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Research Protocol for Forging New Families in Contemporary Contexts: The Online Sperm Donation Project

Rhys Turner-Moore[1], Lauren A. Smith[1], Francesca Taylor-Phillips[1], Georgina Forshall[1], Aleksandra Krotoski[2], David Carless[3], Lucy Frith[4], Tanya Palmer[5], Allan Pacey[6], and Georgina L. Jones[1]

Abstract

People looking for sperm ('recipients') and people providing sperm ('donors') are increasingly connecting via informal online platforms, such as 'connection websites' and social networking sites. Typically, research has not focused on this route to conception. Little is known about how people involved in online sperm donation initiate, negotiate, sustain or end their relationships with each other, how power or influence operates within this context, or what the impacts of these influences might be. Previous research has suggested that abuses of power and morally challenging behaviour can occur. The first aim of this project is to explore the interpersonal relationships, power relations and potential abuses of power across the social ecology of online sperm donation. The second aim is to harness this new knowledge to explore the imagined ideal futures of those involved in online sperm donation and to work with them to start to realize these ideal futures. The project comprises three phases: (1) a two-year qualitative longitudinal study following the lives of prospective recipients, donors, and their partners via life story interviews, visual socio-ecological power narratives, and interaction logs; (2) a one-year digital ethnography of five online sperm donation sites; (3) action research workshops with recipients and their partners, donors and their partners, and platform owners, respectively. The multi-modal data will be analysed using narrative, discourse, and thematic analysis. The project will be carried out by a multi-disciplinary team, comprising academics and researchers with psychosocial, bioethical, medical, and legal expertise, and Public Involvement in Research members with lived experience of online sperm donation. The project will produce unique and holistic knowledge of online sperm donation and harness this knowledge to produce impacts across the social ecology that are identified by, and important to, those involved in online sperm donation.

Keywords

assisted conception, sperm donation, recipient, donor, power, abuse, qualitative longitudinal, narrative analysis, digital ethnography, action research

[1]School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK
[2]Department of Research, Pillowfort Productions, New York, USA
[3]School of Health and Life Sciences, University of the West of Scotland, Paisley, UK
[4]Centre for Social Ethics and Policy, Department of Law, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK
[5]School of Law, Politics and Sociology, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK
[6]School of Medical Sciences, Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

Corresponding Author:
Rhys Turner-Moore, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Leeds Beckett University, City Campus, Leeds, West Yorkshire LS1 3HE, UK.
Email: r.turner-moore@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

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Introduction

Sperm donation plays a critical role in starting and building a family. It is the only way that many people can conceive, including single people and couples assigned female at birth, and mixed-sex couples where a person assigned male at birth experiences infertility. However, there are lots of barriers to people accessing sperm donation via a clinic, either funded via the state National Health Service (NHS) or paid for privately (Taylor et al., 2022, 2023).

Increasingly, recipients and donors are connecting informally, outside of licensed fertility clinics, via online connection sites. Members of our team (Forshall, Taylor-Phillips, Turner-Moore and Jones) have undertaken a series of contextual and exploratory studies into this route to conception (Forshall, 2022; Taylor-Phillips, 2024). The research included an environmental scan to systematically map all global English-speaking websites and Facebook groups that facilitate contact between potential donors and recipients (Taylor-Phillips et al., 2025), a systematic review of peer-reviewed and grey research on online sperm donation (Taylor-Phillips et al., 2025), and two qualitative studies: a longitudinal study with recipients (Taylor-Phillips, 2024) and a retrospective study with recipients and donors (Forshall et al., 2024).

The environmental scan demonstrated that online sperm donation is a burgeoning market with over 350,000 recipients and donors on over 60 English-speaking sites in 2020. This likely dwarfs the clinical route to sperm donation. For example, in the UK, whilst it is unknown how many recipients are waiting for donor insemination in regulated clinics, only 5,384 donor insemination cycles took place in UK clinics in 2020 (figures do not separate IUI/IVF; Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority [HFEA], 2023). For the finalised environmental scan, see Taylor-Phillips et al. (2025).

At the point of designing the present project, 13 studies had been identified for inclusion in the systematic review, revealing four key gaps in the existing research into online sperm donation. First, a limited focus: there were only two studies on both recipients and donors, only one study with recipients' or donors' partners (lesbian recipient couples; Nordqvist, 2011), only two studies that explored the online websites (McQuoid, 2015; Riggs & Russell, 2011), and there was only one longitudinal study (McQuoid, 2015), leading to calls for prospective research (Javda et al., 2015; Lavoie et al., 2018; Whyte et al., 2017). Second, two-thirds of studies had used predominantly or exclusively quantitative surveys – producing useful data, but in-depth accounts of online sperm donation were lacking. Third, the emphasis was on recipient and donor characteristics, preferences and motivations (e.g., Freeman et al., 2016; Javda et al., 2018); we knew virtually nothing about how people in online sperm donation initiated, negotiated, sustained, or ended their relationships with each other. Lastly, one non-peer-reviewed study by McQuoid (2015) had explored who is positioned as powerful or influential within this context and highlighted some of the impacts and abuses of power that might be occurring. For the finalised systematic review, see Taylor-Phillips et al. (2025).

Our two qualitative studies aimed to explore online sperm donation further and to inform the design of the larger, present project. These studies included 12-month longitudinal research into recipients' experiences of online sperm donation, entailing narrative interviews with three individuals and four couples, and - given the findings from McQuoid (2015) above – retrospective research on 'morally challenging behaviour' in online sperm donation, involving narrative interviews with five recipients and three prolific donors. The longitudinal study highlighted the highs and lows of online sperm donation and how interpersonal relationships between recipients and donors could change over time (Taylor-Phillips, 2024). It was evident that online sperm donation provided recipients with new opportunities for connection and family-making but via a socially stigmatised route that was beset with mistrust and concerns about 'staying safe' (Taylor-Phillips, 2024). The second qualitative study, focusing on 'morally challenging behaviour', highlighted personal conflict voiced by recipients and donors about what they had experienced or witnessed in online sperm donation, such as issues with donor anonymity (donors using fake online profiles or aliases), the sexual motivations or (mis)conduct of some donors, and the perceived risks associated with this route to conception (Forshall et al., 2024). Across both studies, it was clear that online sperm donation fulfilled an important purpose and offered an alternative route to conception and family-making, and that further research was needed to better understand the experiences of those involved in it, what their needs were, and how these needs could be best met or supported within this space.

Building on our initial work, this paper describes a protocol for a four-year research project, the Online Sperm Donation Project (OSDP), funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the UK (Grant reference: ES/W001381/1). The multi-disciplinary team, led by Turner-Moore, comprises academics and researchers who provide psychosocial (Carless, Forshall, Jones, Krotoski, Smith, Taylor-Phillips, Turner-Moore), bioethics (Frith), medical (Pacey), and legal (Palmer) perspectives, and Public Involvement in Research (PIR) members who bring perspectives on online sperm donation based on their lived experience of being a recipient, donor, and/or site moderator/owner in online sperm donation.

Methods

Theoretical Background and Aims and Objectives of the OSDP

Recognising that sperm donation is grounded in an interplay between individuals and their context, we will employ a social-ecological approach (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Dahlberg & Krug, 2002) to broaden the focus of research into

online sperm donation. The social ecology comprises five levels - the individual, their close relationships, their community, wider society, and time - represented as concentric circles to denote the interplay between the levels (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Dahlberg & Krug, 2002). Figure 1 illustrates the social ecology applied to online sperm donation.

The first aim of the OSDP is to explore the interpersonal relationships, power relations and potential abuses of power across the social ecology of online sperm donation. This aim will be met via five objectives, reflecting the five levels of the social ecology. Further, to address the limitations of prior research, the project will be prospective and qualitative. Thus, the five objectives are to:

(1) gather multi-modal, in-depth qualitative evidence on recipient and donor experiences of interpersonal relationships, power and abuses of power (individual level of the social ecology);
(2) collect concurrent, in-depth qualitative data to demonstrate how their partner and the donor/recipient they conceive with narrate *their* experiences of these (relationship level);
(3) undertake a multi-sited digital ethnography of online sperm donation platforms to evidence how site users forge relationships and subcultural norms (e.g., collective beliefs about what is and is not acceptable behaviour), and the role of platform owners in creating and governing these (community level);
(4) analyse the wider social narratives participants draw upon to understand their experiences (societal level);
(5) track how their experiences unfold over time by collecting data longitudinally (temporal level).

