The meaning of the sperm donor for heterosexual couples: Confirming the position of the father

Wyverkens, E.¹, Provoost, V.², Ravelingien, A.², Pennings, G.², De Sutter, P.³, & Buysse, A.¹

¹ Department of Experimental-Clinical and Health Psychology, Ghent University, Belgium
² Bioethics Institute Ghent (BIG), Department of Philosophy and Moral Sciences, Ghent University, Belgium
³ Department of Reproductive Medicine, Ghent University Hospital, Belgium

In the literature, relatively little attention has been paid to the meaning of donor involvement in the intimate couple dyad. The current study aimed to enrich our understanding of couples’ meaning-making regarding the anonymous sperm donor and how they dealt with the donor involvement. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine couples, who had at least one child conceived through sperm donation. Our thematic analysis showed that the donor conception was seen as a different path to create a normal family. Once the family was formed, most couples avoided talking about the donor because it was perceived as disrupting men’s growing confidence in their position as father. Participants tried to confirm the position of the father to protect the family relationships. Uncertainties about how they were perceived as parents showed the continuing dominance of genetic ties within our social discourse. Participants also dealt with reminders of the donor in their daily life. Overall, they tried to manage the space taken up by the donor and to protect the position of the father. We relate our findings to literature on topic avoidance and shared obliviousness in families. For counseling practice, it could be useful to explore couples’ meaning-making about the donor as this seemed to serve family functioning.
Reference: