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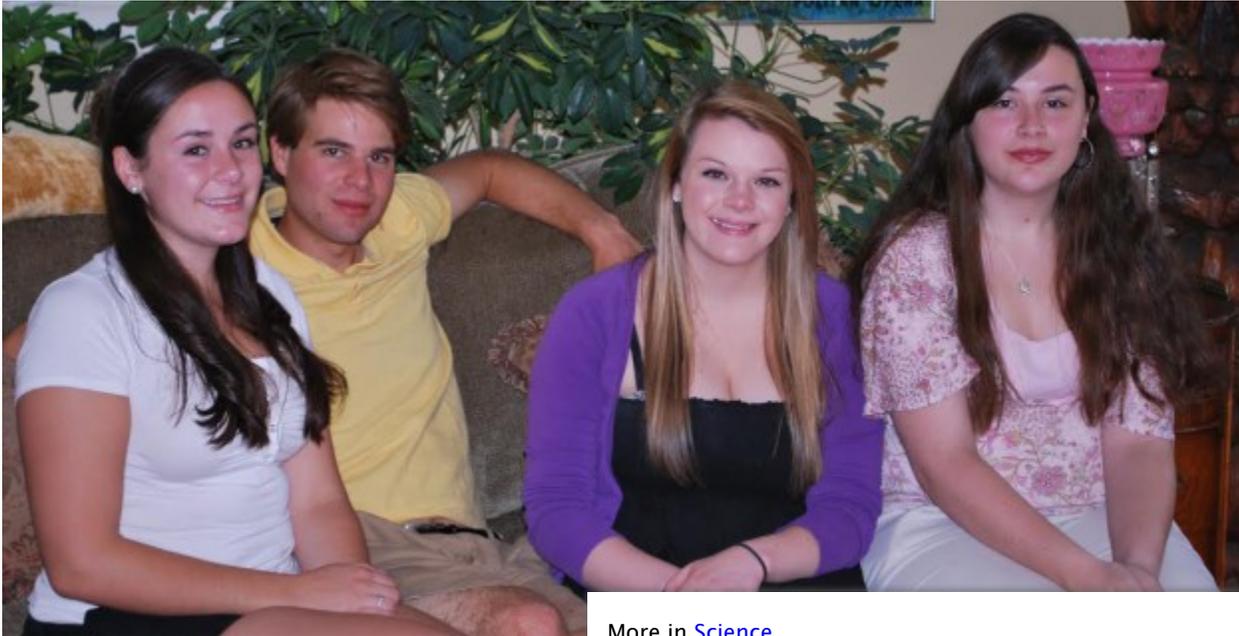
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'Generation Cryo': How A New Generation Is Redefining Family

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By [Marisa Peñaloza](#)



Ryan Kramer (second from left) found his hal through a website she created. (Courtesy Wen

Thousands of children are conceived using sp entice MTV to air "Generation Cryo." The sh "Generation Cryo" will symbolize how a new generation is redefining family.

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The show follows a teenager as she sets out to find her “donor dad,” and along the way, she discovers she has more than a dozen half-siblings.

Breeanna Speicher is the lead character in the docuseries. She’s 17, cool-looking and poised. Her big brown eyes look straight into a video camera, “For so long it hasn’t even felt like reality that this mystery man brought me into the world. I just want to know who you are!” she says.

She’s not alone. There is no accurate record keeping in the U.S. — no one knows precisely the size of this population. It’s certainly in the thousands.

Kathleen LaBounty lives in Houston. She was conceived by an anonymous sperm donor. She found out she was donor-conceived when she was 8 years old. She says she knew she wanted to watch the show, but didn’t know what to expect. Popular media often portray the issue as comedy — sperm donor jokes are a staple of TV sitcoms. But the 31-year-old says “Generation Cryo” is dealing with the whole complex range of emotions that donor families can experience.

“It reminded me of when I first found out and my feelings then and the whole journey that I’ve gone through personally,” said LaBounty, “There were a lot of aspects that I could relate to ... but, of course the biggest difference is the fact that Bree has a donor number. I don’t.”

That’s bittersweet for LaBounty.

You can actually enter your donor’s ID number and find out if he had other kids ... and BOOM.
– Breeanna Speicher

Fertility clinics only started assigning those numbers in 1984 — two years after Kathleen LaBounty was conceived. It’s a number given to every sample of sperm or egg donor.

LaBounty has been searching for her donor for more than 20 years. Her search though has been more like throwing darts in the dark — posting on the web and DNA testing. For Breeanna, piecing together her history has been as simple as typing her donor’s number in her laptop – 1096.

“Now years later, I’m trying to piece together my history. I found this website the donor sibling registry ... you can actually enter your donor’s ID number and find out if he had other kids ... and BOOM,” said Speicher.

Breeanna found out that she has 15 half-siblings.

Wendy Kramer set up the website, [The Donor Sibling Registry](#), in 2000 to help her own son find his donor. It immediately got people’s attention and Kramer’s idea to tell donor offspring stories of their own was not as easy.

“For the last eight years, there were just so many people who thought the general public wouldn’t be able to

That’s because, for so long, the subject was so

says Kramer. But attitudes have changed — especially among younger people who happen to be a big

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part of MTV's audience.

"I think there is not a more relevant time or a more relevant audience than ours to explore the multitude of issues unique to this generation" says MTV president Stephen Friedman.

Friedman says the network's audience is largely made up of the so-called millennials — the generation of Americans born between 1980 and 2000 — the first donor-conceived generation to come of age. Friedman says that's raising the issue to a broader national level.

"Hopefully opens up a conversation that people didn't want to talk about and yet you have an entire young generation of people whose parents used a donor that are going to be asking questions," Friedman said.

Questions about identity and about what family means

MTV producers thought the catalyst for the drama would come from the kids, but they were surprised by something totally unexpected — what happened to the parents.

"It brings up the most basic elements of parenthood and the definition of what a family means," Friedman said.

Eric Jacobson lives in Atlanta with his wife Terry and his twins Jonah and Hilit, who were conceived with a sperm donor and who are Breeanna's half-siblings. Eric and his wife Terry were always open about the kids' origin and though Eric initially felt freaked out about the whole thing, he was able to overcome his insecurities and pain — until now.

I wanted to know my sperm donor, but also my aunts, my uncles, my grandparents, my cousins.
– Kathleen LaBounty

"I had desires about how I wanted to raise my own family and that obviously was never ever going to happen that way, so any attack on my picture of what my family is an attack on me," Jacobson said.

Terry wants to meet their donor. Jonah and Hilit want to see a picture. Eric Jacobson struggles to understand why.

"Adding donor, adding siblings is not my definition of family. Jonah, Halit, Terry and Eric. Period ... I mean, you start to throw in these other pieces and that destroys that picture," Jacobson said.

And yet, for thousands of donor-conceived children like Kathleen LaBounty, that picture remains half blank.

"I wanted to know my sperm donor, but also r
LaBounty said.

She would like to see someone else who has h
with the idea that she may never find answers.

LaBounty says she's happy for Breeanna and her half-siblings. And though the kids think it's cool to

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December 17, 2013

meet, even if Breeanna finds her “donor dad,” there are no assurances that he’ll want to connect.

“This is raw, it’s emotional and it’s a risk the children have to be willing to accept,” Kramer said.

Reporter

- [Marisa Peñaloza](#), senior producer for NPR’s National Desk.

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