The second aim of the OSDP is to harness this new knowledge to explore the imagined ideal futures of those involved in online sperm donation and work with them to facilitate any personal, professional or social changes they identify. This second aim will be met via two objectives, to:

(6) produce a set of comics and visual social-ecological power drawings that distil the findings from Objectives 1-5;
(7) undertake workshops with those involved in online sperm donation, reflecting on the comics and power

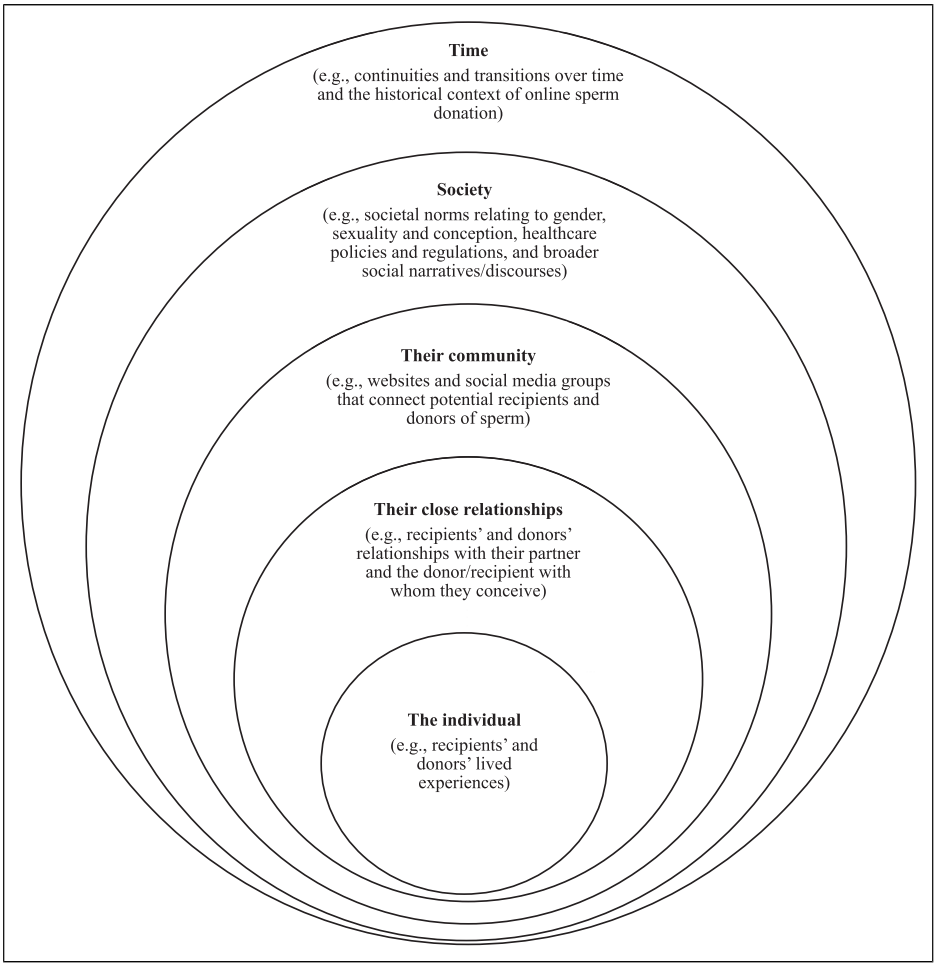


Figure 1. The Social Ecology of Online Sperm Donation.

drawings, to imagine ideal futures for online sperm donation and to co-design and co-implement actions to achieve change.

Meeting the first aim will provide a unique and holistic account of online sperm donation and contribute to wider knowledge around assisted conception and parenthood, digital lives and spaces, power dynamics and abuses of power. Meeting the second aim will enable us to harness the knowledge from the research to achieve broader impact. We will work collaboratively with those involved in online sperm donation to reflect on the research findings and to try to realise any changes across the social ecology of online sperm donation that they want or need.

Project Phases

The project comprises three phases: longitudinal research on the individual and relationship level of the social ecology; a digital ethnography of the community level of the social ecology; and action research to achieve impact across the whole social ecology. Our PIR members will assist throughout all phases, contributing to refining research methods, navigating ethical and recruitment issues, interpreting findings, co-facilitating/participating in Phase 3, shaping dissemination strategies, co-producing some non-academic outputs, and contributing to a journal article for Phase 3. All phases have received ethical approval (see *Ethics* section) and all research materials will be made available at the end of the project via ReShare (https://reshare.ukdataservice.ac.uk/). Below, we detail each phase in turn.

Phase 1

Sampling. At the individual level of the social ecology, the target populations are: (a) recipients within 3 months of starting their search for a sperm donor online and (b) donors currently searching online for a recipient to donate to (UK-residents, aged 18+; see Figure 2). Recruiting participants from their initial search for a donor or recipient will enable us to follow their sperm donation journeys from the start. The UK focus enables some face-to-face research (where desired by the participant) and explication of UK-relevant implications of the findings. Purposive sampling is necessary as online sperm donation is a stigmatised practice (Taylor-Phillips et al., 2025) involving people who are understandably cautious about being identified or contacted. We will use our environmental scan of English-speaking online sperm donation platforms globally to select a representative sample of relevant sites (initially) or all relevant sites (if necessary) through which to recruit UK-residents. To allow for in-depth data collection over time, and further sampling at these participants' relationship level, we will recruit a sample of 12 recipients and a separate sample of 12 donors at the individual level of the social ecology. We will monitor recruitment to facilitate diversity in terms of identity (e.g., sexuality, ethnicity) and intended donation arrangements (e.g., donation-only, co-parenting). One-third of participants will be single, and two-thirds will be partnered, to ensure diversity whilst still securing a sufficient sample size for recruitment at the relationship level.

At the relationship level, the target populations are the partner of the participants at the individual level ($N = 16$) and the person with whom the participant at the individual level conceives (i.e., their donor or recipient; $N = 24$), if they conceive during the study (see Figure 2).

Data Collection. Phase 1 comprises a qualitative longitudinal study, with the prospective design addressing the temporal level of the social ecology. Data collection will take place over 2 years; this is based on an estimation of 9+ months for participants at the individual level to find a person to conceive with, a nine-month pregnancy, and up to 6 months postpartum. Narrative interviews will take place at the individual level at the start, mid-point and end of the 2 years; for their partners, at the start and end of the 2 years (if preferred, couples will be interviewed together); and for the person with whom they conceive, shortly after conception and at the end of the 2 years.

The first interview will be in the participant's home or a local alternative, if possible, to build rapport and an understanding of their lives; further interviews will be online as participants may be dispersed across the UK. The interview will entail two parts. First, we will employ a life story approach (Crossley, 2000): the participant will lead the researcher through their life up to that point (first interview) or since the previous interview (subsequent interviews), followed by researcher probes to deeply understand these experiences and their impacts, particularly regarding relationships, power and any abuse. In our pilot research on online sperm donation, participants were often keen to 'tell their story', providing rich data about their lives, including challenging or abusive experiences (Forshall et al., 2024; Taylor-Phillips, 2024). Next, we will explore power across the social ecology from the participant's perspective. Power is an abstract concept (Kitzinger, 1997), which we will make tangible by asking the participant about who or what "influences" their sperm donation journey and using visual methods to map and explore these influences. Created for the purposes of the project, *visual socio-ecological power narratives* (VSPNs) will entail a large piece of paper depicting five concentric circles, representing the five levels of the social ecology. The VSPN will be similar to Figure 1, however, each circle will be labelled as follows: *You*, *Your close relationships*, *Your wider relationships and local and online communities*, *Society*, and *Time/History;* and the VSPN will not include the examples provided in Figure 1. Participants will be asked to annotate the paper with who or what influences their sperm donation journey and narrate how each of these 'actors' influence their experiences, if/how the participant themselves influences these actors, and which actor(s) has had the most

