

## Viewpoint: Golden State Killer case provokes discussion about ethics and DNA

Last week's arrest of a suspect in the Golden State Killer case in California has highlighted how DNA samples that have been volunteered for one purpose — in this case, genealogy — can be used for other reasons, often without the donor's explicit consent. Several ethicists have expressed concern about US detectives using a genealogy website in this way.

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The case of the Golden State Killer, linked to at least 50 rapes and 12 murders between 1976 and 1986, had gone cold — although investigators believed they had a reliable sequence of the perpetrator's DNA. Next they needed a match. So, according to reports, they uploaded the data to a popular website that compares people's genetic information to trace their relatives — in effect, creating a profile for him. They got lucky: a match with family members led them to identify and arrest Joseph James DeAngelo.

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If police can use genetic databases to catch killers — even those who are distant relatives of individuals who have submitted their DNA — then perhaps more people will sign up to share their DNA. But they should be told that this is a possibility, and be given the choice to opt out. Meanwhile, more geneticists, ethicists and lawyers need to debate other potential ways in which genetic information is likely to be used, so that ethics leads the conversation, rather than playing catch-up.

**Read full, original post:** [The ethics of catching criminals using their family's DNA](#)