Family communication about donor conception: A qualitative study with lesbian parents

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In this qualitative study of 10 lesbian couples who built their families through anonymous donor conception, we explore how lesbian parents experience communication about the donor conception within the family. While for these families “disclosure” of donor conception is often seen as evident, the way parents and children discuss this subject and how this is experienced by the parents themselves has not received much research attention. To meet this gap in the literature, in-depth interviews with lesbian couples were conducted. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis showed that this family communication process can be understood within the broader relational context of parent–child relationships. Even though parents handled this family communication in many different ways, these were all inspired by the same motives: acting in the child’s best interest and—on a more implicit level—maintaining good relations within the family. Furthermore, parents left the initiative for talking about the DC mostly to the child. Overall, parents aimed at constructing a donor conception narrative that they considered acceptable for both the children and themselves. They used different strategies, such as gradual disclosure, limiting the meaning of the donor, and justifying the donor conception. Building an acceptable donor conception narrative was sometimes challenged by influences from the
social environment. In the discussion, we relate this qualitative systemic study to the broader issues of selective disclosure and bidirectionality within families.

Reference: