

Indirect Strategies for Disclosing the Genetic/Gestational Origins of Children Conceived by Means of Reproductive Donation (Spain)

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Abstract: This article is based on ethnographic research carried out in Spain, with families who have conceived their children using third-party intervention. It focuses on an aspect of these parents' strategies regarding disclosure (or non-disclosure) of their children's origins which has received very little attention in the research in this field: the indirect strategies implemented in contexts beyond the parents-children dyad. The parents use these strategies to establish an environment in which the child can create an image of her- or himself as normal and non-exceptional, for which they intervene in their social networks mainly by controlling the information circulating through them and that, therefore, can reach the child. Three main contexts in which the parents implement these strategies have been identified: the extended family, the school, and family associations. The analysis of disclosure (or non-disclosure) strategies in these contexts provides some suggestions to improve professional intervention in this area.

Keywords: Assisted reproductive technologies, disclosure, family formation/relations, indirect strategies, origins

Résumé: Cet article est basé sur des recherches ethnographiques menées en Espagne auprès de familles ayant conçu leurs enfants avec l'intervention d'un tiers. Il se concentre sur un aspect des stratégies des parents concernant la divulgation (ou la non-divulgation) des origines de leurs enfants

qui a reçu très peu d'attention dans la recherche dans ce domaine: les stratégies indirectes mises en œuvre dans des contextes au-delà de la dyade parents-enfants. Les parents utilisent ces stratégies pour créer un environnement dans lequel l'enfant peut se créer une image de lui-même en tant qu'enfant « normal » et non exceptionnel. A cette fin, les parents interviennent dans leurs réseaux sociaux, principalement en contrôlant les informations qui circulent à travers eux et que, par conséquent, peuvent atteindre leur enfant. Trois principaux contextes dans lesquels les parents mettent en œuvre ces stratégies ont été identifiés: la famille élargie, l'école et les associations familiales. L'analyse des stratégies de divulgation (ou de non-divulgation) dans ces contextes a permis de dégager certaines suggestions pour améliorer l'intervention professionnelle dans ce domaine.

Mots-clés: ARTs, divulgation, formation/rerelations familiales, stratégies indirectes, réseaux sociaux, origines

1. INTRODUCTION

Although publications on the disclosure of children's genetic and gestational origins, when conceived through reproductive donation, abound, especially in the Euro-American context, little attention has been given to strategies beyond the direct narrative by parents to children regarding their origins. The research presented here will address a series of indirect strategies, the broader contexts, namely, extended family, school, and family associations, in which they are deployed, or not deployed, by the families, and the nuances that they bring to our understanding of disclosure, nuances which professionals in this area will find useful for improving their intervention.

Studies on the disclosure of the genetic/gestational origins of children when third party assisted reproduction –gamete donors and/or gestational surrogates- has been used in their conception have tended to focus on the diadic relations established between parents and children, on how parents communicate the way they were conceived to their children (Blake et al., 2010; Blyth, Langridge, and Harris, 2010; Hertz, 2002; Kirkman, 2003; MacDougall et al., 2007; Rumball and Adair, 1999; Zadeh, Freeman, and Golombok, 2016), whether in a specific family model (heteroparental, monoparental, or homoparental) and regarding a specific kind of donation (sperm, egg, embryo, gestation), or by comparing different models or kinds of donation. Researchers have highlighted the greater frequency of disclosure in monoparental and homoparental families, compared to heteroparental families (Beeson, Jennings, and Kramer, 2011; Jadva et al., 2009), and in surrogate or egg-receiving families, compared to sperm- or embryo-receiving families (Golombok et al., 2006; Hertz and Nelson, 2016). This work has shown relevant aspects of communicating this information, such as considering it an on-going process (Blake, 2011; Daniels and Thorn, 2001; Lycett et al., 2005; Mac Dougall et al., 2007; Nachtigall et al., 1997; Nordqvist, 2014; Vanfraussen, Ponjaert-Kristoffersen, and Brewaeys, 2001) rather than an act taking place at a specific moment in time, the narrative strategies that the families use (Jociles, 2016; Daniels and Thorn, 2001; MacDougall et al., 2007; Rumball and Adair, 1999), the ambivalent way that the donor is represented in parents' narratives (Grace, Daniels, and Guillelt, 2008; Kirkman, 2004), the noteworthy role of the children in the communication process and, therefore, its bi-directional nature (Isaksson et al., 2016; Stevens et al., 2003; Van Paris et al., 2016), and the factors that affect parents' decisions to disclose or not, and when and how to do so

(Greenfeld et al., 1998; Hahn and Craft-Rosenberg, 2002; Hammarberg et al., 2008; Hershberger, Klock, and Barnes, 2007; Indekeu et al., 2013; Lycett et al., 2005; MacCallum and Golombok, 2007; Nachtigall et al., 1997; Jociles, 2016; Rosholm et al., 2010).

Very few publications, however, have dealt with the role that other entities, such as the extended family, the school, or family associations and self-help groups, play in this communication, not as a factor that affects the fact that parents disclose this information or not (Indekeu et al., 2013), but as agents in communicating their genetic/gestational origins to the children. It has been shown that some parents speak of the existence of donors to their extended families (and/or to close friends), even when they have not told their progeny (Baetens et al., 2000; Daniels, Guillet, and Grace, 2009; Gottlieb, Lalos, and Lindblad, 2000; Klock and Greenfeld, 2004; Lalos, Gottlieb, and Lalos, 2007; Lycett et al., 2005; Murray and Golombok, 2003; Rosholm et al., 2010; Sälevaara, Suikkari, and Söderström-Anttila, 2013) and that this is more frequently communicated to the maternal extended family than to the paternal extended family, even in the cases of egg donation, as heterosexual couples who received sperm donations are usually more concerned about rejection by the non-genetic relatives (especially the grandparents) than those who receive eggs (Golombok et al., 2004; Jociles, 2016). It has also been seen that having told people around them or not, including the extended family, affects parents' decisions (and concerns) regarding telling their children or not (Hahn and Craft-Rosenberg, 2002; Shehab et al., 2008), either because having disclosed it to others increases the risk that the child will find out accidentally, making parents forestall this contingency, or because telling the extended family (and/or friends) is part of the global strategy of disclosure.

As for other spaces in which these parents participate, some studies have dealt with the impact of self-help groups (Daniels et al., 2007; Laruelle et al., 2011; Nachtigall et al., 1997) and family associations (Jociles, 2016) on creating an attitude favorable to disclosure and/or providing narrative and non-narratives resources for disclosure, insofar as they increase the level of confidence and the capacity to bring the issue up with their children. Regarding school, researchers have highlighted the willingness of *non-conventional* families, such as monoparental and homoparental families (Jociles, 2016; Smietana, 2016) to explain these origins to their children's teachers and classmates, in order to contribute to *normalizing* their family models.

It has been noted, though, that once the origins have been disclosed to the extended family (or to teachers and classmates, family friends, or any other social circle), parents basically lose control of disclosure (Klock and Greenfeld, 2014; Nordqvist, 2014), making some repent of their decision: once this information is transmitted to significant others, it cannot be taken back (Nordqvist, 2014). However, this loss of control over information regarding the conception of their children (together with the objective of normalizing their families in these social circles, especially in the cases of monoparental and homoparental families) is what explains the way that these parents intensify their efforts to manage the disclosure process: what to tell, what not to tell, when and where to tell it, how to refer to donors and/or the woman who carried the pregnancy, etc.

Insofar as the people who make up these social networks are (or can potentially become) agents of disclosure, parents develop strategies directed toward influencing the information and the attitudes that these other agents can transmit to the children about how they were conceived and/or their family model. These are indirect disclosure strategies because parents use them to intervene in the extended family, in the school, and/or in family associations, in order to maintain a certain margin of maneuverability regarding what these people transmit to their children. But these indirect strategies –which this article will focus on- can also go in the opposite direction, as the parents, knowing that kids tell all, also use the children to transmit information on their origins to their family members, friends, and/or teachers when they feel it is opportune. That is, they disclose this information to others by means of their children.

Studying these indirect strategies allows us to go beyond the meanings that families and the professionals who work with them (psychologists, social workers, etc.) commonly associate with the communication of genetic/gestational origins. On one hand, these strategies go beyond pure narrative (such as the use of stories and accounts or the question-answer exchange between parents and children), as they affect the children's contexts of socialization and childhood and youth sociability; thus, they comprise care-giving work that is effected by intervening in the children's relational spaces. On the other hand, they go beyond the parents-children dyad as a framework considered appropriate for this communication, extending it to other social relations that occur in these contexts of socialization and sociability, in which others, such as relatives (grandparents, aunts and

uncles, cousins...), professionals (teachers, psychologists, psycho-pedagogues, etc.) or peers (classmates, children of other similar families, etc.) participate.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research on which this article is based was carried out in the framework of the project “Revelation and Secret. How Families with Progeny from Gamete Donation Deal with the Origins of Their Children: Variations according to Family Models” (Ref. CSO2012-36413 of the VI National I+D+i Plan of the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitivity) with Dr. María Isabel Jociles as Principal Researcher. The main objective was to document and analyze the attitudes, strategies, and experiences of the members of these families regarding disclosure or non-disclosure of their donor origins to their children and to others.

The research design (see Jociles et al., 2016:21-25 for more details) was focused on the production of data regarding the experiences, attitudes, strategies and practices related to the revelation of origins of the different actors involved, including parents, children, professionals, and associations; this focus made qualitative ethnographic techniques the tool best suited to produce the data. Several qualitative ethnographic methods were employed to this end: ethnographic interviews of parents, children and professionals involved in third-party donation in assisted reproduction, ethnographic observation both in physical contexts and online, and the organization of workshops for discussion among parents.

The main technique employed to produce data was the ethnographic interview. 72 parents and 24 children in a total of 71 families formed through donation, as well as 17 professionals involved with donor-assisted families in various capacities, were interviewed between May 2014 and October 2015. The families interviewed included single mothers by choice (24), female homoparental couples (14), male homoparental couples, (4) and heteroparental couples (21). Because no registry or list of families created through donor assistance or of professionals in this area exists, it was impossible to create a random sample. The interviewees were recruited through different associations and by word of mouth, through contacts. The majority of the interviews were carried out in the Autonomous Communities of Madrid, Catalonia, and Valencia, with additional interviews in other autonomous communities in Spain. The ethnographers explained the objective of the research to the people interviewed and provided a written commitment regarding anonymity and the confidentiality of the data produced.

Although other interviews with professionals and children were conducted and analyzed in this research project, in this article we focus mainly on the analysis of interviews conducted with parents. Families were mainly recruited for the research through online forums discussing donor-assisted conception and its disclosure to children and associations which include families who have used donor-assisted conception, for example, associations of gay and lesbian people and single mothers by choice such as Madres Solteras por Elección, Galehi, Galesh, and FLG, to which they belong. Participants were also recruited by word of mouth, using the snowball technique to extend the network of participants. The delicate and confidential nature of much of the information produced made personal introductions from

participants in our research to others willing to participate the ideal way to recruit new interviewees. In order to create significant data, the researchers were careful to diversify the sample, following three specific criteria: family model (monoparental, homoparental, and heteroparental), type of donation (sperm, egg, embryo, double donation, gestational surrogacy), and the moment in their maternity/paternity project (undergoing treatment, pregnant, with children of different ages). The researchers were thus able to cover a broad spectrum of profiles of people using donor assisted reproduction, regarding types of informants and specific practices. Interviews were carried out until the saturation point was reached, following the theoretical frameworks that were reformulated in the successive analyses of the data produced by the ethnographic research (Glaser and Strauss, 2006). The only group which resisted every effort of the researchers is the group of heteroparental families who, because of male sterility, needed sperm donation. The reasons for this, discussed in Jociles et al. (2016:24-25), have to do with the decreasing use of sperm donation with the advent of newer technologies such as intracytoplasmic sperm injection and with a greater reticence to disclose the use of sperm donation. For these families, visibilizing male infertility seems to be more problematic than visibilizing female infertility. This makes these families very reticent to discuss or disclose male infertility, explains that they do not form associations in relation to this problem, and also causes clinics to be unwilling to facilitate contacts. The following table summarizes the disclosing and non-disclosing families according to family structure and type of donation.

