Decades ago, when explorers discovered painted figures of horses, bulls and other animals preserved on cave walls near Lascaux, France, they were astonished by the renderings’ sophistication. The cave painters were, after all, primitive peoples of the Paleolithic Age. What prompted them to paint, and why? Did they need to make art? Did a hunting guide to the movement of game? Was it an essential part of early religious ceremonies? Did all three? No matter the intent, ancient and modern humans alike seem compelled to describe the world symbolically, whether in images, words, sounds or, in recent times, through the use of mathematical symbols, as a form of art.

The following trio of articles describes projects being conducted by Old Dominion researchers who are using computer software and hardware to depict the natural world or the ways humans once depicted the natural world. We agree with Wegar that “acts of love and care” — whether by blood or by choice — are as real as any family created by blood. Decades after secrecy laws were enacted, activists began concerted efforts to repeal the prohibitions. “It became easier for advocates to make themselves heard,” Wegar explains. “It became easier for them to parade their evidence of the laws’ ineffectuality.”

Virtual World

Computerized Depictions of Reality

Katarina Wegar is an assistant professor of sociology at Old Dominion.

Decades ago, when explorers discovered painted figures of horses, bulls and other animals preserved on cave walls near Lascaux, France, they were astonished by the renderings’ sophistication. The cave painters were, after all, primitive peoples of the Paleolithic Age. What prompted these creations? Was it an instinctual need to make art? A hunting guide to the movement of game? An essential part of early religious ceremonies? All three?

“Regardless of the intent,” Wegar explains, “they certainly were able to predict, strategizing only that it ‘has to be as valuable as any child living with birth parents.’”

“Natural, biological kinship is the norm,” Wegar says. “Adoption is seen as second-best — a definite deviation. Adoptive families aren’t seen as real families. Raising a child and growing up as a child can be very difficult under those circumstances.”

Wegar notes that in the past 15 years, some countries in the West, in particular Great Britain, appear to be moving toward greater adoption openness. “The United States has yet to follow that lead; if and when it will, Wegar is reluctant to predict, saying only that ‘it doesn’t look like it will happen soon.’”

Adoption prejudice may persist, but Wegar suggests that adoption openness is also emerging. Ironically, the commonness of divorce in the second half of the century may be helping families redefine kinship, as stepfamilies bring children of different kin under one roof. No matter the definition, Wegar believes all families should be valued and accepted for what they can and should be places where children are raised, nurtured, accepted and loved.

“We think so much in biological terms,” Wegar argues. “Kinship is something we do create; it is social as well.”

Wegar notes that within the past 15 years, some countries in the West, in particular Great Britain, appear to be moving toward greater adoption openness. “The United States has yet to follow that lead; if and when it will, Wegar is reluctant to predict, saying only that ‘it doesn’t look like it will happen soon.’”

Adoption prejudice may persist, but Wegar suggests that adoption openness is also emerging. Ironically, the commonness of divorce in the second half of the century may be helping families redefine kinship, as stepfamilies bring children of different kin under one roof. No matter the definition, Wegar believes all families should be valued and accepted for what they can and should be places where children are raised, nurtured, accepted and loved.

“Adoption prejudice may persist, but Wegar suggests that adoption openness is also emerging. Ironically, the commonness of divorce in the second half of the century may be helping families redefine kinship, as stepfamilies bring children of different kin under one roof. No matter the definition, Wegar believes all families should be valued and accepted for what they can and should be places where children are raised, nurtured, accepted and loved.

“Acts of love and care” — whether by blood or by choice — are as real as any family created by blood.

Acts of Love and Care

An adoptee herself, Wegar’s personal experience contradicts the notion that unfettered access to one’s past is corrosive of the present and future. Wegar grew up in a small southwestern Finnish town, an hour’s drive from Helsinki, and knew the identities of both her biological parents. “They had to make a decision about me,” Wegar writes in her book. “I had always taken access to identifying information for granted.”

That which is hidden is often thought shameful. While Wegar does not believe secrecy creates stigma, she does think it contributes to the view of adoption as somehow disgraceful. If all sealed adoption records were opened tomorrow, bias would remain — but openness would be an important first step in an ongoing process of legitimizing adoption and helping the adopted to feel as valued as any child living with birth parents.

Despite activists’ enthusiasm, not many adoption laws have been overturned or amended. Federal and state lawmakers, Wegar points out, still incorrectly believe adoption is impossible psychologically and socially only through legislation that shields the adoptee from any knowledge of her or his biological history. Although an increasing number of adoption agencies today favor openness and arrange open adoptions, it is still difficult to mine genealogical information from a largely closed records system.

Acts of Love and Care

An adoptee herself, Wegar’s personal experience contradicts the notion that unfettered access to one’s past is corrosive of the present and future. Wegar grew up in a small southwestern Finnish town, an hour’s drive from Helsinki, and knew the identities of both her biological parents. “They had to make a decision about me,” Wegar writes in her book. “I had always taken access to identifying information for granted.”

That which is hidden is often thought shameful. While Wegar does not believe secrecy creates stigma, she does think it contributes to the view of adoption as somehow disgraceful. If all sealed adoption records were opened tomorrow, bias would remain — but openness would be an important first step in an ongoing process of legitimizing adoption and helping the adopted to feel as valued as any child living with birth parents.

“Acts of love and care” — whether by blood or by choice — are as real as any family created by blood.