

GAY FATHERS CONTACTING THEIR EGG DONORS

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Abstract

Background: While the body of literature on gay fatherhood has been steadily increasing, few studies explore the relationships between gay fathers and their children's biological mother, the egg donor.

Method: This interpretive phenomenological study sought the perspectives of six gay fathers from Australia and the US who had contacted their egg donors post-birth. None of these fathers had known their donor previously. Using semi-structured interviews and IPA (Smith, 1996), this study aimed to understand how fathers made sense of this contact and its impact on them and their families, from both negative and positive perspectives.

Results: One superordinate theme, *Building This House Right from the Start*, described fathers' intentions to foster transparency, honor their child's *Right to know*, and prepare for anticipated identity needs. Without formal guidance on donor-linking and its implications, contact was described as a *Leap of Faith*, characterized by vulnerability and reflection. Reaching out with a sense of emotional uncertainty (*Unfolding Implications*) and *Empathetic Sensitivity*, all fathers experienced reciprocal warmth and connection with their egg donor (*Open Arms*). Over time, almost all of these relationships deepened with fathers' gratitude and admiration, spilling over to altruistic acts and positive redefinitions of parenthood and family in these complex and evolving families (*Defining Who We Are*).

Conclusion: This study calls for inclusive counseling on egg donor-linking for gay fathers on the pathway of third-party reproduction, to promote informed decision-making underpinned

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by the rights of the child. It supports a call for accessible counseling post-birth, as relational challenges and opportunities arise in these complex and evolving families.

Keywords: Gay Fathers; Donor Conception; Egg Donor; Third-Party Assisted Reproduction; Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

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“Building This House Right From The Start”:

Gay Fathers Contacting Their Egg Donors

The path to parenthood for gay men is uniquely complex, involving third-party reproduction via IVF, egg donation, and surrogacy, often across borders (Kramer, 2022). Similarly, global practices surrounding egg donation vary, particularly regarding donor anonymity and legal access (Kramer, 2022). In countries such as Australia and the UK, identifying information about egg donors is withheld until donor-conceived children reach adulthood, whereas in the US, some agencies and clinics send intended parents and donors to the Donor Sibling Registry so that intended parents and donors have the choice and opportunity to connect from pregnancy or birth (Gunnarsson Payne et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2023; Kramer, 2022).

Egg donation globally also differs in compensation, legal, and ethical frameworks (Millbank, 2019). In Australia, Canada, and much of Europe, only altruistic egg donation is permitted, while in the US, commercial compensation is common (Millbank, 2019). However, such practices are compounded by psychosocial and legal challenges experienced by gay intended fathers, such as heteronormative assumptions in clinical services, patchy legal frameworks and recognition of parentage, and support systems that often focus on heterosexual couples across Australia, North America, and Europe (Millbank, 2019; Fantus, 2020; Ng, 2023).

Furthermore, much of the existing literature has focused on surrogacy and gay fathers' relationships with surrogates, with scant attention given to egg donors (Fantus, 2020; Blake et al., 2016). Where studies have explored father-donor relationships, it has often been conflated with surrogacy dynamics or limited to altruistic arrangements (Blake et al., 2016; Carone et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2023). Yet egg donors, who contribute half of the child's genetics, represent an essential relational and symbolic figure within the family-building story (Kramer, 2022). Certainly, from the perspectives of egg donors, views on any children resulting from

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their donations range from ‘only genetic’ and ‘special but not family’ to ‘a connection beyond biology’ and ‘my biological child’ (Adlam et al., 2025; Jadvā et al., 2011). For gay fathers, studies from Sweden, Canada, and the US have found that while they primarily considered their child’s surrogate to be a close family member, they also held views of the egg donor ranging from a ‘distant acquaintance’ to ‘a close family member’ (Carone et al., 2017; Malmquist & Höjerström, 2020; Smietana, 2017). Yet, how gay fathers engage with, interpret, or distance themselves from these relationships remains largely unexplored.

Where research has addressed donor contact among gay fathers, findings have suggested that contact is limited. For example, Blake et al. (2016) found that only one in four gay father households maintained any contact with the egg donor post-birth, and that contact with the surrogate was far more typical. Similarly, Carone et al. (2017) found that over two-thirds of fathers had no relationship with the donor. Among those who did, some expressed disappointment at the lack of reciprocal engagement. More recent research by Jones et al. (2023) found that while almost two-thirds of single gay fathers preferred identifiable donors, less than one-third reached out and sustained contact post-birth. These studies indicate that while the desire for openness exists, translating this desire into long-term donor relationships remains inconsistent.

The reasons for this inconsistency are multifaceted. Existing clinical practices often prioritize surrogacy-related counseling, leaving little room for exploration of the donor’s ongoing relevance to the child and parents. Surrogates are also typically involved throughout pregnancy, often forming positive relationships with intended parents, leaving all parties in the hope of maintaining those bonds post-birth. In contrast, donors are usually anonymous and absent post-conception (Kneebone et al., 2022). Additionally, many gay fathers adopt partial disclosure practices, where they only tell their children about the surrogate but not the donor (Blake et al., 2016). Finally, counseling around the psychosocial implications of donor contact is limited, despite gay fathers’ desire for informed decision-making throughout surrogacy,

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demonstrated by their reaching out to peer support and online communities (Fantus, 2020; Fantus & Newman, 2022; Millbank, 2019).

Donor contact also intersects with legal access. In Australia, identifying information about donors is restricted until donor-conceived children turn 18, unless both parties agree to earlier disclosure via parental request (Kelly & Dempsey, 2016). In the UK, children conceived after 2005 are similarly granted access to identifying donor data at age 18 (Ng, 2023). However, these policies are increasingly bypassed through consumer DNA testing and the Donor Sibling Registry, enabling early contact regardless of formal pathways (Carone et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2023; Kramer, 2022). As such, legal anonymity has increasingly been overtaken by technological and social openness, forcing families, donors, and agencies to adapt more flexibly.

Additionally, gay fathers' motivations for contacting egg donors often reflect deeper existential and psychosocial concerns. For example, fathers often view donor contact as both a right for their child and an opportunity to support identity and safety in the future (Jones et al., 2023; Fantus. & Newman, 2022). With many gay fathers pursuing parenthood later in life without the support of their parents, it may be that donor contact offers both medical reassurance and a sense of ongoing kinship, especially if the father is concerned about the child's future after his death.

Indeed, there is a growing body of evidence to support early disclosure of donor conception to children. For instance, children who learn about their genetic origins early tend to have better psychological outcomes in adolescence, including stronger identity formation, greater family cohesion, and fewer feelings of confusion or betrayal (Ilioi et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2019). However, such findings have implications for the timing and nature of donor contact when legal and systemic barriers to early disclosure are present. In addition, the lack of counseling for navigating father-donor relationships is consistently highlighted across the literature as a gap (Fantus. & Newman, 2022; Ng, 2023).

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Therefore, this study sought to address that gap by offering interpretive phenomenological insights into the lived experiences of gay fathers who have reached out to their egg donors for the first time post-birth. Following the protocols of IPA (Smith, 1996), this research sought gay fathers' subjective interpretations of their lived experiences of contacting their child's egg donor post-birth, from both a negative and positive stance. In particular, this study aimed to understand: (1) gay fathers' motivations for contacting their donor post-birth; (2) the relational dynamics that ensued; (3) the availability or absence of psychoeducation and implications counseling; (4) the psychological and family-level impacts; and (5) any changes in self-perception or worldview they perceive relate to their experiences.

Method

Study Design

This interpretative phenomenological study sits comfortably within a critical realist framework, which recognizes the socially constructed nature of experience and the existence of underlying causal mechanisms (Fletcher, 2017; Willig, 2013). While individuals' interpretations of reality are subjective, they may also shape and be shaped by social structures. This aligns with the hermeneutic foundation of IPA, which posits that lived experience is always situated in a broader sociocultural context (Larkin et al., 2006). Furthermore, the idiographic and double hermeneutic nature of IPA makes it well-suited to exploring complex psychosocial phenomena, such as egg donor contact by gay fathers (McCormack & Joseph, 2018; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Participants

Six gay fathers from Australia and the US participated in the study (see Table 1). All had contacted their egg donor post-birth, and none of the participants had known her previously. Participants were recruited through purposive, homogeneous sampling via online support networks and snowballing methods. This sample size aligns with IPA's emphasis on in-depth engagement

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with a small purposive sample for whom the topic has personal significance (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Participants included both single and coupled fathers.

[Insert Table 1]

Procedure

Following ethics approval, participants were provided with study information and asked to provide verbal and written informed consent. Semi-structured interviews of around 60 minutes duration were conducted via secure video call using a semi-structured interview schedule. This format allowed participants to explore personally significant aspects of their experiences, while facilitating the co-construction of meaning through the double hermeneutic process (Smith, 1996; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were used throughout. The authors sought reflexivity throughout the interviews and analysis, setting aside any biases that could influence interpretation of the data set (McCormack & Joseph, 2018).

Data Analysis

The data set was analyzed following the seven-step IPA guideline from Smith et al. (2021) (see Table 2). The second author analyzed all transcripts, while the first author independently analysed 25%. Each case was analyzed in detail before moving on to the next. Initial notes were transformed into experiential statements, which were then grouped into themes. After independent analysis, researchers met to reach consensus on emergent themes through iterative discussion. An audit trail of all recordings and notes was kept (McCormack & Joseph, 2018).

[Insert Table 2]

Findings

This study sought to understand the negative and positive subjective experiences of gay fathers who contacted their egg donors post-birth. In particular, we sought an insider's perspective on: (1) fathers' motivations for contact; (2) the nature and evolution of contact; (3) whether these fathers had received any formal guidance on contacting the donor, such as implications counselling or psychoeducation; (4) the personal and family-level impacts of

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donor contact; and (5) any changes in self-perception or worldview that these fathers perceived related to their experiences.

Six gay fathers (two Australian, four American) of donor-conceived children participated in the study. All had initiated post-birth contact with their egg donor. No fathers had known their donor previously. One superordinate theme, *Building This House Right from the Start*, captured fathers' deliberate, values-driven approach to promoting transparency with their child while remaining attuned to the donor's role and needs. This overarching narrative was supported by six subordinate themes: *Right to Know*, *Leap of Faith*, *Unfolding Implications*, *Open Arms*, *Empathetic Sensitivity*, and *Defining Who We Are*. Together, these themes described a thoughtful, intentional process in which fathers sought to honor the anticipated identity needs of their child, despite the absence of formal guidance. Contact was often initiated as a *Leap of Faith*, characterized by vulnerability, uncertainty (*Unfolding Implications*), and *Empathetic Sensitivity* toward the egg donor. All fathers experienced reciprocal warmth and generosity, which improved over time for most (*Open Arms*). In turn, father's appreciation and admiration of the egg donor deepened. Over time, this spilled over to a positive redefinition of parenthood and family within these complex and evolving kinship systems (*Defining Who We Are*).

Right to Know

Fathers described transparency about donor conception as a core value, framed morally as good parenting practice, and the child's right to know. Many fathers felt that knowing one's origins was essential to identity development, and that their child was likely to want contact with the donor, as part of that journey:

I always had an intention of wanting to have contact with the egg donor because I think my child, when she grows up, would want to know who her real mother is (Adam).

Reflecting on secrecy in his own family of origin, John sought to illustrate the emotional cost of secrecy and the relational damage that can result:

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I've been through the blind adoption experience ... I fantasied about who my biological parents were ... I don't think it's healthy to hold secrets ... After I met [my biological parents], I wanted my [adoptive] parents to know about this. It was a disaster. It revealed all the anxieties, worries, and resentments ... So, I said, let's just build this house the right way from the start, and so I did (John).

Pragmatically, Lee viewed donor contact as a proactive way to access ongoing medical information for Hana:

Eventually she may have some illness later in life. So, I think we need to know... that's why I wanted to pursue that (Lee).

Similarly, with protectiveness, he also recognised Hana's future needs for family:

When both of us die, at least she knows she's got a family over there ... half-siblings ... grandparents (Lee).

Leap of Faith

Fathers described contacting the donor as emotionally charged and without precedent. Based upon values of openness and moral responsibility, John's determination to reach out to the donor was guided by his personal history and an intuitive moral compass:

I was so fixed in my own experience and how I wanted to do that differently... They could have told me 9 out of 10 unveilings result in horrible relationships ... and I probably still would've said ... I'm going ahead with this ... through an intuitive sense of what is the right way to go (John).

David recognized this was uncharted territory, and how little extant guidance there was on donor relationships:

It often feels a little bit like a brave new world ... But I've been a little surprised by how little is accessible around these topics (David).

For some fathers, their interest in a relationship seemed to eclipse their awareness of the donor's wishes relating to contact. With hindsight, Charlie regretted disregarding the donor's preferences at the outset and trying to force a relationship:

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She had checked she does not want a relationship moving forward and given this was so important for our surrogate, I just don't understand why our standards were different for our egg donor I think I would have given that a little more thought and it might have slowed the process down a bit (Charlie).

Unfolding Implications

Despite their conviction, fathers also described ambivalence and self-doubt. Their reflections revealed a mix of guilt, shame, fear of rejection, and concern that contact might confuse or burden their children.

Reflecting on the rights of his twins and such children more broadly, Adam reveals existential doubt about gay fatherhood and loss without donor contact:

I don't know if this is the right way. I sometimes wonder if gay men and women should have kids... I wonder am I doing the right thing for them, you know can a gay couple provide the best for them that they can? In a way, I'm thinking to myself like I'm denying them their mother's voice, right?" (Adam)

On the other hand, Lee remembers implications counseling that recommended closing the door on donor contact:

"You just have to tell her that she doesn't have a mother, she has two fathers." She said

"No, no, no, you don't do that It's too dangerous and the child would be confused (Lee).

Remaining in anxious self-doubt about self-as-father, Adam felt torn between opening the door to donor contact and his fear of being eclipsed:

I want them to have that connection but I'm also a little bit afraid that the connection will be too strong and they're not going to want to be with us (Adam).

However, in some families, donor contact had not been sustained. At a loss, Peter reflected on a fading relationship with his donor, followed by a fallout. Striving to make sense of his experience, language barriers came to mind:

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We connected and then at some point we had a fallout... We couldn't communicate, there was a language barrier between the two of us because all the chats were through translated phrases (Peter).

For Charlie, his own anxieties spilled over to concerns about timing and his daughter's emotional readiness. In turn, protectiveness raised ethical dilemmas for him as a father:

She's really bright and I don't want to keep anything from her. At the same time, she is so emotionally attuned I think something like this might make her really sad but again, that's not a reason not to share but maybe think more about the timing of this so she can fully understand it and not just be stuck with the grief (Charlie).

Open Arms

These fathers tended to take an open stance with communication and a see-as-we-go approach to ongoing contact. For most fathers, experiences of contact were characterized by a surprisingly easy warmth, openness, and reciprocity:

I love that there's an openness to figuring out as we go along... .. it just feels like very organic it just kind happened and just felt like — easy (David).

Feeling welcomed both by the donor and her extended family, Lee felt as if he could relax in positive closure:

We feel that we are being embraced. I think this is so important for Hana to feel loved it's also good to know that her mother and her mother's family all love her... ..I feel relieved really great — I feel complete that everything's fallen into place. I couldn't have asked for anything more (Lee).

Underpinned by immense gratitude, David reaffirms his belief in humanity:

We're very grateful to her thanks to her, we have these two wonderful children she's just this kind of person with a very open soul and her open mind to figuring out how things might work it just makes me feel good about humanity (David).

For David, reciprocal admiration revealed support on the sidelines:

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I think the relationship is one of, you know, great mutual admiration. A desire to kind of watch from the outside, each other's family building process, right? (David).

Reflecting on his donor's generosity, gratitude in Peter revealed altruism:

I felt I was given a great favour. And I wanted to return that to others (Peter).

Empathetic Sensitivity

Fathers demonstrated sensitivity and awareness of donors' boundaries by carefully navigating the evolving relationship. David balanced connection with empathic sensitivity for his child's egg donor:

She was very clear ... "No relationship; I will be the egg donor" ... I want to be sensitive to the fact that this could be a little unusual ... there is a child with your genetic makeup. You might not want to know too much. You might feel like — when I look at a picture of him, "Do I see myself there?" ... that might feel a little uncomfortable, particularly for someone who is not yet a mother or parent themselves (David).

Based on perceptions of emotional maturity in his children and a commitment to transparency, Adam found himself in a difficult position asking Grace to delay contact until Anton was emotionally ready:

The reason we haven't met yet is my daughter wants to meet her — and she's ready — but my son is saying he's not ready. And so, he's 6 and a half years old ... we're giving him that (Adam).

Recognizing the impact of his decisions surrounding donor contact, Charlie wisely valued intentional decision-making:

My decisions ... do have potentially profound impacts on the people around me — and that's really important (Charlie).

Defining Who We Are

Over time, engaging with egg donors prompted fathers to reflect on family roles, parental identity, and the language used to describe these relationships. Confident in his parental role as

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father, Lee reflected in a matter-of-fact way about Hanah's right to know: "I just think that she should know where she came from," although contact fell short of an invitation to co-parent:

Not, not so much the mother figure ... I just feel that my child would want to know who her parents are. That's all. I don't think I wanted the egg donor to play a role in her upbringing. Nothing like that (Lee).

Others grappled with broader questions of parenthood, redefining themselves in ways that transcended concepts of parenthood anchored in genetics. For example, Adam positively redefined himself as a father in a way that was both relational and experiential rather than just biological:

I think of parent as the person who, you know, brings up a child. Dad is the dad that raises you right? The dad who has put in the time and the effort (Adam).

Striving to define his relationship with his child's donor, John let go of traditional norms surrounding kinship and ageing, revealing a more flexible and pro-age way of thinking about family. Describing shared purpose and connection with the donor, John's comfort with being both an older brother-like figure and a co-parent, revealed that the act of sharing Sam had deepened their relationship:

That's an interesting thing given the age-gap, where I feel more paternal at times. But then we're talking about a child that's biologically both of ours. So, there's that level-plane ... maybe in-between being almost parental, and being, you know, co-parent with her? Is the sense of being like a big brother? Maybe that's where I'm most comfortable. We're in this together being parents, but we are very strongly tethered by being tethered (John).

Discussion

This study explored gay fathers' perspectives of contacting their egg donors post-birth, through both a negative and positive lens. None of the egg donors were previously known to these fathers. Through IPA (Smith, 1996), this study sought to understand how fathers made sense of this contact and its impact on them and their families. Although each family's experience was unique, there was a convergence of data relating to the future-focused stance of intentionality in these

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fathers, valuing of transparency, and honoring their child's right to know who and where they came from in anticipation of their future identity needs.

All the fathers in this study challenged surrogacy norms by highlighting the egg donor's ongoing relational significance to their families. In contrast with much of the extant literature, which indicates that gay and straight families more frequently engage in disclosure that is partial, delayed, or framed as sensitive, these fathers endorsed transparency. Similarly, these fathers were committed to the child's right to know, alongside the awareness that this was important for the child's identity needs and potential future medical needs. Rather than being a static act of telling, this intentional transparency was found to be an ongoing process of identity-building within the evolving family system.

As such, the superordinate theme, *Building This House Right from the Start*, captured this intentionality and a future-oriented approach to parenting. Fathers sought to construct family narratives grounded in honesty and openness, not only for their children's benefit but to avoid the secrecy and identity confusion that they had experienced themselves through adoption or late discovery of their genetic origin. As a result, contact with donors was positioned as a future-focused and protective act of relationally scaffolding their children.

Importantly, these motivations were also shaped by fathers' own maturity. Many were older first-time parents, with significant age gaps between themselves and their children. In this context, contacting the donor was sometimes imagined as offering children kinship and continuity in the event of the father's death or incapacity. This highlights a relational foresight not previously explored in the literature.

Yet, this contact was not without psychosocial and relational complexity. *Leap of Faith* captured the initial uncertainty and emotional vulnerability many fathers experienced. There was little precedent, guidance, or formal support to navigate these decisions. Few had access to counseling tailored to donor-linking, despite this being a major identity-shaping event for these gay fathers and the expanding family. In some cases, fathers were actively discouraged from contact by

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agency staff or clinicians, reflecting persistent heteronormative assumptions about what families should look like. This absence of support left these fathers navigating the process alone, relying on personal values, intuition, and peer-led knowledge.

In turn, the theme *Unfolding Implications* captured the emotional ambivalence experienced by these fathers. Despite wanting contact in the best interests of their children, these men reflected on fears of being displaced by the egg donor, revealing internalized stigma about self-as-father in comparison to the traditional primacy of the maternal-child bond. Where fears surfaced about donor contact being confusing for their children, this may have reflected fathers' own anxieties. In such situations, it would appear that some family members were left in a state of delayed, silent curiosity while fathers waited for the right time to make contact. Additionally, some fathers questioned their own adequacy as parents or grappled with internalized doubts about gay men's legitimacy as fathers. These findings reveal how non-normative paths to parenthood can provoke self-doubt and a heightened sensitivity to stigma in gay fathers.

Nonetheless, contact with donors for these fathers was described as a major turning point in their lives. The theme *Open Arms* described donors' surprising openness and the emotional relief fathers experienced when their children were accepted. These moments fostered a sense of relational completeness and, in some cases, an emergent kinship between families that extended beyond the donor to include other family members. Fathers expressed gratitude and awe, often describing donors in altruistic terms that reinforced the relational meaning of donor conception. These accounts challenge any assumptions that egg donation is impersonal or transactional, particularly in the context of commercial arrangements.

Throughout these interviews, *Empathetic Sensitivity* was a defining feature of how fathers approached these relationships. Fathers were found to actively avoid pressure or overreach. This was especially evident when navigating how and when to involve children, with some fathers deferring to their children's readiness and preferences. Rather than imposing a role on the donor, fathers sought to co-construct new relational possibilities, led by consent, respect, and emotionally

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attuned contact that followed the donor's lead. When fathers reflected on experiences of trying to force a relationship that overlooked the donor's wishes, it led to regret and to questions about why their "standards were different for our egg donor" (Charlie) and how the situation could have been approached at a respectful pace.

The final theme, *Defining Who We Are*, reflected how donor contact prompted fathers to revisit and redefine what it meant to be a parent. Participants were found to be struggling to make sense of parenthood, with common themes of it being experiential rather than merely biological, for example, "the dad who has put in the time and the effort" (Adam). Similarly, these fathers struggled to define their deepening relationships with egg donors, who ranged from co-parents and kin to friends and brother-like figures. The evolving nature of these ties often went beyond existing kinship terms. As John put it, "we are very strongly tethered by being tethered," a reflection of shared parenthood and purpose. Such narratives represented a shift toward more intentional models of family, moving beyond normative concepts and biology to a more inclusive model grounded in connection, care, and self-reflection.

Crucially, no father in this study expressed regret for initiating donor contact. Even those experiencing rejection by the donor reached out in ways that reflected their values relating to transparency and the child's right to know. All fathers acknowledged risks and challenges, contextualizing these as part of an evolving journey, requiring determination, empathy, reflexivity, and maturity. In this study, connections with donors did not undermine the integrity of gay father households, even where contact waned or dissolved. Rather, it affirmed that knowing 'where and who you come from' can coexist with knowing 'who raised you', especially when transparency and trust are positioned as the foundations of a healthy family life.

Strengths & Limitations

Although qualitative studies necessarily involve researcher interpretation, independent auditing brought credibility to the findings. Furthermore, the interviews did not restrict participants' meaning, making it unclear whether that was negative or positive, thereby minimizing the

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possibility that the findings were subject to participants' biases in recall and perception that can occur during interviews. The researchers did not seek generalisability nor cause-and-effect, but rather ideographic insights from a purposive sample. Future studies could formulate hypotheses based on these themes to assess generalisability.

Conclusions

This study sheds new light on a dimension of gay fatherhood that has remained underresearched. The findings contribute to a broader redefinition of parenthood and family, where intentionality, transparency, purpose, connection, and the child's right to know are central. This study calls for inclusive counseling on the psychosocial implications of egg donor linking among gay intended fathers to promote informed decision-making. The findings also call for accessible counseling post-birth, as relational challenges and opportunities arise in these complex and evolving family systems.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Table 1

Participant and child demographic information at the time of the study

Participant (pseudonym)	Age (years)	Relationship status	Children(pseudonym)	Age (years)	Country
Lee	60	Coupled	Hana	17	Australia
Peter	44	Coupled	Aubrey	2	Australia
John	59	Single	Sam	8	US
David	46	Coupled	Eliot, Elisa	7, 4	US
Charlie	46	Coupled	Annie, Sage	6, 1	US
Adam	41	Coupled	Grace, Anton	6, 6	US

Appendix 2

Table 2

Analytical process for interpretative phenomenological analysis for interview (McCormack & Joseph, 2018; Smith et al., 2021).

Stage	Process
1	Bracket personal biases/preconceptions that could influence data interpretation
2	Establish an audit trail of the data, so that interpretations can be traced from initial themes to the final thematic narrative
3	Line-by-line reading of the data to select experiential claims, concerns and understandings of individual participants
4	Identification of thematic patterns, noting convergence and divergence
5	Cross-referencing of themes with psychological and theoretical knowledge and analysis of positionality, roles and relationships, organisations, systems, stories, language and its context to interpret participant meaning
6	Generating an illustrative structural map of themes
7	Completing an independent data audit with consensus reached through debate
8	Engaging in an iterative/inductive cycle of returning to the data for reinterpretation
9	Developing a narrative, with vivid extracts grounded in the data, to take the reader through a convincing interpretation theme-by-theme.