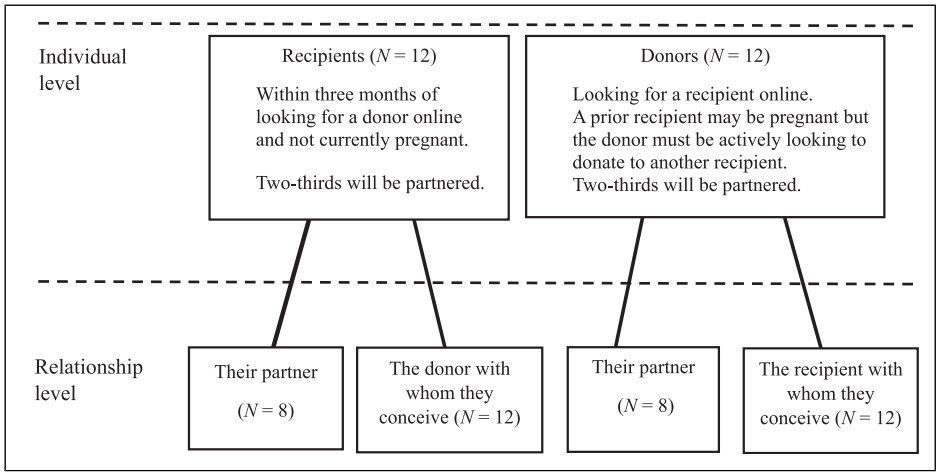


Figure 2. Sampling for Phase 1.

powerful influence on their sperm donation journey to date and how this is experienced. Our design of the VSPN is adapted from qualitative network maps and sociograms (e.g., Altissimo, 2016; Ryan & D'Angelo, 2018). Participants will create the VSPN in their first interview, annotating any changes in the next interview(s), to explore shifts and continuities over time.

Interview data at the individual level will be supplemented with interaction logs. Participants will be asked to keep a live anonymised log, in their own words, of their interactions with potential donors/recipients until conception. For example, the date of the interaction, the mode of interaction (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, text message, in-person), and a summary of what happened. This will provide unique insights into the search for a donor/recipient, and how trust and emotional connections are developed, and possibly in some instances, how an individual might employ this trust and connection to their advantage.

Data Analysis. We will conduct three forms of narrative analysis. First, an integrated within-case analysis for each participant (interview transcripts, VSPN, interaction log, if applicable) to explore their individual stories of interpersonal relationships, power and any abuses of power over time. Second, a cross-case structural analysis (Reissman, 2008) to explore the types of underlying narratives, illuminating the wider social narratives participants draw upon at the societal level (Frank, 2010; Murray, 2000). Third, a dialogical, relational storytelling approach (Frank, 2010) to identify personal/collective stories among: (i) recipients, their partners and the donors with whom they conceive, and (ii) donors, their partners and the recipients with whom they conceive.

Phase 2

Sampling. The target population for Phase 2 is English-speaking websites and social media groups that aim to connect potential recipients and donors of sperm. They will be English-speaking, rather than UK-specific, as virtual spaces often lack clear geographical bounds but cohere around language. Our environmental scan will provide the sampling frame (Taylor-Phillips et al., 2025) and we will select a representative sample of five sites based on type (website/social media), size, administrator characteristics, and membership.

Data Collection. Phase 2 comprises a digital ethnography with three primary forms of data collection. Firstly, we will analyse the text and policies the platform owners supply on their sites to explicate what information they provide to site users, what they consider (im)permissible and how they frame this material. This will include any publicly available information on the site, and, with permission from the platform owners, any further information for site users made available once an individual joins the site. Secondly, we will conduct a narrative interview with each platform owner - similar to the narrative interviews in Phase 1. Specifically, we will invite them to share their life story, focusing on their lives leading up to creating the site, through to realising and governing the site, and then, creating a VSPN to explore who or what influences the creation and management of their site. Interviews will be in-person or online. Thirdly, we will join the five online sites for 1 year, with permission from the platform owners, and via purposefully created profiles. The researcher profile will contain an image of the researcher and their university webpage link, as well as an overview of the research project and their reason for being on the site. The digital ethnography will entail reading profiles and ongoing posts, following online interactions, and participation in the sites, including conversations with site users (Hine, 2008) - intensively for 2 months and then around 1.5 hours a week per site (1 day a week total) for the rest of the year. Immersion in the virtual culture will illuminate how site users forge relationships and subcultural norms, and how power and influence operate and are reinforced, and possibly, how power and influence are abused or resisted in these spaces. The one-year timeframe

addresses the temporal level of the social ecology and recognises these sites are temporally complex, with user engagement oscillating and fragmenting over time (Nicholson & Caroll, 2013).

Data Analysis. We will undertake a discourse analysis of the site text and polices to consider what material platform owners provide, how they frame it, the social and historical context and power implications of this framing, and the subject positions on offer to site users (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). The analysis of the narrative interviews will be similar to Phase 1; within-case and cross-case narrative analysis to understand platform owners' experiences and the social narratives they draw on. We will analyse the ethnographic fieldnotes from observing and participating in the sites to identify themes relating to relationships, norms, power and any abuse over time at the community level, triangulating these via the textual and interview data (Coleman, 2010; Hine, 2000).

Phase 3

Sampling. The target populations for Phase 3 are volunteers from the participants who took part at the individual and relationship level of Phase 1 or community level of Phase 2, and volunteers from the PIR members. This will enable three action research cycles, one each with: recipients and their partners ($N \approx 15$); donors and their partners ($N \approx 15$); and platform owners ($N \approx 8$). It is hoped that these action research cycles will provide participants with capacity-building opportunities (enabling personal and professional impact) and enable the co-design and co-implementation of strategies for action (enabling social impact).

Action Research Cycles. Phase 3 comprises action research, with each action research cycle involving four participatory workshops that will be facilitated by members of the research team, and hopefully, co-facilitated by one or two PIR members in that group. The action research will incorporate problem identification, planning, action, and evaluation (Waterman et al., 2001). The process of an action research cycle is described in Figure 3.

Before the participatory workshops, the research team will work with PIR members and a graphic artist to distil themes from Phase 1 and 2 into eight comics conveying four recipients' and four donors' sperm donation journeys, from the initial search for a donor/recipient to conception, pregnancy, birth and beyond, with stories that do and do not include partnered recipients/donors, end in a baby, entail abuses of power or individual/collective resistance to power. We will also work with PIR members and a graphic artist to distil the VSPNs from Phases 1 and 2 into four composite VSPNs from the perspective of recipients, donors, partners, and platform owners, respectively.

In Workshop 1, participants will view the visual summaries of the Phase 1 and 2 findings as outlined above. Reflecting on these, participants will be invited to imagine their 'ideal online sperm donation futures' (e.g., ideal relationships, expectations, rights, protections, social norms); this visioning exercise will be live scribed by an artist (Hall et al., 2017). Informed by the composite VSPNs, we will then identify, together, where and how power is operating across the social ecology of online sperm donation, and who or what could be mobilised for change (Hunjan & Pettit, 2011), to inform an 'agenda for change', specifying what needs to change, where, with whom, what to prioritise and what is feasible within the timescales and resources of the project (Fox, 2006). In Workshop 2, we will collectively select and plan one or two actions from this agenda for change and identify how to assess the impact of those actions. In Workshops 3 and 4, we will co-implement these actions and document their impact. It is difficult to anticipate what the actions are likely to be at this stage because they will be decided by and with the research participants and PIR members who take part in Phase 3. Possibly, we imagine the co-designed actions and co-produced outputs might include: an "insiders' guide to online sperm donation" podcast for potential recipients and donors who are thinking about or starting online sperm donation; pitching online sperm donation as a story thread in a TV soap to raise awareness of and destigmatise this route to conception; an exhibition of the comics and a subsequent panel discussion with relevant support services; developing a suggested Code of Practice for sperm donation sites that platform owners might wish to adopt or adapt, with an online launch and Q&A; or submitting recipients' and donors' questions to Prime Minister's Questions, for example, about the restrictive policies relating to state-funded donor insemination in clinics. However, these are hypothetical examples. Ultimately, the actions cannot be decided upon until the findings from Phases 1 and 2 are known and these findings have been explored and discussed with people involved in online sperm donation as part of Phase 3. Whilst social impact is important, successful action research is determined by what the participants and researchers learn from the experience of creating change (Meyer, 2000). Evaluation of learning will be embedded throughout this phase via journaling/reflexive diaries and within-workshop exercises.

Workshop 1 for the recipient and donor action cycles will be in-person, if possible, to facilitate mutual connections, with the remaining workshops in-person or online, as required. All workshops for the platform owner action cycle will be online as some platform owners will live outside the UK. The three action cycles will run concurrently, but separately, recognising the possibly different interests and power relations in each group; however, cross-cycle working will be facilitated, where desired or useful.

Data Analysis. Themes will be derived from the researchers' fieldnotes, workshop 'artefacts'/exercises and journaling. We will produce a case study of the action research, including the learning and impacts across the social ecology, and participants from Phase 3 will be invited to co-write the case study.