TABLE 1 HERE

The second fundamental technique employed was ethnographic observation in a variety of contexts: families' homes, meetings, events organized by associations, clinics, and surrogacy agencies, a trip to the country of Georgia with two families for surrogate births, and internet forums and blogs. Two special events were organized to produce data: the first was a workshop with parents and children to discuss their family formation and disclosure, and the second was a story contest for parents to present stories created to disclose donor origins and explain their family formation to their children. Observations were recorded using the ethnographic tool known as the field diary, in which the researcher takes detailed notes of her or his observations while observing and also writes up additional notes afterward. The book *Deseos, hadas, magos y semillas. Cuentos para comunicar los orígenes en familias que han acudido a la donación reproductiva* (Poveda, Jociles, y González-Patiño, 2015) was one result of this story contest. In addition, data was also gathered regarding children's books on the subject, as well as pertinent national and international legal issues.

All the interviews and recordings from the events organized were recorded on digital recorders and transcribed. Because our specific objective in this article focuses on analyzing aspects that are seldom explored in cultural schema regarding the disclosure of origins or in other research on this subject, we drew on some elements of the analytic model based on Grounded Theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Our interest in employing some of these procedures is due to the need to seek the meaning to elements involved in disclosure that emerged through the ethnographic process. In this way, we were able to explore aspects of the actors' experience that were not evident but that were related in a significant way to the disclosure of their origins, paying special attention to the ways in which they intervened in

their social networks to control, implicitly or explicitly, the information that circulated in them and could influence this disclosure. The members of the research group read the interviews, coding data and identifying analytic categories that were then reviewed to reach a consensus, merging categories that were considered equivalent. Finally, an axial coding was carried out, establishing new relationships among the categories to enable theorization based on the categories that emerged as central categories. Although substantive theory was generated, the results achieved go far beyond the conventional representations and practices that are considered to explicitly “reveal” family origins both in families’ and professionals’ discourses and in theories on this subject. This process allowed us to identify and analyze experiences of disclosure that we hope can be conveniently integrated in a more general theory on family relations and identities in the context of reproductive donation.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Extended Family

The effect of intervention in the extended family is to prepare these family members as one of the social contexts by means of which the children will find things out about their genetic/gestational origins, that is, to constitute the extended family as an environment that will act as an ally to parents in the process (when to tell, how to tell, what tone to use, etc.) of communicating their origins to their children. This intervention often begins before the child is born, that is, when the parents know that the third-party assisted reproduction techniques

have been successful and the pregnancy is confirmed, or even earlier, when they are thinking about beginning the process. They seek, first, their relatives' affective, social, or economic support, in some cases, for the decision they have made and, in the cases of gay and lesbian couples or single mothers by choice, also for the family model they have chosen. Moreover, in some cases of gay and lesbian couples, communicating the decision to have a child or announcing the pregnancy is a way of *coming out of the closet*, to not only their families of origin but all their relatives and neighbors. This coming out of the closet, especially when the situation is made public by a wedding celebration, sometimes does not bring the support sought, but rather a rupture with one or both of the families of origin, if they do not accept the sexual orientation of the future parents, or do not accept making it visible to their social circles. It is important to keep in mind that, in order to register a child as the child of a same-sex couple in Spain, without one of the members having to adopt, the couple must be legally married. So many gay and lesbian couples decide to get married once they have decided to have children. This is the case of Merche and Carlota (all names are pseudonyms):

Merche: Well, I told my parents a long time ago, when I started to go out with her, that I was a lesbian and that Carlota was my partner. Then I told them that we were going to have a baby girl (Lola, Carlota's biological daughter) and that they were going to be grandparents, and my parents came to eat with us and they brought (as a present) a little bottle of olive oil, you know? And my parents would go to the nursery school to see her, and the teacher knew it and everything was fine. I got pregnant, and we decided to get married for several reasons, one of them was to recognize rights, okay? [...]. I call my parents on the phone and tell them: "Look, we've decided to get married." [...]

And, evidently, they did not come (to the wedding). Relations cooled off after the wedding issue. That Christmas they did not come to eat. [...] The truth is that I did not communicate with them much during the pregnancy.

Carlota: They were missing.

Merche: And I told my sister what day, what time the baby was going to be born. My sister didn't come to the hospital and my parents didn't show up at the hospital either. Of course, our hypothesis is that, in private, my parents behaved like grandparents with my older daughter but, of course, the moment of the wedding is a moment of public disclosure, so... (Merche and Carlota, lesbian couple, 1 daughter 10-15 years old and 5-10-year-old twins through anonymous sperm donation)

However, in the framework of the sample of gay and lesbian couples interviewed, this rupture is an exception, as the extended families end up accepting the conjugal situation, with the arrival of a new member to this family (the child-in-process) usually being what facilitates this acceptance. Other times, the extended family (or part of it) accept the son or daughter and include him or her as a relative, but do not accept the father or mother's partner, that is, this person's non-heteronormative situation. This is what happened with Carlota's mother:

Carlota: My mother said to me, "Better a drug addict or prostitute than a lesbian." So, then, you say, "Well, that's just fine and dandy!"

Interviewer: And with the girls, didn't she change her mind?

Carlota: The girls, it's been a long process, because [...] when my daughter (Lola) was born, my mother came to the hospital. My mother turned up when she (Merche) wasn't there any more. That's why she came, because she knew she wasn't there. But really, the relation that my mother has had with the girls, especially with the eldest (Lola), has been a relation of stress. If Lola had been a much weaker girl, who got scared more easily, she would have had a really bad time. One day, my mother even said to her, "They're deceiving you, you don't have two mothers." And Lola, who has a frighteningly ready tongue, said to her, "Grandma, I have two mommies who love me a whole lot." Of course, that's the point where you say, "That's enough!"

Merche: From that point on, you told your mother, "You might not understand what we're doing, but don't you ever tell our daughter how things are again, because at school they've known how things are right from the start. At home, our daughter knows how things are; so don't you ever bring this subject up again if you want to keep seeing her. Otherwise, you'll never see her again. (Merche and Carlota, lesbian couple, 1 daughter 10-15 years old and 5-10-year-old twins through anonymous sperm donation)

As this quote shows, when the child is accepted and has relationships (or is expected to have them when she or he is born) with the parents' extended families is when the parents develop a set of strategies intended to keep the versions of their origins that the grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, etc., transmit or may transmit to the children in line with the parents' versions. Thus, Carlota, whose mother has accepted both Lola, Carlota's biological daughter, and the twins, Merche's biological daughters, as her granddaughters, makes it clear to her mother that, in order to remain in contact with them, she must not contradict the idea that

both Carlota and Merche are the girls' mothers, that is, that the family is a homoparental family.

These kinds of interventions in the extended families affect many other details and are developed in quite different ways that vary, to a great extent, according to the family model (heteroparental, monoparental, or homoparental). These ways go from deactivating certain family links that are not considered to be adequate, to not telling the extended family what the parents do not want to tell, or have not yet told, their children... to giving specific guidelines for how to act with the children regarding these issues. These strategies for intervening in the extended family, as indirect ways of disclosing information to the children, take on two main forms: forms of *restriction* and forms of *normalization*. The forms of restriction, in turn, affect two different aspects: a) the information regarding origins that they give to the extended family and b) the relatives to whom this is told. Abelinda is an example of *restriction* or of a restrictive selection of relatives:

And so, we started to deposit this intimate information in people that you know are going to use this information well. [...] And those who were closest to us did know. I mean, they knew everything with all the details. But there, I think you make a selection. I don't know if it is a selection that arises from your experience or simply from your feelings, but I made a selection and I'm delighted with the selection I made. And there were people whose response was absolutely overwhelming. My father, you know? He's a man who grew up in the countryside, in a small village, and everything, well, my father's response is so graphic! He says to me, "You bring me a wet kitty and I love it.

If it's yours, I love it. (Abelinda, heterosexual couple, 5-10-year-old twins through egg donation and gestational surrogacy in California)

These indirect strategies are intended not only to control the process of disclosure (when, how, who, what kind of tone to use and what information to tell the children about their origins), but to achieve other objectives, such as facilitating the filiation of the children with the two sets of relatives, avoiding rejection by these relatives. However, parents do not believe this to be possible when these relatives are considered to be *very conservative, traditional, or religious*, so that, depending on these considerations, parents often make a selection of relatives to whom they disclose this information. This strategy has certain disadvantages, though, because telling some relatives, no matter how *selected* they are, carries the risk that they will tell other relatives; this is why some parents follow the strategy of not telling anyone (Cook et al., 1995; Golombok et al., 2004; MacCallum and Golombok, 2007) when it is possible not to, that is, when the donation can be concealed. This is the case, especially, in heteroparental families who have not used gestational surrogacy.

My family, shall we say, is a little more open, but my husband's family is not like that. His parents are older. My husband is afraid that they would reject him (the son) because... it might be an unreal fear but, for example, we talked to my father-in-law once about adopting children, well, he said that that child would not be his grandchild. That's what he said. So, sure, with this kind of thinking, well, my husband was afraid. So, sure, we said: "It's really complicated to tell one side and not say anything to the other side." And so, then, we were talking it over and we said: "Well, we won't say

anything.” And we haven’t said anything. (Valeska, heterosexual couple, 1 child, 0-5 years old, through egg donation)

Most commonly, though, this restriction affects the information (the details) transmitted to the extended family. Sometimes they are told about the gestational surrogacy but not about the egg donation, other times –especially in the case of single mothers by choice- they are told only about the sperm donation but not about the egg donation, and other times – particularly in the case of gay couples- the parents conceal which one is the genetic father.

I’m not interested, either, in people generally knowing about the egg donation. It makes me uncomfortable because I think that there are many people who wouldn’t understand it and could think that they are not really truly my children. The idea that they might think this makes me uncomfortable and, especially, part of my family. (Carola, single mother by choice, twins 5-10 years old, through anonymous sperm and egg donation)

The restriction of information is intended, first of all, to control the progression in time of disclosure to the children (what is disclosed and what is not at each moment, who does the disclosing...), and it is usually a provisional restriction, as the extended family usually ends up finding out the details or at least some of them from the parents or from the children themselves. Regarding this, Honorio says:

In our family context, we have not told either the names of the women who carried the pregnancies, or the names of the donors, or biological fatherhoods... Later, things

become pretty evident, right? Because of physical resemblances and such, but I and my husband decided that this issue belonged to us and we didn't have to share it with anyone, or with the family context. Well, logically, they know it was gestational surrogacy in India, but we didn't want to give any further details. So, this is something that our children will have all the details and our family, for now, doesn't have the details. I mean, little by little, they'll reach the family, too, by way of the children, because if we show them the photos (of the women who carried the pregnancies), they might feel like showing them to the family. [...] The good thing about having done it like this is that we control what information the children have and what information they don't have perfectly. (Honorio, homosexual couple, 1 son and 2 daughters, 0-5 years old, through surrogacy in India and egg donation)

But by selecting the relatives, the parents are also trying to avoid the child being rejected and to favor her or his filiation with the extended family, independently of the existence or non-existence of genetic links to the family. Because of this, the members of male homoparental families often conceal which of the two members of the couple is the biological father:

Juan: At least for my parents, I'm going to make it very clear that the girl is our girl.

It's no good if all of a sudden we go to my village and, because the girl is a little

blonder: "Ah, that's my favorite girl, because she's from my side!" No, no, no.

Absolutely not. And you need to make that really clear. This is a social thing. It can't be a genetic thing.

José María: Even though, then, people like to say: “She looks like you, she looks like me. She looks like your great-grandmother, the one who had one green eye.”

José María: Well, I mean, they are going to look for resemblances and they’re sure to find them, but it’s a completely different thing for your family or mine to connect with one child or the other according to whether the child is biologically mine or yours. This is what we won’t allow. (Juan and José María, homosexual couple, “expecting” 1 daughter through surrogacy in Mexico and egg donation)

As for normalization strategies, they are used to prevent the extended family from restricting or *distorting* the information that they use with the children regarding their genetic/gestational origins; that is, they are used to create “normalcy” in dealing with the issue.

I told everything. Now, everyone knows that my son was born through surrogacy. Even my own family says: “He looks like your father.” And I say: “My father! It’s like you don’t realize that he doesn’t have our blood.” My father was really bad when he was a child, really bad, and my mother says: “Because you’ve told us. If not, people would say: ‘Well, just like the grandfather.’ (Amalia, heterosexual couple, 1 son, 0-5 years old, through surrogacy in India and egg donation)

The main objective here is to keep the messages that the extended family gives to the children congruent with the messages their parents transmit to them and, often, to prevent there being any taboo subjects that are not discussed. One way to achieve this is for the

parents to talk about *everything* and do so *normally* with their relatives, in front of the children, that is, through their own practice of dealing with the subject openly. This is the case of Isadora:

Isadora: When I talk about this subject with the adults, I always talk about embryo donation, about the egg donor and the sperm donor.

Interviewer: Because in your case, right? You could say sperm donation and that's it! You don't need to say...

Isadora: But I tell about it. I always tell it. They always say to me, especially my family: "Nobody cares!" My mother and my father get really angry, you know? And especially if I joke about these things, right? The other day, for example, we were eating at home, the family, right? We were talking about vegetables, about if they're frozen... And they were criticizing frozen things a lot, and I said: "Well, I don't know why you're criticizing frozen stuff so much. Look at Nuria (her daughter)," I say, "she was frozen and she's just great." (Laughter) And she was right there. Well, my family got so mad! And I was saying: "But I don't understand, because if that's how it is, if she was frozen, she was frozen." It's your reality, and your reality has to be something that's normal for you, right? What difference does it make if I tell about it or not, if that's how it is! What's wrong with having been frozen? I think that everything that is concealed is because somehow you think it's important, and I want my family to talk about all of this normally. Maybe I've stretched things a little so that she will see it all even more naturally, because everything that you hide, and that she thinks you're

hiding, is because it's bad. (Isadora, single mother by choice, 1 daughter 0-5 years old, through embryo donation)

On the other hand, parents provide specific guidelines about how to deal with the aspects that the extended family find hardest to understand or accept and what language to use. This is what happens, for example, with the terms for designating the reproductive donors:

Alma: If he perceives this as something that is hidden, he starts to dream up a whole story right away. The truth is, I'm very lucky about this with my parents, with my brother... I mean, the people in my closest circle have really digested the issue and have gotten used to using "donor."

Interviewer: Ah!, they use it, too?

Alma: Yes, well, I've been right there insisting right from the day I got pregnant. "And is this from the dad?" "No, from the donor. No 'dad' at all. He's the donor." "From the other one?" "No, from the donor." I'm really insistent about making the word natural. (Alma, single mother by choice, 1 child, 0-5 years old, through anonymous sperm donation)

This is because they feel that, if they did not give clear guidelines, the extended family would not know how to act:

Juan: The guidelines, at least in our family, have to come from us: "I want this to be explained like this, or for you to talk to the children like this, because they are going to

ask (the grandmother), they're going to ask and at that moment, I want you to have this and say this.

José María: My mother was grateful that we gave her guidelines because, if not, she would be lost. (Juan and José María, homosexual couple, "expecting" 1 daughter through surrogacy in Mexico, through egg donation)

But the extended family also plays other roles in this process of indirect communication of genetic/gestational origins. Thus, there are times when the parents try out the story that they plan to tell their children on their nieces and nephews first, or ask some of their relatives to collaborate in preparing the story, which is just another way (implicit or explicit) of influencing the information that the children will receive from significant others.

I did explain it to my niece, who's going to be 14 now. I said, "María, your aunt and uncle want to be parents, but your aunt has a problem with her eggs. Do you know what eggs are?" "Yes." "Do you know how being pregnant and everything works?" "Yes." "Okay. Well, in my case, instead of it being my egg, it's with the egg of a girl, of a donor." And she didn't really understand. "But how does that work?" I said, "They make it outside, in the exterior, with a glass jar –so that you can understand it- and they mix it with your uncle's sperm. And that's what they put in your aunt, the egg." And she knows it, what they put in me and everything. Apart from that, I told my sister about it. I said to her, "Can I explain it to your girl?" Because the girl was asking me too. And I also told her so that it wouldn't be a (subject that was) taboo. (Dalia, heterosexual couple, twins 0-5 years old, through egg donation)

The analysis of the data produced in our research thus opens up new vistas, beyond previous analyses of whether or not parents disclose reproductive donation to the extended family (Daniels, Guillet, and Grace, 2009; Klock and Greenfeld, 2004; Lalos, Gottlieb, and Lalos, 2007; Lycett et al., 2005; Murray and Golombok, 2003; Rosholm et al., 2010; Sälevaara, Suikkari, and Söderström-Anttila, 2013), indicating the use of the extended family as a context of disclosure and normalization to support parent-child disclosure, and the selection of family members to be included in this context of disclosure.

3.2 School

School centers are another of the spaces preferred for these kinds of strategies because school is a central institution for children's socialization and sociability. Even though there are many similarities among the different family models in relation to the way they face the issue of disclosure in school spaces, the fact remains that heteroparental families generally find fewer incentives to disclose in school spaces, whereas monoparental families are more favorably disposed toward disclosing (this is sometimes inevitable, because of the obviousness of the facts) and toward turning the visibility of their family experience into a value in their children's schools. Families' predispositions toward disclosing or concealing and the concrete ways in which they do one or the other are related to their perception of the school relations in which their children are immersed; these relations can be either a space of resistance to disclosure (where stereotypes about the family are reproduced) or a context of opportunity for disclosure (open to less conventional visions of family and sexual diversity).

Thus, whether to disclose or to keep the secret or preserve discretion, families act in more or less consciously or planned ways in these spaces.

In the interviews, families indicate that choosing a school is often the first important challenge they face. The criteria that organize the search for a school establish the difference between religious and lay schools (sometimes called the private/public difference) because of their different ways of dealing with the issue of family and sexual diversity in the school's everyday dynamics. Some administrative formalities for registering their children in their school in fact force the parents to make their family model visible to the administrative personnel. For example, one of the women interviewed told us that single parenthood gives extra points for choosing schools in her Autonomous Community (Andalusia), so she had to show her Family Book at the school secretary's office, which in fact meant that she was giving school personnel access to sensitive information on her family configuration. A lesbian couple related an anecdote about the negotiations they held with the administrative personnel of their son's nursery school in order to change forms created for a conventional (father/mother) family to fit their family configuration (mother/mother).

