Two mothers and a donor: Exploration of children’s family concepts in lesbian households

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Background: Although children from lesbian families appear to make a distinction between a residential father and a donor, defining these two concepts seems to be a challenge. They need to appeal to more familiar concepts such as the hetero-normative concept of ‘mother’ to give a definition of the unfamiliar concepts they are confronted with. Methods: The study is based on qualitative in-depth interviews with 6 children (9-10 years old) from lesbian families, all of which have been conceived using anonymous sperm donation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted. Results: Two findings stand out. First, in defining the concepts of biological and non-biological mother, both mothers were described as equal parents. No difference was attached by the children to the mothers’ position as a parent. Second, the concepts ‘non-biological mother’ and ‘donor’ were defined by looking at the hetero-normative concepts of ‘mummy’ and ‘daddy’. To define the non-biological mother, both a ‘mummy’ and a ‘daddy’ were used as a reference. To define the donor concept, often references were made to a daddy. This comparison with a ‘daddy’ turned out to be complex due to the conflict between the role as a progenitor and the lack of a social relationship. The lack of language surrounding this concept turned out to be difficult. Wider implications of the findings: This study illustrates the complexity and ambiguity of children’s experiences and perceptions when dealing with issues related to genetic and social parenthood.
Reference: