mistakes she made while in Canada. However, Julia is heavily othered throughout the novel. In the first significant introduction to her character, she is highly sexualized by Stacey's best friend Brian, who waxes poetic about how beautiful he finds Julia's breasts (Brian and Julia end up dating

by the end of the novel). After this, Brian literally calls her an “other” due to her race: “You couldn’t place her in any census bureau racial identity box; she was Other—a beautiful, mysterious Other” (Jack, 2018, p. 24). Being othered for her perceived race is a common theme throughout the novel: teachers pull her aside to tell her that they are happy to see a Latina in an AP class and her campaign posters were vandalized with racist rhetoric. Julia is also othered for the nature of her conception, after Stacey discovers an article about how Julia’s mom sued the fertility clinic she used to conceive (the only mention of the fertility clinic in this book is characterizing it as shady). Stacey uses this as blackmail, threatening to tell the whole school that Julia is donor conceived, and in conversations with Stacey’s campaign advisors, they talk about how not having a dad is “weird” and characterize Julia’s mom as a hyper-militant feminist who does not think men are necessary (Jack, 2018, p. 278). Julia’s mom is also never depicted in a positive light — she is depicted as hyper-liberal, strict, and controlling, making decisions about what Julia is allowed to know about her donor and keeping the fact that she knows Julia’s racial makeup a secret. This denial of access, in a sense, mirrors what typically happens to all children in the United States with anonymous sperm donors: people other than the donor-conceived person are making decisions about what information the donor-conceived person is allowed to have access to.

I found the nature of Julia’s othering, specifically the hyper-sexualization, to be incredibly interesting, especially when compared to other books in my sample where the donor-conceived character is generally depicted as fat and/or unattractive. My thoughts were that Julia was depicted in this way to posit her in opposition to her mother, who is generally depicted as undesirable and anti-man. By having Julia be this hyper-sexual

figure, even if it's the perception that other people have of her, I feel like it makes an argument that she is not taking after her undesirable mother who had to rely on an unnatural method of conception.

The Secret of a Heart Note

“Fall in love, and like Aunt Bryony, lose your supersniffer. It's why Mother chose my father from a list of donors she got in the mail like a Christmas catalogue.”
—Stacey Lee, *The Secret of a Heart Note*

In *The Secret of a Heart Note* (Lee, 2016), 15-year-old, donor-conceived Mimosa is an aromateur — a person with a magical sense of smell that allows her to create love elixirs. Being an aromateur comes with many rules, but the most important of all is that Mimosa is not allowed to fall in love, or else she will lose her supernatural sense of smell. As Mimosa advances in her aromateur training, her mom is giving her more responsibilities, the newest one being to give an elixir to the school librarian to encourage her to fall in love with Mimosa's math teacher. But after she accidentally gives the elixir to popular boy Court's mom instead of the school librarian, she has to work with Court to get the plants she needs to make an antidote, and grows closer to Court in the process. After a freak accident in the ocean, Mimosa is left with no choice but to kiss Court in order to save his life, and she loses her sense of smell. Left without a way to make the antidote herself, she calls her estranged aunt, who lost her sense of smell after falling in love years ago, for help. Mimosa's aunt tells Mimosa that it is not falling in love that makes aromateurs lose their sense of smell, but the salt water from the ocean, and that Mimosa's sense of smell will come back better than ever. The two finish making the antidote, but find out that it is too late — Court's mom has already fallen in love with

Mimosa's math teacher, and he has fallen in love with Court's mom too, and everyone agrees that Mimosa's mistake was for the best.

Mimosa is female, presumed straight, and multi-racial, though those races are not explicitly stated. Mimosa has a single mother at the time of conception and the book's action because of the magical rule about falling in love making aromateurs lose their sense of smell. Mimosa is raised to believe that when she grows up, she will be expected to use donor conception to have daughters and continue the matriarchal line of aromateurs, which Mimosa refers to as a "lonely life" (Lee, 2016, p. 122). Mimosa and her mother have a strained relationship; her mother is focused on Mimosa developing her talents as an aromateur, whereas Mimosa would prefer to focus on school and living a more normal life. Mimosa's mother is explicitly against Mimosa going to school, and uses the threat of being taken out of school or being taken out of her advanced math class as potential punishments for Mimosa not being focused enough on her aromateur studies. Despite this, Mimosa possesses the "achievement motivation" asset (Search Institute, n.d.), and works hard to excel in her aromateur studies and her schoolwork. Mimosa does not mention any curiosity toward finding out information about the donor, though the way Mimosa must have inherited some of the donor's physical traits are briefly mentioned by Mimosa's aunt.

Mimosa is othured by her classmates for her magical abilities, as her peers believe that if they get too close to her, she would "put a spell on them" (Lee, 2016, p. 18). However, she is not the subject of bullying as much as her best friend Kali, who is bullied for her height and size, and later for being queer. There is also a brief moment in the novel where Mimosa questions whether or not being donor conceived means that there's

something missing, which she describes as “a part of [her] that failed to thrive in [the donor’s] absence, like an unrotated watermelon that stays yellow on one side” (Lee, 2016, p. 201). Overall, I thought it was interesting and unique to use sperm donor conception as a way to explain a magic system, even if it ended up not being true. However, the depiction of single motherhood being lonely, and romantic love being held up on a pedestal as the way to live a fulfilling life has the potential to make children of single moms (even children who are not donor conceived) to feel othered while reading this text.

Devil and the Bluebird

“You were never my father, not in any real way. Not any more than Donor 707 is Blue’s.”
—Jennifer Mason-Black, *Devil and the Bluebird*

Devil and the Bluebird (Mason-Black, 2016) follows donor-conceived 17-year-old Blue as she hitchhikes across the country looking for her sister, Cass, who went missing two years ago. To get help finding her, Blue meets the devil at the town crossroads, and in exchange for her voice, the devil imbues Blue’s hiking boots with magic, making them act as a homing device that directs Blue where to go. Blue just has to make sure that the people she meets on her journey never learn her real name, or they will be targeted and killed. As Blue gets closer and closer to her sister, she meets a variety of characters, some kind and helpful, and some that threaten Blue’s life. The further Blue goes, the more she realizes that she is following the path her deceased mother took out west that lead her mother to her bandmate and life partner, Tish, who

Blue had not seen in years. After a particularly dangerous encounter with a man who kidnaps and tries to kill Blue, she finds herself in Tish's barn, and Tish helps her go the rest of the way to California, where she discovers that Cass was in a singing competition with a record deal with the devil as the prize. Blue crashes the final competition, disqualifying Cass, and rescuing her from the predatory record company executive, and gains back her voice.

Blue is female, presumed straight, and presumed white. Her older sister, Cass, is not donor conceived. Blue's mother decided to use a sperm donor to conceive Blue after giving birth to Cass and leaving Cass's father, as she did not want Cass to be lonely on the road (Blue's mother was a musician). During Blue's early childhood, she was raised by her mother and her mother's partner, Tish, though Tish was never granted parental rights. After Blue's mom received a cancer diagnosis, she decided to move away from Tish to Blue's aunt's house, so that once Blue's mother died, Tish would not become Blue and Cass's legal guardian. Age of disclosure is not specified, though it is implied that Blue had known since an early age. Blue does not know anything about the donor, and never expresses any interest in finding out any information about him, as she does not believe him to be much of a relative, as "family wasn't part of a sperm donor's donation" (Mason-Black, 2016, p. 13). Donor conception does not play much of a role in this narrative other than as a way to explain why Cass and Blue do not share a father and why Blue lived with her aunt after her mother's death. Donor conception is also used to make a point to Cass's father about why she does not want him in her life:

You were never my father, not in any real way. Not any more than Donor 707 is Blue's." (Mason-Black, 2016, p. 326)

Because this novel is a work of magical realism and Blue does not have much of a chance to be a normal kid because she is hitchhiking across the country, there are few opportunities for Blue to show that she possesses any developmental assets other than engaging in creative activities. Though Blue does compare her guitar and vocal skills to her mother, sister, and Tish throughout the novel, she is regarded as a talented musician and songwriter, especially near the end of the novel where she begins to write her own song and collaborates with Tish.

This book does engage in othering in a very similar way to *Silence is Goldfish* (Pitcher, 2016); like Tess, Blue has no longer has her main method of communication, though unlike Tess, she can communicate through writing notes. However, unlike Tess, in addition to her voice, she also has her identity stripped from her until she finds Tish again. Blue becomes a pawn in a larger game — she has no identity or agency, and is forced to go along with the whims of the people she is surrounded by. This novel does reject the nuclear family, specifically when Blue is taken in and helped by an organization that helps LGBTQ+ teens who have been kicked out of their homes. One of the people with the organization teaches Blue that “families can be made, that romance wasn’t the only kind of [love]” (Mason-Black, 2016, p. 272). Like *The Upside of Unrequited* (Albertalli, 2017), I appreciated how *Devil and the Bluebird* (Mason-Black, 2016) took the concept of sperm donor conception and made it a facet of Blue’s identity, but did not make it the sum of her identity.

Sparrow

“Don’t look for some sad tale of the father figure I’m missing or how he left when blah, blah, blah. Mom didn’t want a husband; she wanted a baby. So she had one. You know. Sperm-bank style.”

—Sarah Moon, *Sparrow*

Sparrow (Moon, 2017) begins with 14-year-old, donor-conceived Sparrow in the hospital following what the doctors and adults in her life are calling a suicide attempt — she was found on the roof of her school, and it looked like she was going to jump. Despite what Sparrow insists, nobody believes her when she says she was not going to jump, and her doctors insist that she goes to see a therapist. It takes Sparrow some time to open up to Dr. Katz, but when Dr. Katz starts to play music during Sparrow’s sessions, like Pixie’s “Where Is My Mind?,” Sparrow begins to open up, and starts to tell Dr. Katz why she was found on her school’s roof. After the sudden death of Sparrow’s school librarian, who let Sparrow eat in her office and spend her lunch time reading in the library, Sparrow felt like she had nowhere else to go during lunch, so she would spend her time on the roof, imagining flying away with the birds. Dr. Katz encourages Sparrow to talk about this with her mother, as their relationship became strained when the two felt like they could not talk to each other about Sparrow’s mental health. And to encourage Sparrow to begin to open up and pursue her burgeoning interests in alternative music, Dr. Katz suggests that Sparrow spends her summer at the Gertrude Nix Rock Camp for Girls, named for blues icon Ma Rainey. It takes Sparrow a while to begin to open up to her bandmates, but the four eventually become inseparable, finally spending enough time together to write a song for the camp’s final showcase and decide on a name: the Boom Chachalacas, after a bird that Sparrow read about. But when the Boom Chachalacas’s

singer loses her voice the day of the final showcase, Sparrow has to overcome her fears and sing in front of the crowd, and Sparrow finds a new form of flying.

Sparrow is female, Black, and presumed straight. She had a single mother at the time of her conception and at the time of the book's action. It's stated that Sparrow's mother used a sperm donor to conceive because she did not "want a husband; she wanted a baby" (Moon, 2017, pp. 5-6). Sparrow also explicitly states that she has no interest in learning about her donor or his identity, as she has "other things on [her] mind" (Moon, 2017, p. 6). Age of disclosure is not specified. Sparrow possesses many of the developmental assets identified by the Search Institute (n.d.). While Sparrow's relationship with her mother is strained throughout the majority of the novel, Sparrow still receives support from her mother and they engage in positive family communication. While Sparrow does not feel like her mother understands her mental health struggles and social anxiety, her mother does tell Sparrow that she loves her and supports her, and also tells Sparrow that she is there to listen whenever Sparrow is ready to talk. Sparrow's mother also upholds boundaries, and makes it clear to Sparrow that she still needs to put effort into her studies and trying to better her mental health. Sparrow also has a caring school climate, exemplified by both her former school librarian and her homeroom teacher, who makes his class a safe space where students can share with each other what is happening in their lives. Sparrow also has a supportive relationship with her therapist, Dr. Katz, who also acts as someone Sparrow can look up to as a Black woman who has interests in stereotypically "white" things, like alternative music. Near the end of the novel, Sparrow begins to get more involved in creative activities, learning to play bass at rock camp and helps do lights and sound at her school's talent show. Sparrow also

develops a sense of personal power, and sticks up for herself when a girl at school says that she wants to be Sparrow's friend, but only in private. Sparrow is frequently othered by her classmates for being an "Oreo," or a Black girl who acts white and is stuck up, because she has different interests from her classmates (Moon, 2017, p. 110). Donor conception is normalized in this book, and I appreciated how in this narrative, donor conception was only briefly mentioned, and was not the sum of Sparrow's identity.

Silence Is Goldfish

“And with our fingers almost scraping the sky we would smile identical smiles and then he would gasp, ‘It’s you!’”
—Annabel Pitcher, *Silence is Goldfish*

Silence is Goldfish (Pitcher, 2016) begins with donor-conceived 15-year-old Tess running away after reading the beginning of a horrifying blog post written by her father about how he resented his daughter for being donor-conceived:

“When Tess finally emerged after two hours of pushing, all I felt was revulsion, and I could no more easily pretend to love the peculiar creature in my delighted wife’s arms than hide the resentment that burned inside. It wasn’t my daughter. It was her daughter—hers and some sperm donor’s I had never met, but what could I do? She was here and she was my wife’s and I loved my wife even if I didn’t love the ugly red thing gnawing at her—” (Pitcher, 2016, pp. 13-14)

But Tess cannot bring herself to run away, and returns home, quietly resenting her parents until she decides, while on stage in a production of *Peter Pan* with her father, to stop speaking entirely. She thinks she has found her sperm donor when a substitute arrives to fill in for her math teacher — Mr. Richardson looks more like blonde-haired, brown-eyed Tess than her father does. To confirm whether or not Mr. Richardson is in fact her donor, she concocts a plan to find out more about Mr. Richardson and spend

more time with him. But the more Tess tries to find out, the more she realizes that Mr. Richardson is not a good person, and she questions whether or not he could be her donor. After being threatened by Mr. Richardson not to reveal his infidelity, Tess decides to speak again to reveal Mr. Richardson's wrongdoings and tell her parents why she stopped speaking. Her father reveals that the blog post was not finished when she read it, and it ended with him realizing that even though they are not biologically related, Tess is his daughter and he loves her unconditionally.

Tess is female, white, and presumably straight. She has a mother and a father at the time of conception and action, and it is stated that the reason for donor conception is that her parents could not conceive using her father's sperm. As was previously stated, Tess was 15 at age of disclosure, though it was an accidental disclosure and her parents had not intended for her to know. It is also revealed later in the novel that Tess's parents also had not anybody, including other members of their family, that they had used donor sperm to conceive. Because this book revolves around Tess's search to find her sperm donor, it is made abundantly clear that she wants to have contact with her donor and that she wants him to fill a father figure role in her life, as a replacement for her father. However, Tess lives in England, where even though a sperm donor's identity has to be shared with the donor-conceived child eventually, some information cannot be released until they turn 16, and the donor's name and other identifying information cannot be released until the donor-conceived child turns 18 (Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority, n.d.). Because Tess cannot have access to the actual information, she is constantly on the lookout for men who look like her: tall, blond, with brown eyes. She keeps seeing men who look like her, but then their personalities are not the same, such as

a loud supermarket delivery guy, a too-small doctor, and a “fragile but brave” “transvestite” (Pitcher, 2016, pp. 99-100).

In the novel, Tess is described as having a few developmental assets, but they are always in the context of being things that she does to appease and impress her controlling father. For example, Tess engages in creative activities, such as being in a production of *Peter Pan* and taking tap lessons. But she also says that she agreed to participate in those activities because she wanted to make her actor father proud of her. When she makes the choice not to say her only line while on stage, performing for an audience and with her father, it is an ultimate act of rebellion — it is implied that her father is insecure about his career, and Tess embarrassing him while engaging in an activity that he is supposed to be talented in mirrors the fact that Tess had to be conceived with a donor, a reminder that he “failed to be a husband” and a “proper dad” (Pitcher, 2016, pp. 336-337). Her father also upholds expectations, for example, every day when he comes home he expects Tess to have started on her homework, but again, Tess complies with this because she wants to impress him, not because of some intrinsic desire to be responsible and succeed.

I was repeatedly disappointed when reading this novel to discover that the majority of the text is dedicated to perpetuating dominant narratives around donor conception and othering the donor-conceived character. Tess repeatedly upholds the idea of the nuclear family, though this could be understandable after finding out that she is donor conceived in such a horrific, dehumanizing way — she is literally called “it,” a “creature,” and “thing” by her father (Pitcher, 2016, pp. 13-14). Throughout the novel, Tess describes how much she wants to have a dad after losing her “so-called dad” (Pitcher, 2016, p. 4), and even says that without her donor she has “no roots, no past and

no future” (Pitcher, 2016, p. 285). Tess also appears to believe that family is entirely based in genetics, the fact that sharing DNA creates an instant connection, and that learning the identity of her sperm donor would lead to learning inner truths about herself. She even describes herself as not being whole after learning that she’s donor conceived and mourns her childhood that was all a lie. Tess and her mother also treat the phrases “donor conceived” and “sperm donor” like dirty words, with Tess arguing that the phrase “donor conceived” implies that she is not human, but a science experiment, and her mother, when explaining why she used a sperm donor, first calling the donor “a thingy” (Pitcher, 2016, p. 335). And while Tess is struggling to come to terms with the fact that Mr. Richardson may not be her donor after all, she fanaticizes about her dad telling her that because he took years off of work to be a stay-at-home dad, he must be her biological father and that the blog post was a lie. Another fantasy Tess has is that her donor must have dated her mother at some point, and that is why he agreed to donate his sperm, creating a more understandable or acceptable reason behind sperm donation and donor conception.

Tess is also repeatedly othered throughout the course of the novel. The most obvious form of othering is that she chooses to stop speaking or communicating in any way to anybody except her imaginary friend/flashlight, Mr. Goldfish. By no longer having any way to communicate, similarly to Julia in *Devil and the Bluebird* (Mason-Black, 2016), Tess is cut off from the world, including her only friend, and is infantilized by her family members and teachers for her sudden inability to speak. Tess is also fat, a fact that is repeatedly emphasized throughout the novel, and very rarely in a positive light. In addition to othering herself for being fat, she is also othered and bullied by her

neighbors, her father, and especially her classmates. One particularly horrifying incident involves a popular girl at Tess's school calling her a pig and then forcing her to eat a hamburger, goading her all the while. In addition to her fatness, Tess is also bullied by her peers after someone starts a rumor that she is transgender after an unflattering picture of her on vacation is shared online that allegedly shows Tess having a penis bulge (Tess is cisgender). Her classmates then cyberbully her by commenting transphobic words and then sexually harass her in person, talking about how much she must be masturbating now that she is finally going through puberty (the reason the bullies concocted behind Tess's ability to "pass" as a girl until this point). The same classmate who calls her a pig and forces her to eat a hamburger also spends multiple pages forcing Tess to pose for pictures, all while misgendering her and making fun of her physical characteristics, before later in the novel saying that a boy must be "wrong in the head" for wanting to hook up with "girls who are boys" and someone as fat as Tess is (Pitcher, 2016, p. 266).

Like *The People We Choose* (Detweiler, 2021), *Silence is Goldfish* (Pitcher, 2016) also entertains the idea of a donor-conceived person falling in love with her donor's son. While it is later confirmed that Mr. Richardson is not her donor, while Tess still believes that he is, she develops a crush on his son. While she is aware that it is wrong, a fact that she is also reminded of by Mr. Goldfish, she keeps describing her attraction to him, before they finally kiss. Tess also finds out about the fact that she might have donor-conceived siblings out in the world, and she immediately jumps to the potential of incest, worried that a boy she kissed might have been related to her, and resents her parents ruining that memory for her. I think it is important to note that unlike in other books, especially *The Other F-Word*, Tess does not resent the donor for her conception, but

instead resents both her mother and her father. Tess believes that the donor must inherently be a good person, and ignores Mr. Richardson's red flags due to this belief, until she realizes that because he is not a good person, he could not possibly be her donor. Tess also views non-disclosure as a lie, and sees her mother as complicit. In fact, Tess also creates a fantasy where she leaves both her mother and father behind to live with her donor, her kind art teacher, and her grandmother (who is her mother's mother). It is not until the very end of the novel that the nuclear family is rejected, after Tess's father reveals that his blog post was not done, telling Tess that while he is "not the best dad," he is her dad (Pitcher, 2016, p. 339).