In general, families perceive the move from nursery school to grade school as a critical moment in their children's itinerary. Whereas nursery school is seen as something provisional, as a less compromising environment for the child which, in addition, covers early ages, the entry into school is seen as a threshold in the child's socialization, something more long-lasting and decisive, for which preparatory work is done in order to avoid discrimination and make it easier to fit their family model into the context of their school

relations. The school experience provides situations in which a person's family identifications are publicly brought into play: activities to commemorate Father's Day, conversations among classmates about *resemblances* between relatives and about the absence or double presence of some family roles ("not having a dad" or "having two moms"), as well as other relational spaces derived from the relations struck up in school contexts, such as birthday parties or summer camps. This broad repertory of situations demands more or less explicit justifications and sometimes even forced disclosure regarding the kind of family one belongs to, as well as one's place in it, often through comparisons in which feelings of family belonging are represented among peers, before other children, and before teachers.

Following this logic, encounters, interviews, and negotiations with experts in the educational sphere (teachers, psychologists, psychopedagogues) and participation in different activities in their children's school life (reading stories, participating in the school's family association, etc.), would fit into this indirect understanding of some of the strategies that families put into play, with variable degrees of implication and objectives that can be modulated according to different conjunctures in these contexts and to the demands of the children themselves:

The first thing I did was talk to the teachers, I said: "Above all, what I am interested in is that, when you talk about families, or about fathers and mothers, you go integrating these issues." I said: "Because she is not going to understand why she doesn't have a dad or what happened to this dad, or... right? You need to introduce..." They told me: "Don't worry, don't... there are more and more kinds of families all the time, everyone talks more in general all the time." Of course, when they talk about fathers, or Father's

Day, or all those figures, they need to know how to answer because I think that, from the school, it's one of the main pillars of information, because I know that I'll give [my son] the information, but the others [parents] won't [give it to] their children. (Isadora, single mother by choice, 1 daughter 0-5 years old, through embryo donation)

These kinds of family interventions –especially by mothers- in their children's schools offer opportunities to visibilize their own family experiences before the school community (other parents, teachers, children). Because of this, by trying to create safe and comfortable frameworks of relation for their children in their school relations, the families' different interventions in this direction are integrated into the broader process of disclosing genetic origins and producing feelings of family belonging. And this happens in a way that cannot be unlinked from the normalization of family types that are not evident at school, such as monoparental and homoparental families.

In many aspects, these strategies are inscribed in a logic of continuities drawn between the school and family contexts. Disclosure in the sphere of the home is often a consummation of issues that arise in school contexts and, viceversa, interventions in the school serve to prolong domestic practices destined to deal with the subject of family origins. For example, whereas single-parent families and homoparental families tend to seek advice from other peers (both online in blogs and forums and in associations), heteroparental families are less active in this way. These families, who are less favorable to begin with toward early disclosure, are more dependent on the rhythms of learning set by the school (in the subject of

human biology), thus indirectly depending more on expert criteria, in this case, the teachers' criteria. We can see this in one mother's reply to a question about the best age for disclosure:

I think that first I would talk to the teachers at school. First, I'd ask. If we wanted to tell, I'd say, do you think my daughters are ready, for us to be able to tell them, where the origin of their lives comes from? Because, of course, the birds and the bees and all that, they'll explain it to them. Until they explain that to them, I don't think it would be the right time to tell them, because they wouldn't understand. (Dalia and Pablo, heterosexual couple, egg donation)

Even so, it is important to realize that, while many families develop strategies of this kind, parents' interventions in their children's school spheres are not always actions intended to promote a visibilization of their family experiences. Sometimes they attempt to preserve their confidentiality and discretion regarding the issue of genetic origins. This can be interpreted as a practice of caring for the child, in this case, to protect her or him in the sphere of the child's relations with other schoolmates. This is coherent with similar practices of restricting relevant information in other spheres, such as the extended family, as was seen earlier. As Camino tells us here, this can be done by seeking complicity from teachers, psychologists, and pedagogues (in tune with expert opinion which is largely favorable toward discretion):

It's true that I'm not talking about this now at my daughter's school, because they told me: "Listen, your right to tell this stops where your daughter's right to her intimacy begins," and it's true. Besides, children at school are very cruel, and so I don't want

them to hurt her with this, and I don't tell it at school. So: "They put her in mommy at the hospital, they put me there." I do tell this, because it's a fertility treatment. I don't tell any more due to respect for her, and because I don't know if tomorrow a child is going to say to her: "Listen, the thing is that you...!" She can tell about it if she wants, or not. (Camino, single mother by choice, 1 daughter 0-5 years old through egg donation and non-anonymous sperm donation)

Whereas school has been dealt with, in previous research, as a context where disclosure is employed to normalize non-normative family formation, our analysis shows that the school context can also be considered a threat to this normalization and a place where a child must learn to preserve her or his privacy and restrict the disclosure of personal information.

3.3 Associations

In addition to the role that different associations, specifically associations of single mothers by choice and LGBTI associations, play in parents' decisions to disclose donor origins to their children and to others (relatives, friends, schoolteachers, etc.), parents also use them as tools for indirect disclosure. Parents explain that these associations and the activities they foment, by bringing together families in similar situations, create a context in which family configurations that differ from the heteroparental-with-genetically-related-offspring norm are accepted, valued, and normalized. A mother explains this in the following way:

Yes, I think it's useful because I think that, in the end, you always like to feel a little... that there are more people like... I mean, you fit in the normalness of the group. That there are more people who are in your same circumstances, right? And to talk, she'll even have to talk about her stuff with other people who have her experiences or her way of feeling and thinking, right? And I think it's good for her to be in contact, too, with other children of single mothers and egg donation. (Ankara, single mother by choice, 1 daughter 0-5 years old, through sperm and egg donation)

In some interviews with children, parents took advantage of the ethnographers' questions about the children's explanations of their origins to remind the children of their friends and acquaintances from associations whose families had been formed in a similar manner or were also non-normative in some way.