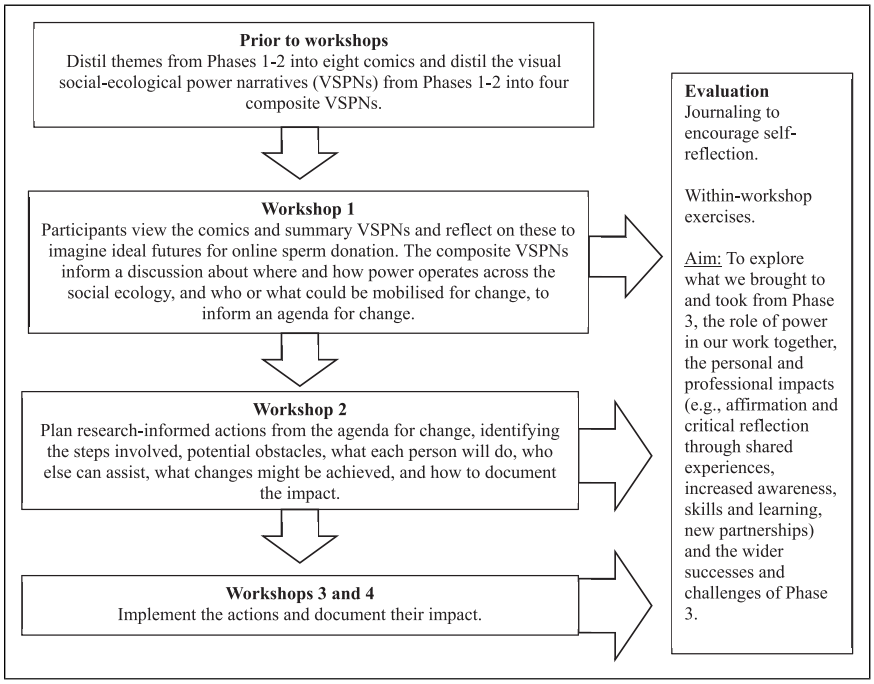


Figure 3. Action Research Cycle Process.

Research Ethics

The research has been approved by the Psychology Research Ethics Co-ordinator at Leeds Beckett University (Reference: 113920). The research will adhere to UKRIO (2020) and British Psychological Society (BPS, 2014, 2017, 2021) ethical standards. Ethical issues will also be discussed with PIR members. The three main ethical issues associated with the research are: the sensitivity of the topic; consent for accessing and joining the online sites; and anonymity and confidentiality of the data. Each of these issues are discussed below.

First, the research team will be involved in a significant, emotional stage in the participants' lives, which may involve, for example, challenges in trying to conceive or with interpersonal interactions online. Some participants may become upset or distressed when recounting personal experiences during interviews. The researchers have experience in responding to disclosures and distress and will respond sensitively, empathetically and flexibly to participants' experiences, and be aware of and signpost to support services, where needed. Details of a wide range of free support services will be provided on the project website (https://www.theosdproject.com/) and linked to in the Participant Information Sheet.

Second, the research team will undertake a digital ethnography of online sperm donation platforms. The British Psychological Society (BPS, 2021) stipulate that consent should be obtained where it cannot be reasonably argued that the online data is in the public domain. *Public domain* would be an open website, forum, social media page or application that does not require users to login with a username and password to access the content on the site. Accordingly, we will request a platform owner's permission to join, observe and participate in any online sperm donation platform that is not in the public domain - that is, that requires a user to login with a username and password ('lock-and-key sites'; BPS, 2017) - and platform owners will be asked to provide their consent via an online form. Site users - irrespective of whether the site is lock-and-key or not - will be informed of the presence of the researcher on the site, either via the platform owner (e.g., an email to site users) and/or via the researcher (e.g., in their site profile, in public and private posts). If the researcher approaches site users privately (e.g., via instant or personal messaging), they will obtain the site user's consent to record and download an anonymised copy of any private messages.

Finally, all participants will have their right to privacy and anonymity upheld. To maintain anonymity, and in turn, the confidentiality of data, participants will be encouraged to refrain from sharing personally identifying information about themselves or others during their interviews. Further, if provided, any identifiable information (e.g., people's names, names of online platforms, locations) will be removed and pseudonymised at the point of data recording or during transcription. All information provided by a participant will be kept strictly confidential, unless they indicate that they or someone else is at risk of serious harm, or they disclose details of previous serious harm to others that includes identifiable and specific information. This will be clearly explained to participants in the Participant Information Sheet.

The project's funding body, the ESRC, requires the data from the project to be archived with the UK Data Service for potential further research by other researchers. However, we will not archive the website text/imagery that platform owners supply on their sites as this will identify the site. Further, for Phase 1 and 2, the transcripts, VSPNs, and interaction logs will be archived only with participant consent, and all archived Phase 1 and 2 data will be carefully and thoroughly anonymised, with sections redacted, where required, to prevent identification. For Phase 3, the co-produced documents, planning/reflective artefacts, and products will be archived; however, individual journals will not be archived. Workshop participants will decide whether to use a pseudonym or their own name for the co-produced documents, artefacts and products in Phase 3, and the researchers' fieldnotes will be consistent with this. If the workshop participants have taken part in Phase 1 or 2, and they would like to use their own name for Phase 3, a pseudonym will still be used for their Phase 1 or 2 data; if they choose to use a pseudonym in Phase 3, this pseudonym will be different from the one used in their Phase 1 or 2 data, to prevent identification.

The study documentation and data from the project will be held securely and in line with UK and EU data security regulations (including GDPR). The archived data with the UK Data Service will be restricted-access, with researchers needing to contact the project lead to obtain access for further academic research.

Project Rigor

Throughout the project, the research team will meet monthly for regular communication, effective monitoring and planning, reviewing impact and arising opportunities, and team reflexivity (Barry et al., 1999). Co-mentoring and co-learning will be cultivated via research team and PIR group meetings and joint team development days (Muhammad et al., 2015).

To facilitate comprehensive understanding of online sperm donation, we will collect data from all key groups of people or 'actors' within online sperm donation, including recipients, recipients' partners, donors, donors' partners, the people recipients and donors conceive with, site owners and moderators, and site users. This comprehensive understanding will be further advanced by collecting multimodal data over the course of the project (Patton, 1999). This includes spoken, visual, written, naturalistic and observational data from interviews, VSPNs, interaction logs, website text, and ethnographic fieldnotes. We will develop interview schedules and VSPNs with questions and interviewer prompts, and refine and pilot research materials with research team and PIR members. We will write fieldnotes after each interview, describing the interview setting and researcher reflections, to give context to the interviews.

Transcribers will check all interview transcripts against the audio-recordings to ensure accuracy and completeness of transcription. We will redact identifying information (e.g., names, places, sites) in the transcripts and replace the information with pseudonyms. We will use the same pseudonyms for a given name, place or site across a participant's transcripts to facilitate a detailed understanding of their narratives over time whilst maintaining anonymity. Prior to data archiving, more extended sections of the transcripts may be redacted to prevent participant identification.

We will discuss our findings from the interviews in Phases 1 and 2 with participants to ensure that the voices of those with lived experience is understood and represented. The multidisciplinary research team members will all be involved in the analysis of the Phase 1 and 2 data, and PIR members will help to interpret findings. Barker and Pistrang (2005) and Guion (2002) suggest this is advantageous over using a single analyst, as multiple perspectives on the data are considered. The distilling of the Phase 1 and 2 data into comics and summary VSPNs will also entail multiple perspectives, drawing on the research team, PIR members and a graphic artist.

In writing up the research, we will aim to provide a thick description of the research findings, situate the findings within individual, relational, community, societal, and temporal contexts, as per the social-ecological model, and draw out the implications of the findings for theory, policy and practice. Phase 3 workshop participants' thoughts and reflections on the comics and summary VSPNs will be integrated into the write-up of the project findings, where possible. Lastly, and consistent with the principles of action research, Phase 3 workshop participants will be invited to co-write the Phase 3 case study with the research team.

ORCID iDs

Rhys Turner-Moore https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0045-9095
Georgina Forshall https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7092-3490
Lucy Frith https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8506-0699

Ethical Statement

Ethical Approval

The research was approved by the Psychology Research Ethics Co-ordinator at Leeds Beckett University (Reference: 113920).

Informed Consent

Written informed consent will be required from participants.

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