In addition to the rampant fatphobia and transphobia that is presented in this book, I also wanted to point out a section of text where Tess is trying to tell her friend that she is donor conceived, and her friend assumes that Tess is coming out as queer. This friend then appears to fetishize queer people through desperately wanting Tess to come out, and then compares queerness to bestiality. It was a very jarring passage to read, and I am still not sure why it was included, other than as a setup to a later joke about incest. I had very similar feelings while reading this book that I did when reading *The People We Choose* (Detweiler, 2021). While both books do ultimately reject the nuclear family and attempt to argue that the donor-conceived character is just as loved despite being donor-conceived, I feel like this narrative has the potential to being harmful to donor-conceived children.

Saving Montgomery Sole

“It’s not like I want to find him. The donor. I don’t need to find him. He’s just there, I guess, and sometimes I step on him in my brain. Like a sock left on the floor.”

—Mariko Tamaki, *Saving Montgomery Sole*

In *Saving Montgomery Sole* (Tamaki, 2016), 16-year-old, donor-conceived Montgomery is the chair of her high school’s Mystery Club (whose only other members are her best friends Thomas and Naoki). Montgomery has always been interested in the unexplained, and when she sees that she sees that the mysterious Eye of Know is only \$5.99, of course she is going to buy it. After thinking that she had bought a dud, Montgomery realizes that when she wears the Eye of Know, bad things happen to her enemies, and she hopes it can help her take down her newest one: Kenneth White, the son of a homophobic preacher who moved into town, who is just another person to make Montgomery feel like she does not belong in her small town of Aunty, California. Things are made worse when her friend Naoki keeps trying to convince Montgomery to give Kenneth a chance. After a classmate of Montgomery’s is sent to the hospital after she yells at him to stop talking — a result of the Eye of Know? — and confronts Kenneth’s dad at a Vigil for the American Family, she learns that Kenneth is nothing like his father, not all Christians are as homophobic as Montgomery assumed, and she allows Kenneth to be the newest member of Mystery Club.

Montgomery is female, presumed white, and presumed straight. She has a younger sister, Tesla, who was conceived using the same donor; Tesla, who is female, is also presumed white, but nothing explicit is said about Tesla’s attraction, and the narrative revolves around Montgomery. Montgomery and Tesla had two moms at the time of their conception and at the time of the book’s action, which is the assumed reason

behind the use of sperm donor conception. Both daughters have positive relationships with their moms. Age of disclosure is not specified, but it is implied that Montgomery and Tesla have known about their conception since a young age.

Because *Saving Montgomery Sole* (Tamaki, 2016) focuses on Montgomery's perspective, the reader does not know much about Tesla other than the fact that she plays soccer and had an interest in practicing Christianity during the course of the novel, which Montgomery strongly objects to. Montgomery does express some curiosity about the donor, but frames it in the context of "a sock left on the floor" that she occasionally "[steps] on" (Tamaki, 2016, p. 47). She also briefly considers the role of genetics when asking her moms if they wanted to choose a donor with specific traits, namely athleticism, which Montgomery feels like she's deficient in. Montgomery also possesses two of the positive developmental assets: creative activities, family boundaries, and family support. Montgomery's friend Thomas is involved in theater, and Montgomery assists him with set design. Her moms also make it clear to Montgomery that they expect her to respond to their messages, but also understand that if she is being distant, it might be because she feels like she cannot go to them, and make it clear that they love and support her while disciplining her.

Montgomery is othered throughout the novel, namely for her family type. Montgomery describes having classmates put signs on her locker that say things like "KICK ME," "MONTYZ MOMZ HAVE AIDZ," and "MONTY IS A LESBIAN" (Tamaki, 2016, p. 51). She also goes to one of Tesla's soccer games where a group of mean girls refer to Montgomery as "the girl with the fatty lesbians" (Tamaki, 2016, p. 104). Montgomery's classmates also tell her that she comes from a "broken home"

(Tamaki, 2016, p. 158), and she is made to feel like an outsider for her family type. Montgomery is also bullied and sexualized by a group of boys after she refuses to go further than kissing with one of them, who then calls her a “dyke” and says that she is desperate to have sex with him (Tamaki, 2016, p. 136).

Her grandfather also others Montgomery and her family, telling Montgomery that the mom who did not carry her is not her mom, and that her donor is her real father and that he is comforted by the fact that he is a Christian. However, Montgomery’s mother defends her family, rejecting the nuclear family and telling Montgomery’s grandfather that they are a family, no matter what he says. Like *The Upside of Unrequited* (Albertalli, 2017), it seems like the fact that Montgomery and Tesla are conceived with a sperm donor is included in the novel to show young readers that it is possible for queer families to have children in ways other than adoption, and to provide another reason why Montgomery feels like such an outsider in her community.

School and Public Library OPAC Results

For the purposes of clear data representation, the library collections of alternative schools are grouped with the grade levels they serve.

School District A

School District A is one of the largest school districts in the state of North Carolina, serving over 158,000 students in grades PK-13 in urban, suburban, and rural locations. The district has 194 schools, which includes 117 elementary schools, 37 middle schools, 31 high schools, six alternative schools, and three schools that teach Kindergarten through eighth grade or sixth grade through ninth grade. One of the high

schools (A3) is also a branch of the local public library system, and therefore does not have its own collection. The largest racial group in the district is white students with 43.7% of the district population, followed by Black students at 22.3%, Hispanic students at 18.9%, Asian students at 10.9%, multiracial students at 3.9%, Native American and Indigenous students at 0.3%, and Pacific Islander students at 0.1%.

There are 25 print copies of *The Upside of Unrequited* in School District A. Twenty-four print copies are at high schools A1, A2, A4, A5, A7, A8, A9, A10, A11, A12, A13, A14, A15, A16, A17, A19, A20, A21, A22, A23, A24, A28, and A31; and one copy at 6-12 school A2. High school A9 owns two print copies, and high school A13 also owns an eBook copy.

There are 7 total print copies of *Fade to Us*. Four print copies are at high schools A4, A10, A12, and A23; and three print copies are at middle schools A1, A2, and A28.

School District A does not own any copies of *The People We Choose* in any format.

There are 10 total print copies of *The Other F Word*, all of which are housed in high schools A1, A2, A4, A9, A10, A12, A19, A22, A23, and A31.

There are six total print copies of *Your Own Worst Enemy*, all of which are in high schools A9, A12, A23, A24, A28, and A31. High school A28 also owns an eBook copy.

There are seven total print copies of *The Secret of a Heart Note*, all of which are in high schools A1, A9, A10, A11, A12, A23, and A31.

There are nine total print copies of *The Devil and the Bluebird*, all of which are at high schools A1, A2, A9, A10, A12, A19, A23, A24, and A31. High schools A2, A12, and A23 also own eBook copies.

There are 20 total print copies of *Sparrow*. Nine copies are at high schools A2, A4, A11, A12, A13, A15, A20, A24, and A25; eight copies are at middle schools A1, A2, A6, A18, A20, A28, and A29; two copies are at alternative school A3; and one copy is at 6-12 school A2. Middle school A6 owns two print copies.

There are 15 total print copies of *Silence is Goldfish*. Ten copies are at high schools A2, A9, A10, A12, A16, A19, A23, A24, A28, and A31; five copies are at middle schools A1, A2, A8, A26, and A28. High school A23 also owns an eBook copy.

There are 18 total print copies of *Saving Montgomery Sole*. Ten copies are at high schools A1, A4, A9, A10, A11, A12, A19, A23, A24, and A31; seven copies are at middle schools A1, A2, A8, A19, A21, A28, and A29; alternative school A3 owns one print copy. High schools A12 and A23 also own eAudio copies.

School District B

School District B is much smaller than School District A, serving approximately 22,000 students in grades PK-13 in rural and suburban locations. The district has 37 schools, which includes 20 elementary schools, six middle schools, seven high schools, one alternative school, and one career and technical education center. The largest racial group in the district is white students, who make up 38.8% of the district population, followed by Hispanic students at 28.6%, Black students at 24.5%, multiracial students at 6.3%, Asian students at 1.5%, Native American and Indigenous students at 0.3%, and Pacific Islander students at 0.1%.

There are eight print copies of *The Upside of Unrequited* in School District B. Four print copies are at high schools B2, B3, B5, and B6; and four print copies are at middle schools B1, B2, B3, and B5.

There are no copies of *Fade to Us* or *The People We Choose* in School District B in any format.

There is one print copy of *The Other F-Word* at high school B7.

There are no copies of *Your Own Worst Enemy*, *The Secret of a Heart Note*, or *Devil and the Bluebird* in any format.

There are two print copies of *Sparrow*. One copy is at high school B6 and one copy is at middle school B6.

There are no copies of *Silence is Goldfish* in School District B in any format.

There is one print copy of *Saving Montgomery Sole* at middle school B1.

School District C

School District C is the smallest of the three districts and around half of the size of School District B, serving approximately 11,400 students in grades PK-13 in a suburban area. This district does not serve the entire county that it is located in, but two municipalities. School District C has 21 schools, which includes 11 elementary schools, four middle schools, three high schools, one alternative school, and one school that serves students residing in the local hospital. The largest racial group in the district is white students, who make up 50.1% of the district population, followed by Hispanic students at 17.8%, Asian students at 13.2%, Black students at 11.4%, multiracial students at 7.4%, Native American and Indigenous students at 0.1%, and Pacific Islander students at less than 0.1%.

There are three print copies of *The Upside of Unrequited* in School District C.

Two copies are at high schools C1 and C2; one copy is at middle school C1.

School District C does not own any copies of *Fade to Us* or *The People We Choose* in any format.

There is one print copy of *The Other F-Word* at middle school C4.

School District C does not own any copies of *Your Own Worst Enemy* or *The Secret of a Heart Note* in any format.

There is one print copy of *Devil and the Bluebird* at high school C2.

There is one print copy of *Sparrow* at high school C4.

There is one print copy of *Silence is Goldfish* at high school C2.

School district C does not own any copies of *Saving Montgomery Sole* in any format.

Public Library System A

Public Library System A serves the same geographic population as School District A; therefore, while School District A is one of the largest public school systems in North Carolina, the population Public Library System A serves is also one of the largest in the state with approximately 1,150,000 residents. The largest racial group Public Library System A serves is white residents at 59.6% of the population, followed by Black residents at 21.0%, Hispanic residents at 10.4%, Asian residents at 7.7%, multiracial residents at 2.6%, Native American and Indigenous residents at 0.8%, and Pacific Islander residents at 0.1%. Public Library System A has 23 branches with a floating collection, meaning that the majority of materials do not have a specific home branch. One of their branches, A13, is currently undergoing a renovation, so any materials that were not distributed directly to a new branch were put into remote storage;

patrons of Public Library System A can receive materials from remote storage if demand exceeds the number of copies currently located at open branches.

Public Library System A owns seven print copies of *The Upside of Unrequited*. At the time of data collection, they were located at branches A1, A5, A9, and A22. Branches A1, A9, and A22 had two print copies each. The system also owns five eBook and two eAudio copies.

Public Library System A does not own any copies of *Fade to Us* or *The People We Choose* in any format.

Public Library System A owns seven print copies of *The Other F-Word*. At the time of data collection, they were located at branches A4, A5, A8, A9, A18, A19, and A23.

Public Library System A owns 17 print copies of *Your Own Worst Enemy*. At the time of data collection, they were located at branches A1, A2, A4, A5, A8, A9, A10, A11, A12, A14, A16, A19, and A22. Branches A2, A4, A19, and A22 had two print copies each.

Public Library System A owns 15 print copies of *The Secret of a Heart Note*. At the time of data collection, they were located at branches A1, A2, A4, A5, A10, A14, A17, A19, and A22. Branches A1, A2, A4, and A19 had two copies each. Two of the 15 copies were being held in remote storage.

Public Library System A owns 15 print copies of *Devil and the Bluebird*. At the time of data collection, they were located at branches A1, A2, A4, A14, A19, A22, and A23. Branches A1, A2, A4, and A19 had two copies each. Four of the 15 copies were being held in remote storage.

Public Library System A does not own any copies of *Sparrow* in any format.

Public Library System A owns 13 print copies of *Silence is Goldfish*. At the time of data collection, they were located at branches A1, A2, A4, A10, A14, A17, A18, A19, A20, and A22. Branches A4, A17, and A20 had two copies each.

Public Library System A owns eight print copies of *Saving Montgomery Sole*. At the time of data collection, they were located at branches A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, and A18. Branch A4 had two copies; one print copy was being held in remote storage.

Public Library System B

Public Library System B serves the same geographic population as School District B of approximately 174,000 residents. The largest racial group Public Library System B serves is white residents, who make up 62.9% of the population. That is followed by Black residents at 20.9%, Hispanic residents at 13.1%, multiracial residents at 13.1%, Asian residents at 1.7%, Native American and Indigenous residents at 1.5%, and Pacific Islander residents at 0.1%. Public Library System B has four branches, but unlike Public Library System A, they do not have a floating collection, which means each copy has a permanent home location. However, library cards from Public Library System B are valid at every branch and members can place requests for titles to be sent to their home branch for pickup.

Public Library System B owns one print copy of *The Upside of Unrequited*, located at branch B1.

Public Library System B does not own any copies of *Fade to Us*, *The People We Choose*, *The Other F-Word*, *Your Own Worst Enemy*, *The Secret of a Heart Note*, or *Devil and the Bluebird* in any format.

Public Library System B owns three print copies of *Sparrow*. They are located at branches B2, B3, and B4.

Public Library System B owns one print copy of *Silence Is Goldfish*, located at branch B2.

Public Library System B does not own any copies of *Saving Montgomery Sole* in any format.

Public Library System C

Public Library System C serves a portion of the geographic population of School District C as a division of one of the municipalities School District C serves. This municipality has approximately 62,000 residents. The largest racial group Public Library System C serves is white residents, who make up 65.9% of the population. This is followed by Asian residents at 13.5%, Black residents at 10.2%, Hispanic residents at 7.2%, multiracial residents at 3.7%, and Native American and Indigenous residents at 0.1%. Since Public Library System C serves a single, small municipality, the system is comprised of a single location that houses the system's entire collection.

Public Library System C owns one print copy of *The Upside of Unrequited*, as well as one copy of the audiobook on CD, and one eBook copy.

Public Library System C owns one print copy of *Fade to Us*.

Public Library System C owns one print copy of *The People We Choose*.

Public Library System C owns one print copy of *The Other F-Word*.

Public Library System C owns one print copy of *Your Own Worst Enemy*.

Public Library System C owns one print copy of *The Secret of a Heart Note*.

Public Library System C owns one eBook copy of *Devil and the Bluebird*.

Public Library System C owns one print copy of *Sparrow*.

Public Library System C owns one print copy of *Silence is Goldfish*.

Public Library System C owns one print copy of *Saving Montgomery Sole*.

Table 1. Total number of copies owned in all formats

| | <i>School District A</i> | <i>School District B</i> | <i>School District C</i> | <i>Public Library System A</i> | <i>Public Library System B</i> | <i>Public Library System C</i> |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>The Upside of Unrequited</i> | 26 | 8 | 3 | 14 | 1 | 3 |
| <i>Fade to Us</i> | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>The People We Choose</i> | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>The Other F-Word</i> | 10 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Your Own Worst Enemy</i> | 7 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>The Secret of a Heart Note</i> | 7 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Devil and the Bluebird</i> | 12 | 0 | 1 | 15 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Sparrow</i> | 20 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| <i>Silence is Goldfish</i> | 16 | 0 | 1 | 13 | 1 | 1 |
| <i>Saving Montgomery Sole</i> | 20 | 1 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 1 |

School and Public Library OPAC Discussion

The OPAC results from my search show that school and public libraries in central North Carolina are making an effort to include books in their collections that showcase a diversity of family types. I was especially impressed by Public Library System C, that even though it was the smallest system in my sample, it was the only system that owned

at least one copy of every book. I was also pleased to see this because Public Library System C is then able to supplement the collection of its corresponding school district (School District C), which only owns a few print copies of five of the 10 total titles. Something else I found interesting about Public Library System C is that they have a program that allows students in School District C to automatically have access to public library materials through their student ID, something Public Libraries A and B do not have, so Public Library System C's collection truly acts as a supplement.

I was disappointed to see that School District B and Public Library System B do not own any of the titles in a format other than print, limiting the access of students and public library patrons. While School Districts A and C and Public Library Systems A and C do not have every title in a format other than print, all four collections had at least one title that was available in eBook or eAudio formats. I was also surprised to see that *Fade to Us* (Day, 2018) was only available in School Districts A and B and Public Library System C, as the author lives in central North Carolina and the book mainly takes place in a fictional town in central North Carolina, but also mentions places like Raleigh, Durham, and Elon. I was not surprised to see that the most-owned title from my sample was Becky Albertalli's *The Upside of Unrequited* (2017), due to the popularity of her other works.

Impact, Limitations, and Conclusions

I intend for this study to be useful for librarians and information professionals, educators and caregivers, as well as donor-conceived youth. This study will help librarians make collection decisions regarding YA novels that feature donor-conceived characters. This study will also potentially contribute toward further research and developing the body of literature on the information needs of donor-conceived adolescents and ways in which librarians and information professionals can help meet these needs. This study will also equip educators and caregivers with the knowledge of what the representation of donor-conceived children looks like, which could assist in providing the children in their care with positive representation of donor-conceived youth. This study will also help the parents and caregivers of donor-conceived youth gain further understanding of the type of information and representation their children need. Finally, the impact of this study that is dearest to my own heart, is that it will help donor-conceived youth identify books in which they can see themselves in the pages.

The biggest limitation of my study design is that I was not able to answer any “why” questions, such as why are donor-conceived characters portrayed in this way, or why do certain libraries not have these books in their collections. Another limitation is researcher error; though I double-checked my coding, there is always a possibility that I missed something while I read. One delimitation is that I have a fairly small sample from

a small time frame, so my sample may not be truly representative of all YA novels that feature sperm donor-conceived characters. However, because of the time frame I had to complete this study, a larger sample size would not have been feasible. Overall, I believe that the procedures I undertook allowed me to successfully, and thoroughly, answer my research questions.

Upon the conclusion of my study, I found it fulfilling to read so many books that featured a character who was conceived in the same way as myself, as it was something I had never experienced as a child. Bishop's (1990) concept of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors is something that has heavily resonated with me, as there is nothing that makes you feel as seen as seeing someone else with the same lived experience as you, in my opinion. While there were depictions of donor conception that I was pleased by as a donor-conceived person myself, such as *Sparrow* (Moon, 2017) and *The Upside of Unrequited* (Albertalli, 2017), there were some depictions that disappointed me, which included *The People We Choose* (Detweiler, 2021) and *Silence is Goldfish* (Ptcher, 2016). The themes included in those two works, specifically the subject of incest, made me feel even more othered, and made me worried about what teen readers of these books would be taught to believe about donor conception. In the future, I would love to see young adult novels with narratives about donor conception or donor-conceived characters that were also written by a donor-conceived author. I was not able to confirm that any of the authors of the works in my sample were donor conceived themselves. While some authors, such as Detweiler, mentioned consulting with parents who used donor conception, using a sperm donor and being donor conceived are such different

experiences, and I wish donor offspring had been consulted during the writing of these works.

References

- Albertalli, B. (2017). *The Upside of Unrequited*. Balzer + Bray.
- Arocho, R., Lozano, E. B., & Halpern, C. T. (2019). Estimates of Donated Sperm Use in the United States: National Survey of Family Growth 1995–2017. *Fertility and Sterility*, 112(4), 718–723. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fertnstert.2019.05.031>
- Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives*, 6(3), ix-xi. <https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf>
- Blyth, E., & Kramer, W. (2010). “My Daddy’s Name Is Donor”: Read with caution! BioNews. https://www.bionews.org.uk/page_92455
- Clark, R. (2018, August 25). The incest trap. *The Spectator*. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-incest-trap>
- Colvin, S. (2017). Literature as More than a Window: Building Readers’ Empathy and Social Capacity through Exposure to Diverse Literature. *VOYA Magazine*, 24–27. <http://teacherlibrarian.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/11G-colvin.pdf>
- Day, J. (2018). *Fade to Us*. Wednesday Books.
- Detweiler, K. (2021). *The People We Choose*. Margaret Ferguson Books.
- The Donor Sibling Registry. (n.d.). The Donor Sibling Registry. <https://donorsiblingregistry.com/>
- Friend, N. (2017). *The Other F-Word*. Square Fish.
- Gardner, W. (2017). *You’re Welcome, Universe*. Ember.

- Golombok, S., MacCallum, F., Goodman, E., & Rutter, M. (2002). Families with Children Conceived by Donor Insemination: A Follow-Up at Age Twelve. *Child Development, 73*(3), 952–968. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00449>
- Hard, A.D. (1909). Artificial Impregnation. *The Medical World, 27*, 163-164. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015026093826&view=1up&seq=177&skin=2021>
- Harper, J. C., Kennett, D., & Reisel, D. (2016). The End of Donor Anonymity: How Genetic Testing Is Likely to Drive Anonymous Gamete Donation out of Business. *Human Reproduction, 31*(6), 1135–1140. <https://doi.org/10.1093/humrep/dew065>
- Hertz, R., Nelson, M. K., & Kramer, W. (2013) Donor Conceived Offspring Conceive of the Donor: The Relevance of Age, Awareness, and Family Form. *Social Science & Medicine, 86*, 52–65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2013.03.001>
- Hughes-Hassell, S. (2013). Multicultural young adult literature as a form of counter-storytelling. *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy, 83*(3), 212- 228. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/670696>
- Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority. (n.d.). *Rules around releasing donor information*. <https://www.hfea.gov.uk/donation/donors/rules-around-releasing-donor-information/>
- Jack, G. (2018). *Your Own Worst Enemy*. HarperTeen.
- Jadva, V., Freeman, T., Kramer, W., & Golombok, S. (2009). The Experiences of

Adolescents and Adults Conceived by Sperm Donation: Comparisons by Age of Disclosure and Family Type. *Human Reproduction*, 24(8), 1909–1919.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/humrep/dep110>

Jadva, V., Freeman, T., Kramer, W., & Golombok, S. (2010). Experiences of Offspring Searching for and Contacting Their Donor Siblings and Donor. *Reproductive BioMedicine Online (Reproductive Healthcare Limited)*, 20(4), 523–532.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rbmo.2010.01.001>

Kramer, A.-M. (2011). Kinship, Affinity and Connectedness: Exploring the Role of Genealogy in Personal Lives. *Sociology*, 45(3), 379-395.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038511399622>

Lee, S. (2016). *The Secret of a Heart* Note. Katherine Tegen Books.

Marquardt, E., Glenn, N. D., & Clark, K. (2010). *My Daddy's Name Is Donor: A New Study of Young Adults Conceived through Sperm Donation*. Institute for American Values.

https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/Ctee/Council/Submissions/GovtAdminA_Surr ogacy%20-%20Greg%20Donnelly%20MLC%20-%20My%20Daddy's%20name%20is%20Donor.pdf

Mason-Black, J. (2016). *Devil and the Bluebird*. Amulet Books.

Moon, S. (2017). *Sparrow*. Arthur A. Levine Books.

Nelson, M.K. (2014). Hollywood Sperm Donors. *Contexts*, 13(1), 58-60.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504214522011>

Nelson, M. K. (2020). The Presentation of Donor Conception in Young Adult

Fiction. *Journal of Family Issues*, 41(1), 33–61.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X19868751>

Olson, H. A. (2002). *The Power to Name: Locating the Limits of Subject Representation in Libraries*. Kluwer Academic.

Parsons, S. C., Fuxa, R., Kander, F., & Hardy, D. (2017). Representations of Adoption in Contemporary Realistic Fiction for Young Adults. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 13(1), 70–92.

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1141502>

Pitcher, A. (2016). *Silence is Goldfish* (U.S. edition). Little, Brown and Company.

Sarles, P. A. (n.d.). *Donor Offspring: Books for Tweens and Teens*. YA Books for Donor Offspring. <https://yabooksfordonoroffspring.blogspot.com/>

Sarles, P., & Mendell, P. (2010). “Where Did I Really Come From?” Assisted Reproductive Technology in Self-Published Children’s Picture Books. *Children and Libraries*, 13, 18-29.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/745590949/citation/C67A63C1ABE64ED3P>
Q/1

Sarles, P. (2012, May 6). *Librarians at a Loss to Help Donor Offspring*. Donor Offspring: Books for Teens and Tweens.

<http://yabooksfordonoroffspring.blogspot.com/2012/05/librarians-at-loss-to-help-donor.html>

Sarles, P. (2012, June 13). *The Library of Congress Finally Acknowledges Donor*

Offspring: (But This Is Only a Beginning). Gay-Themed Picture Books for Children. <http://booksforkidsingayfamilies.blogspot.com/2012/06/library-of-congress-finally.html>

Search Institute. (n.d.). *The Developmental Assets Framework*.

<https://www.search-institute.org/our-research/development-assets/developmental-assets-framework/>

Slutsky, J., Jadv, V., Freeman, T., Persaud, S., Steele, M., Steele, H., Kramer, W., & Golombok, S. (2016) Integrating Donor Conception into Identity Development: Adolescents in Fatherless Families. *Fertility and Sterility*, 106(1), 202–208.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fertnstert.2016.02.033>

Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 23–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800103>

Tamaki, M. (2016). *Saving Montgomery Sole*. Roaring Book Press.

Yoffe, E. (2013, February 19). My Wife is My Sister. *Slate*. <https://slate.com/human-interest/2013/02/dear-prudence-my-wife-and-i-came-from-the-same-sperm-donor.html>

Yuko, E. (2016, January 8). The First Artificial Insemination Was an Ethical Nightmare. *The Atlantic*.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/01/first-artificial-insemination/423198/>

Zadeh, S. (2016). Disclosure of Donor Conception in the Era of Non-

Anonymity: Safeguarding and Promoting the Interests of Donor-Conceived
Individuals? *Human Reproduction*, 31(11), 2416–2420.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/humrep/dew240>

Appendix A. Titles Included for Analysis

| Title | Author | Publication Year | Publisher |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>After the Woods*</i> | Kim Savage | 2017 | Farrar, Straus and Giroux |
| <i>Devil and the Bluebird</i> | Jennifer Mason- Black | 2016 | Amulet Books |
| <i>Fade to Us</i> | Julia Day | 2018 | Wednesday Books |
| <i>The Other F-Word</i> | Natasha Friend | 2017 | Square Fish |
| <i>The People We Choose</i> | Katelyn Detweiler | 2021 | Margaret Ferguson Books |
| <i>Saving Montgomery Sole</i> | Mariko Tamaki | 2016 | Roaring Book Press |
| <i>The Secret of a Heart Note</i> | Stacey Lee | 2016 | Katherine Tegen Books |
| <i>Silence is Goldfish</i> | Annabel Pitcher | 2016 | Little, Brown and Company |
| <i>Sparrow</i> | Sarah Moon | 2017 | Arthur A. Levine Books |
| <i>The Upside of Unrequited</i> | Becky Albertalli | 2017 | Balzer + Bray |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|------|------------|
| <i>You're Welcome, Universe*</i> | Whitney Gardner | 2017 | Ember |
| <i>Your Own Worst Enemy</i> | Gordon Jack | 2018 | HarperTeen |

* *These books were excluded from analysis after I began reading the texts due to the main character being conceived with a known sperm donor as opposed to sperm from a fertility clinic or sperm bank (Savage, 2016, p. 47; Gardner, 2017, p. 176).*

Appendix B. Carnegie Grant Application

Carnegie Grant Request - Approval

silsoffice <silsoffice@unc.edu>

Thu 10/28/2021 10:36 AM

To: Hladik-Brown, Karyn Ann [REDACTED]; silsoffice <silsoffice@unc.edu>

Your recent application for a Carnegie Grant has been approved.

If you plan to use the funds to purchase supplies/products with part of this grant, please be aware that these should be ordered directly by the SILS administrative office. Send an email to silsoffice@unc.edu to make arrangements.

If you plan on paying participants you will need submit the necessary paperwork for cash advance. Details about what is necessary for a cash advance can be found at https://sils.unc.edu/hr/handbook/cash_advances. The Cash Advance form can be found on the page as well. If you have any additional questions about cash advances please contact Michelle Taylor at michele@email.unc.edu.

Name: Karyn Hladik-Brown

Email: [REDACTED]

PID: [REDACTED]

Degree: MSLS

Subject Compensation: No

Description of Research: This study aims to examine how donor-conceived youth are portrayed in novels marketed toward adolescents. It will attempt to categorize how the developmental needs of donor-conceived youth are uniquely met, as well as the developmental needs of all teens, in these books.

Proposed Budget: I will be purchasing 12 print books to hand code for my content analysis. Each book ranges in price from \$5.00 to \$20.00, for a total of approximately \$165.00, including shipping and taxes. A list of the books, as well as their current list price (as of 10/26/21) on Amazon are listed below. After the Woods by Kim Savage -- \$8.18 Devil and the Bluebird by Jennifer Mason-Black -- \$9.09 Fade to Us by Julia Day -- \$9.99 The Other F-Word by Natasha Friend -- \$7.99 The People We Choose by Katelyn Detweiler -- \$16.99 Saving Montgomery Sole by Mariko Tamaki -- \$5.88 The Secret of a Heart Note by Stacey Lee -- \$17.99 Silence is Goldfish by Annabel Pitcher -- \$8.90 Sparrow by Sarah Moon -- \$9.59 The Upside of Unrequited by Becky Albertalli -- \$10.50 You're Welcome, Universe by Whitney Gardner -- \$8.99 Your Own Worst Enemy by Gordon Jack -- \$12.99

Advisor Details

Name: Casey Rawson

Email: crawson@ad.unc.edu

Comments:

SILS Administration

Name: Michelle Taylor

Email: michele@email.unc.edu

Comments: Approved with the understanding that (1) all materials will be purchased directly by SILS and (2) all materials must be returned to SILS once the project is completed. Please contact Susan Sylvester to make purchase(s). If you have any questions, please contact Michelle Taylor, michele@email.unc.edu

Appendix C. Coding Table

This coding table is adapted from Nelson's 2020 article, "The Presentation of Donor Conception in Young Adult Fiction."

| Category | Subcategory | Definition |
|--|---|--|
| Biographical information about donor-conceived character | Gender identity of donor-conceived character | The gender identity of the donor-conceived character if it is explicitly stated, or, since gender and pronouns are not explicitly linked, the donor-conceived character's pronouns. |
| | Race of donor-conceived character and their parent(s) | The race of the donor-conceived character and their parent(s) if it is explicitly stated. Descriptions of phenotypic characteristics can be included, but race will not be inferred from these descriptions. |
| | Sexual orientation of donor-conceived character | The sexual orientation of the donor-conceived character, whether it is explicitly stated, or if the character expresses attraction |

| | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| | | to characters of a certain gender identity. |
| | Family type at time of conception | Whether the donor-conceived character was conceived in a family consisting of a single mother, two mothers, a mother and a father, etc. Also includes siblings (include donor-conceived status if stated). |
| | Family type at time of book's action | Whether the donor-conceived character's family consists of a single mother, two mothers, a mother and a father, etc. at the time of the book's action. Also includes siblings (include donor-conceived status if stated). |
| | Reason for donor conception | The stated reason why a character was donor-conceived. Can also be inferred if the donor-conceived character's family type is a single mother or two mothers. |
| | Approximate age of disclosure | The approximate age of the donor-conceived character when they are |

| | | |
|----------------------|--|---|
| | | told that they were donor conceived. |
| | Relationship with parent(s) at time of disclosure | How the disclosure of being donor conceived affects the relationship between the donor-conceived character and their parent(s). |
| | Relationship with parent(s) at time of book's action | If the relationship between the donor-conceived character and their parent(s) — if it has changed or stayed the same since the time of disclosure. |
| Identity development | Developmental Assets Framework | The ways in which the donor-conceived character's experiences support and promote positive youth development. |
| | Searching for half-siblings | If the donor-conceived character mentions having an interest in or undertakes the process of searching for their half-siblings. This counts using DNA testing services or websites like the Known Donor Registry; this does not count if the half-sibling is the |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| | | one reaching out to the donor-conceived character or accidental meetings. |
| | Searching for donor | If the donor-conceived character mentions having an interest in or undertakes the process of searching for their sperm donor. This counts using DNA testing services or websites like the Known Donor Registry; this does not count if the donor is the one reaching out to the donor-conceived character or accidental meetings. |
| Perpetuating dominant narratives | Othering | If a character is teased for being donor-conceived, and/or they are “‘marked’ by a temporary (e.g., being friendless or overweight) or permanent (e.g., having a facial deformity) difference” (Nelson, 2020). This also includes accidental incest between donor |

| | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| | | siblings who are not aware that they are related. |
| | The nuclear family | If it is implied that a “real family” is one that is composed of “two parents and the child or children who live with them” (Nelson, 2014, p. 59). Fatherhood is portrayed as being redemptive for the donor, the only “true” familial connection is a genetic one, and reproduction requires sex and sexual attraction between parents (Nelson, 2014, pp. 59-60). |
| Counter narratives | Rejection of the nuclear family | Being genetically related does not automatically create an intimate bond, and genetic connections are not necessary to be considered family (Nelson, 2014, pp. 59-60). |
| | Normalization of donor conception | Being donor-conceived does not dictate the plot of the book; it just happens to be the way the character was conceived (Nelson, 2020, pp. 51-52). |