Thus, although disclosure is never carried out directly by the associations, parents use association activities to reinforce their own disclosure to their children: children see that there are other non-normative families like their own and, by inference, other families who have used reproductive donation. Parents' main concern here seems to be to legitimize and normalize the idea of a variety of family configurations, with the issue of reproductive donation taking a back seat as the path to non-normative family formation. This may also reflect a certain tension between two contrasting ideas that parents say they wish to transmit to their children. The first idea, referring to an intimate family context and frequently communicated in disclosure stories, is that the child is special because the parent(s) had to overcome tremendous obstacles and resort to extraordinary measures to achieve the child's

birth. (Although it must be noted that other parents eschew this attitude in favor of emphasizing normalcy.) The second idea, intended to legitimize each person's family configuration within a broad spectrum of possibilities, is that there are many other children just like them, referring rather to the public context of the child and family in relation to other children and families. Thus, whereas the *specialness* of being born through reproductive donation is emphasized within the family sphere, in the context of associations and as the public face presented to the wider world, reproductive donation is simply an extraordinary way to form families which, although non-normative, are presented as ordinary.

The discussions carried on in associations, both in in-person meetings and events and in online forums, blogs, and Whatsapp groups that members form, often produce a partial consensus on issues of disclosure, such as whether or not to disclose their origins to the children and to others, when and how to do so, and how to deal with the matter of the anonymous donor (in the case of Spain, where only gamete and embryo donation are allowed and where donation is mandatorily anonymous). These ways of dealing with disclosure are reinforced in the context of association events, where children hear other people talking openly about reproductive donation and using the same terminology as their parent(s) regarding, for example, the donor. These associations create a context of socialization in which the vision presented supports parents' efforts, normalizes the situation for both children and other attending family members, and teaches children how to talk about these issues with others. Associations often have educational commissions that meet with teachers in schools and go to classrooms to explain family diversity and reproductive donation,

actively modifying their children's school contexts. These associations are also active in politics, where they work to create legal and societal conditions favorable to the existence of diverse family configurations and the use of reproductive donation for family formation. In some cases, people use their personal experience to become professionals, becoming consultants on non-normative family formation or facilitators for gestational surrogacy arrangements outside of Spain. These actions influence the contexts in which their children and other family members approach the normalization of the specificity of their situations of family formation and reproductive donation.

As has been mentioned, single mothers by choice and LGBTI families are the main participants in associations. Although heterosexual couples who use gamete or embryo donation often participate in online forums providing information and support during medical treatment and may discuss disclosure in these online spaces, once they actually have a child, the fact that they look, outwardly, like any other heteronormative family makes disclosure less of a social and more of a family matter. Not needing special support for a non-normative family configuration, they tend not to belong to associations. The exception to this is the case of gestational surrogacy, in which the obvious lack of a pregnancy visibilizes the family's non-normative process; legal complications, due to surrogacy not being allowed in Spain, have caused these families to associate and to speak out in the media to defend their children's right to Spanish citizenship. Associations, then, provide a context replete with indirect disclosure for children and with discourses and narratives for parents, children, and relatives, but mainly in the case of families whose use of reproductive donation is obvious to the casual observer: families of lesbian and gay couples, of single mothers by choice, and

through surrogacy. Heterosexual couples who use egg or sperm donation seem to consider reproductive donation a private, family matter that does not require visibilization in a broader social context.

3.4. Interconnections Among Contexts Of Indirect Disclosure

The contexts of extended family, school, and associations are not airtight compartments. The way that associations' educational commissions act to influence the school context by explaining different family configurations in schools and donating children's books on this subject has already been mentioned, as well as how extended family members are invited to association events. The people who have assisted us in our research have spoken to us of how grandparents, for example, influence the school context by explaining their family configurations on Grandparents' Day, or how not only parents but aunts and uncles participate in the *travelling book* (an illustrated story in which each child and his or her family write a chapter in an ongoing story) that has been popular in schools for decades, using it to visibilize family diversity and reproductive donation. Further research will doubtless discover additional ways in which these contexts interact.

According to the families that participated in our research, family, school, and associations are the main contexts of indirect disclosure; no other contexts were specifically mentioned. This would be an interesting point for comparative research in the future, as multiple belongings to community and neighborhood groups, for working parents with small children,

may be more common in other cultural contexts than in Spain and could create additional social groups for indirect disclosure.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on data produced through ethnographic research, an analysis has been made of an aspect of parents' strategies regarding disclosure (or non-disclosure) of donor origins to their children and to others that has hardly received attention in research in this field: indirect strategies that are deployed in contexts beyond the parent-child dyad or triad. The parents create a social network in which the child can flourish and create an image of her- or himself as normal or unexceptional (while at the same time specially desired). Three main contexts in which parents implement these strategies have been identified: the extended family, schools, and family associations. While previous considerations of disclosure have broadened the time span to describe disclosure as an ongoing process, as mentioned in the introduction, the work described here offers a new perspective of a broadened social and relational context in which disclosure does or does not take place, a context which changes as the children grow and mature. As we have seen, most research to date focuses on disclosure by parents to children of reproductive donation, with the objective of helping children to understand and normalize their own family formation; however, our analysis shows how parents extend this objective beyond their children, trying to normalize family formation through reproductive donation in their broader social network and in society as a whole and using these as

additional contexts for disclosure to their children (Blake et al., 2010; Blyth, Langridge, and Harris, 2010; MacDougall et al., 2007; Zadeh, Freeman, and Golombok, 2016).

In the extended family, both disclosure and non-disclosure are used to this end. When parents reveal issues of sperm, egg, and embryo donation, or gestational surrogacy, to the extended family, they often explain that they hope to avoid secretism and to create an environment in which the way their children were conceived is accepted and normalized. The parents also attempt to create a coherent line of understanding and discourse on the subject, enlisting the assistance of grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc., to reinforce the narratives and explanations that they have provided to their children. As has been noted, this is so important to parents that extended family members who do not support or who actively undermine the parents' explanations can be threatened with limiting or denying their access to the child and, in this way, being eliminated from his/her social network. When parents decide not to disclose reproductive donation, they explain that they do so in order to avoid expected negative reactions from extended family members considered too close-minded or traditional to accept this fact; the parents often fear that the child will be rejected as non-related or as related to one side of the family but not the other, and wish to protect the child from this kind of rejection. Just like disclosure, this non-disclosure seeks to create an environment where the child will be treated normally, like any other child, although this apparent normalcy is based on a secrecy whose ultimate effects (for example, the question "Would my grandparents have loved me if they had known this?" could possibly arise in the future) are as yet unexplored.

