Julia Teschlade, Almut Peukert

Creating a family through surrogacy: Negotiating parental positions, familial boundaries and kinship practices

Zusammenfassung

Familiengründung durch Leihmutterschaft – Aushandlungen zu Elternschaft, familialen und verwandtschaftlichen Grenzen

Im Fokus des Artikels stehen gleichgeschlechtliche Männerpaare, die ihren Kinderwunsch durch Leihmutterschaft erfüllen. Als Zwei-Väter-Familie müssen sie auf die gesellschaftliche Erwartung reagieren, dass jedes Kind auch eine Mutter hat und diese vakante Position erklären.
Anhand narrativer Interviews mit schwulen Elternpaaren aus Deutschland analysieren wir das ‚doing (being) family' aus zwei Perspektiven: Erstens nehmen wir die Aushandlungen von Eltern- und Familienrollen in den Blick. Die Väter verwenden unterschiedliche Strategien, um die Abwesenheit der Mutter zu erklären. Zweitens leisten die Paare Abgrenzungsarbeit, um als die einzigen Eltern des Kindes wahrgenommen zu werden. Wir argumentieren, dass gesellschaftliche Diskurse nur unzulängliche Begrifflichkeiten bereitstellen, um die Diversität von (Familien-) Beziehungen jenseits der Geschlechterdifferenzierung von Vater und Mutter abzubilden.

Schlüsselwörter
Leihmutterschaft, Eizellspende, Gleichgeschlechtliche Paare, doing family, Elternschaft

Summary

This article focuses on male same-sex couples who fulfil their wish for a child through gestational surrogacy. As two-father families they must engage with society's expectation that every child has both a mother and a father. Thus, the position of the mother must be filled, or at least accounted for. The empirical data derive from interviews with male same-sex couples from Germany. Following the grounded theory approach, we analyse the couples' 'doing (being) family' from two perspectives. First, we discuss how family roles are negotiated within the family formation process. The fathers employ different strategies to address the issue of the 'absent mother'. Second, we examine how the couples draw boundaries in family formation processes to ensure that they are seen as the child's only parents. We argue that social discourses lack broader definitions of (family) relations beyond the gendered categorizations of father and mother.

Keywords
surrogacy, egg donation, gay fathers, doing family, parenthood

1 Introduction: Contextualizing family, kinship and social change

In the context of assisted reproduction, the idea that family 'just happens' is contested. Rather, family and kinship are *generally* "performance achievements and a result of social construction processes" (Jurczyk 2014: 119). Gay and lesbian couples who wish to have children engage in complex family arrangements involving social parents with and

without biological ties, gamete donors, gestational carriers[1], lovers and friends (Weeks/ Donovan/Heaphy 1999). Family composition varies depending on whether the couples fulfill their wish for a child through co-parenting arrangements, adoption, foster care, gamete donation or surrogacy. Despite increasing options for family formation, parenthood and family are not solely individual processes of negotiating meanings, roles and responsibilities: what constitutes a family is always also defined by social norms and law. Furthermore, New Kinship Studies emphasize that the cultural meanings of blood, lineage and genes are historically grounded and entangled with their contemporary perceptions. They "are mobilized to create the inclusions and exclusions definitive of kinship" (Franklin/McKinnon 2000: 275). Families must negotiate their kinship and family practices around these expectations, and their subject positions are socially embedded and structured.

In this paper, we focus on gay male couples who fulfill their wish for a child through gestational surrogacy. In order to become parents, it is a biotechnological requirement for gay couples to use donated oocytes to create an embryo with their own biogenetic material. This usually requires the help of at least two women: a gestational carrier and an egg donor.[2] The donated oocytes are inseminated with the sperm of one of the male partners (in vitro fertilization/IVF) and the embryo is transferred to the uterus of a second woman—the gestational carrier. Both women receive monetary compensation, and both usually relinquish their (potential) parental rights through contractual agreements,[3] making the two fathers the only legal and social parents of the child. This way, conception, gestation and social mothering do not coincide. As a consequence, their child grows up without a *mother*,[4] although two women were involved in the process of conception.

Nevertheless, gay couples must integrate both the egg donor[5] and the gestational carrier into their family narrative, because they cannot hide the fact that they received help from "facilitating others" (Mitchell/Green 2007: 82). Moreover, they must define

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1   Gestational carrier is the term most commonly used for a so-called surrogate mother. It describes a woman who carries and gives birth to a child who is not genetically related to her but was conceived through egg donation and IVF. Gestational surrogacy (GS) replaced traditional surrogacy (TS) arrangements, in which the woman is genetically related to the child.

2   The development from TS to GS indicates a complex interplay of different interests and power relations between the reproductive industry, medical professionals, commissioning parents, as well as gestational carriers and egg donors. These are structured by social, legal, and biotechnological opportunities and restraints. For further discussion see e.g. Teschlade (2018).

3   Gestational surrogacy is legal in many parts of the United States. Legal parentage can be assigned to the intended parents before the child is born (pre-birth order) or afterwards (post-birth order). In post-birth states, the intended parents and gestational carriers usually appear in court within a few days after the birth.

4   Within the network of global reproductive economies and chains of procreation and care, the concept of "parenthood" and especially "motherhood" is contested (Ergas/Jenson/Michel 2017). In this paper, we refer to the term *mother* only when talking about the normative perception of motherhood, where the genetic, gestational, legal and social relatedness between the child and the woman coincide. We differentiate between genetic, gestational, legal and/or social mother only if analytically necessary. However, we argue that *mother* and *father*, or more general, *parent*, should only refer to nurturing, caring and parental practices. In contrast to our use of the term *mother*, we refer to *father* as the social parent (while the legal and genetic relatedness for some fathers coincide). See also chapter 2 and for further discussion Peukert et al. (2018).

5   In the United States, egg donation is not necessarily anonymous. Couples have the opportunity to choose a 'known' donor (Teschlade 2018).

and draw boundaries between themselves—as the only parents who constitute a family with their child—and the technological process of procreation. However, societal expectations and cultural scripts demand that the couples engage with discourses on motherhood. Especially, the hegemonic narrative that every person not only has at least one father, but also a biological and genetic relation to at least one woman, must be addressed. Even if the woman is not considered to be a mother in a social and caring way, the position must be filled or at least accounted for.

A considerable body of research has examined how gay couples become fathers through surrogacy and their decision making accompanying this process (Berkowitz 2013), how their family practices are shaped by the traditional kinship patterns of the heteronormative social structure as well as new forms of kinship subjectivities (e.g. Nebeling Petersen 2018), and how both affective and economic exchanges structure relationships between intended gay fathers and gestational carriers (Smietana 2017; Moreno 2016). However, the question of how gay couples negotiate different family roles in third-party reproduction remains open. Therefore, we focus on intimate narratives of gay couples founding a family in the context of ambivalent (shifting) normative frameworks.

In general, commercial surrogacy remains highly contested in the field of assisted reproduction. Feminist scholars discuss surrogacy as commodification of female reproductive labor and oppression of women (e.g. Rothman 1989). Ethnographic research, however, shows that the situation of gestational carriers is complex and ambivalent (see e.g. Jacobson 2016; Rudrappa 2015; Teman 2010).

Shedding light on surrogacy practices from the perspective of intended parents, we draw on interviews with German couples who commissioned gestational carriers in the United States and analyze their 'doing (being) family' from two perspectives. First, we draw on the negotiation of family roles within the family formation process. We argue that the family positions and concepts must be negotiated against the backdrop of a societal understanding of a child having two parents (not three or four) and the expectation that a child has both a father and a mother. In the second part of this article, we show how the setting and unsettling of rules and boundaries is necessary within processes of family and (potential) kinship formation. This entails practices that negotiate the (ir)relevance of kinship relations through boundary-making processes.

In the following sections, we briefly introduce the normative perception of contemporary family life and its heteronormative imperative, and provide an overview of gay parenting and surrogacy. Next, we present the empirical data and research methods. Finally, we analyze how the couples who were interviewed define the role of the *mother*, negotiate boundaries and integrate the egg donor and/or the gestational carrier into their family narrative. Here, they are confronted with an unexpected demand to engage with the meaning of kinship against the backdrop of scientific knowledge on genetic lineage. We conclude with a theoretical outlook on the construction of family.

2 Contemporary family formation practices in the context of changing norms and societal institutions

Today, lesbian and gay families are a social reality. Due to increasing legal equality and greater public visibility and recognition, gays and lesbians form their families outside of (former) heterosexual relationships. New reproductive technologies have created opportunities to become parents with the help of techniques such as donor insemination, in vitro fertilization (IVF), and surrogacy.

Nevertheless, the traditional ideal of the nuclear family persists despite changes in adoption law, greater acceptance of gay and lesbian parents, and a greater diversity of families (Bergold et al. 2017).[6] Until today, the ideal of the heterosexual couple with biologically related children has constituted the hegemonic order of family constellations. While this seems contradictory and creates a tension between social reality and social norms, it also demonstrates how social institutions like the gender binary, coupledom and heteronormativity regulate our intimate and familial daily practices.

The nuclear family, consisting of a heterosexual couple and their biologically related children, is organized along the lines of gender differentiation. Societal assumptions of dyadic, heterosexual procreation and two-parent-families as 'natural' are based on the gender binary. This ideal is built upon a gendered division of labor, with a male breadwinner and father, and a homemaking and child-rearing mother. It has been regarded as the (mostly implicit) hegemonic reference since the end of the 19th century. Closely intertwined with the societal assumption of the gender binary is the norm of romantic coupledom. Following the idea of exclusively heterosexual procreation, parents are differentiated as fathers and mothers. It is common sense that children always have at least and only a mother and a father (e.g. Peukert et al. 2018). This was made visible and criticized as heteronormative by queer theorists: Originally described by Warner (1993), heteronormativity refers to the societal norms of the gender binary and heterosexuality. We reference this concept when discussing practices and institutions that privilege certain kinship ties as well as intimate and familial ways of life that are structured by heterosexuality and the gender binary. 'Others' who deviate from this norm are marked as 'not normal' (Butler, 2002).

Innovations in reproductive technology have challenged societal assumptions of kinship, parenthood and family. The birth of Louise Brown, the first human conceived using in vitro fertilization, in 1978 and the possibility of in vitro fertilization as well as surrogacy arrangements, called the Roman law principle *mater semper certa est*—and thus the status of 'the mother'—into question: children can now have (1) a genetic relation to a woman who provides gametes; (2) a corporeal relation to a woman who carries the fetus and gives birth to the child, (3) a legal relation to a woman who has legal guardianship, and (4) a parental relationship to a woman who nurtures and cares for the child. This is a rather analytic differentiation, because the general understanding is that all four relations are embodied by one person—the mother. However, the presence of blended families and the possibilities created by reproductive technologies demand more complex handling of ascribed categories such as parenthood. With regard

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6 However, these developments are especially questioned and contested by religious, conservative and right-wing voices all over Europe.

to 'motherhood' the German legislature reacted to these changes in 1997 by introducing a definition of 'who is the mother' into §1591 of the civil code, stating that "the mother of a child is the woman who gave birth to it".

How can we best understand and explain social change regarding same-sex couple-dom, parenthood and family formation? Research demonstrates that long-term relationships are common to both heterosexual and homosexual ways of life. Weeks, Donovan and Heaphy argue that "[t]he relationship becomes the defining element within the sphere of the intimate, which provides the framework for everyday life" (Weeks/ Donovan/Heaphy 1999: 85). Referring to Giddens' concept of the "pure relationship" they find that "the transformations of intimacy, themselves the product of the breakdown of traditional narratives and legitimizing discourses under the impact of long-term cultural, social and economic forces, are making possible diverse ways of life which cut across the heterosexual dichotomy."

Similarly, studies on gay fathers show that the ideal of having a family with children is usually interlinked with romantic love and coupledom. Gay men refer to specific moments and experiences that triggered their desire to have a child, such as taking care of nieces and nephews or being introduced to adoption and surrogacy by other gay couples (see e.g. Teschlade 2018; Berkowitz/Marsiglio 2007). They often situate the beginning of their story at the moment when they met each other, which positions the couple relationship at the center of their narrative. These couples describe their wish for a child as a "natural" reproductive desire within the realm of their conventional relationship rather than something new or pioneering. The cultural repertoire people refer to when discussing couple relationships and family is shaped by cultural scripts of the social and political context they live in (Gabb/Fink 2015). Heaphy/Smart/Einarsdottir (2013) analyze this 'ordinariness' in same-sex couples' relationships, whereby greater public and legal recognition allows the couples to experience privileges formerly reserved for heterosexual couples.

While the two-parent family is an important cultural script, it is contested in the context of third-party assisted reproduction. The decision to have a child through gestational surrogacy is often preceded by thoughtful deliberation processes about alternative parenting options such as co-parenting, foster care, and adoption (e.g. Berkowitz/ Marsiglio 2007). Surrogacy, however, allows gay men to procreate as a couple and to build a two-parent family: they can have a child which is biologically related to one of the partners, and often choose an egg donor who somehow resembles the non-biological parent (Mitchell/Green 2007; Teschlade 2018). Nevertheless, the normative societal expectation that every child has two parents—and that one of them must be the mother—creates a delicate situation for these couples: with two fathers, they are already a two-parent family.