The second context, the school context, is also subject to strategies of disclosure and non-disclosure. Because many school activities visibilize family structure, many parents inform the school and/or teachers of their children's origins in reproductive donation. This has been shown to be the case, overwhelmingly, in families in which the donation is inevitably noticeable (single mothers by choice, homoparental families), although families in which this donation is not apparent (heteroparental families) tend to see no need to discuss this issue with the school. The families who do inform the school and teachers explain that they do so in order to increase the school's and teachers' awareness of the diversity of family formations and to encourage them to deal with this diversity as normal in the context of classroom activities and discussions. These families often use school activities to visibilize and normalize their diverse family configurations. However, some families who disclose their children's donor origins in the early grades of school, may cease to do so as the children grow older, in the understanding that this is a part of a person's intimate life and the children themselves must be the ones to decide with whom they wish to share this personal information.

Family associations, such as associations formed by single mothers by choice and by homoparental families, are spaces of disclosure through visibilization, in which children see and interact with other children and families whose situations are similar to their own in a context in which these situations are normalized. This is a context in which the specialness that is often (not always) communicated to the child in disclosure narratives (parents who implemented extraordinary measures to have the child they desired) within the family, is transformed into the normalcy of many people in a similar situation. These associations

interact with both extended family contexts (including extended family members in their activities) and with school contexts (donating children's books on diverse family configurations and going to schools to explain non-normative family formations).

The ethnographic results completely break down the dilemmas around which families and professionals organize their disclosure practices regarding the communication of genetic and gestational origins to children: disclosure/non-disclosure, controlled/uncontrolled, conscious/unconscious, desired/undesired, are all dimensions of the disclosure process that do not appear so clearly defined in an ethnographic approach to subjects' practices. In many situations of everyday life, parents find themselves hard-pressed to control *a posteriori* something that they had not foreseen; on other occasions, they find themselves forced to struggle with the unexpected effects of strategies and movements that they had planned to a greater or lesser degree. It is the lack of determination of social practice that opens up a margin of uncertainty in the identity and relational experiences of the agents, as a consequence of relations that escape their control in the different contexts in which relevant information about identifications and family links circulates.

This causes concrete practices of disclosure to go beyond some of the meanings that are usually associated with them by both experts and families, when they present scenarios that surpass the strict narrative aspect and the central importance of father-mother-child communication. At least regarding the uses the families give, *disclosure as normalization* transcends the mere assimilation of a norm and is seen as the capacity to mobilize one's own resources in order to encourage the acceptance of difference, of the non-conventional family

model in their social world. On the other hand, this also underlines children's capacity for agency to generate their own identities based on different, even conflicting, occasions and contexts of socialization.

Based on the results of our research, some suggestions can be derived which could improve professionals' intervention in this area. First, the work around the disclosure of genetic / gestational origins to children is not a dyadic issue (parents-children), but involves the social network of the family, which is intervened to the extent that its members become important agents of socialization of these children. Second, the value of the strategies that the families themselves are already using to face these issues should be recognized, even if they are often not very systematic. It is important to emphasize this because these disclosure practices are invisibilized or considered irrelevant in the recommendations by experts, and the families themselves may not even recognize them as valuable strategies. In our opinion, many interventions would become more effective if professional experts were more favorably disposed toward finding out about and acknowledging these family practices and toward incorporating them into their recommendations. In this sense, our text intends to encourage a greater openness in experts' sensitivity to this issue.

As has been shown in this presentation of the research, not all disclosure strategies focus on disclosing or not disclosing, despite the importance of narratives about origins in subjectifying family identities. In fact, our research has shown the need to unpack the concept of disclosure itself. The literature, as well as this investigation, has repeatedly demonstrated that families whose use of reproductive donation is not obvious at first glance -

that is, heterosexual couples who use egg, sperm or embryo donation- are less prone to disclosure than families in which this reproductive donation is clearly visible, as in single mothers by choice, lesbian and gay families and families formed through surrogacy (Beeson, Jennings, and Kramer, 2011; Golombok et al., 2006; Hertz and Nelson, 2016; Jadva et al., 2009). What our research has brought to the forefront is that disclosure is not a single, monolithic concept. The families that have spoken with us have not only clarified that disclosure can be a private family matter or an issue of public visibility and normalization, but that it has multiple nuances. What to disclose and to whom to disclose influence both the direct and indirect strategies that families put into motion, but indirect strategies are most abundantly deployed when disclosure is understood to be a social issue of visibilization and normalization. In this sense, the ethnographic method is clearly useful for recovering, visibilizing, and acknowledging the value of family wisdom and practice regarding disclosure that do not include, as their priority, the preparation and use of narratives.

This is even more pertinent because professionals often incorporate the aspects of family experience regarding disclosure that are easier to formalize and systematize into their own advice, as these are precisely the aspects that are less problematic, in principle, when it comes to creating standardized protocols for family intervention. Other aspects of these experiences, such as the indirect strategies discussed in this article, are invisibilized. Ethnographic research is particularly useful for bringing issues such as these to light by applying qualitative methodological approaches that complement other sources of knowledge.

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anonymous sperm donation and non-anonymous egg donation									
ROPA (reproduction with egg of other member of couple and anonymous sperm donor)			2						2
Surrogacy and anonymous egg donation					4 (1: surrogacy is disclosed, egg donation is not)		4 (1: surrogacy is disclosed, egg donation is not)		8
Surrogacy + non – anonymous egg donation							1		1
Surrogacy with own gametes							4		4
TOTAL FAMILIES	24 (2: partial disclose)	0	14	0	4 (1: partial disclose)	0	21 (2: partial disclose)	8	71

Note: “D” represents disclosing families; “ND” represents non-disclosing families.