3 Methods and data

The article draws on in-depth interviews with gay male couples from Germany who intend to become or already have become fathers with the help of a gestational carrier and an egg donor. Between May 2015 and May 2017, a total of 26 couple interviews

were conducted as part of author one's research project on access to assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) in Germany and Israel[7] in the wider context of human and reproductive rights.[8] The couples were interviewed about their wish for a child and their experiences with surrogacy in order to analyze how legal, political, and social contexts influence their reproductive choices and decision-making practices. Interviewing both partners is advantageous in that the couple's negotiations can be researched *in situ* (Wimbauer/Motakef 2017).

In the tradition of the interpretive paradigm, we are interested in the subjective meanings and interpretations of the interviewees. The couples' narratives can be viewed as a "'cite' for exploring" the ways that their story of becoming parents is "linked to relational discourse at a cultural level … involve[s] socially shaped relating orientations and practices … and how couple stories and practices … emerge through interaction in relationships" (Heaphy/Einarsdottir 2012: 54). The interpretation of their stories must be embedded in the specific legal, social, political, and cultural contexts in which the narrative is produced. Following the grounded theory approach (Corbin/Strauss 2008), crucial segments of the interviews were analyzed and empirical findings were discussed with colleagues to ensure the quality, transparency, and accountability of the analysis. All of the interview data were anonymized and masked.

The sample includes 15 couples in different stages of their surrogacy process, eight of whom live in Germany and seven of whom live in Israel.[9] 13 couples commissioned a gestational carrier in the U.S., and two commissioned a gestational carrier in Southeast Asia. All couples are cisgender male, economically affluent, and have achieved higher education; all interviewees but one possess at least a first university (bachelor's) degree and work in higher professional employment. 14 of the couples are either in a *Lebenspartnerschaft* (civil union) or have married abroad. Eight couples already had children at the time of their first interview. Six couples were interviewed at least twice. In this article, we focus on interviews with four German couples who provide remarkable examples showing how negotiating parental roles, familial rules, and intimate familial practices can be an intricate process of inclusion, distinction, and exclusion.

4 Roles, rules and boundaries: Negotiating parenthood, family and kinship in times of ART

Following a social interactionist approach, we analyzed family and kinship as a social practice. While cultural scripts are set with respect to the nuclear family, the men author one interviewed needed to fill the 'gap' created by the mother's absence from the family constellation, explaining their family arrangement in the normative and normalizing context of the gender binary and heterosexual coupledom and family formation. On the

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7   The comparison of Israel and Germany will be discussed elsewhere.
8   The research was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and conducted in the context of the Joint Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program "Human Rights under Pressure—Ethics, Law, and Politics" at the Freie Universität Berlin (2014–2017).
9   Interviews were conducted in German (in Germany) and in English (in Israel). They were audio recorded and verbatim transcribed. Quotes used in this paper from the German sample were translated from German to English and have been edited slightly for readability.

one hand, this implies increased options and leeway, on the other hand, it causes uncertainty and demands constant engagement in daily interactions and social encounters. We traced the family narratives of these fathers to reconstruct how they filled these socially-produced 'gaps'. Following Plummer, we focused on "the personal experience narratives of the intimate" (Plummer 1995: 19). This approach enabled us to analyze the social role of the stories and how they perform and reflect on cultural scripts, norms, and the social order in general: "At the centre of much of this action emerge the story products: the objects which harbour the meanings that have to be handled through interaction" (Plummer 1995: 21). The interviewees' stories yielded information about personal and intimate encounters with the egg donor, their extended families, and gestational carriers. We now examine how these stories serve the purpose of permanently (de)integrating the gestational carrier and the egg donor into their family and kinship narrative.

4.1   Parental roles vs. kinship ties: The mother in two-dad families

In this section, we show how the fathers in two-parent, same-sex families engage with ascribed and socially-expected parental roles as well as cultural understandings of lineage that create inclusions and exclusions of kinship. The negotiation of these with the 'outside world' was a persistent narrative in the interviews. The interviewees were absolutely clear about being the only parents of the child. Simultaneously, the position of the mother(s) in their narrative was a matter of discussion: While the couples adapt different naming practices to include the women in their *kinship* narrative, they exclude the women from their *family* narrative.

4.1.1 "Who is my mum?" Egg donor or gestational carrier signified as mother

Usually, the answer to the question of which woman—egg donor or gestational carrier—will be more important to the child in the future changes in the course of pregnancy. Attributing greater importance to the egg donor is relatively common in the early stages of the surrogacy journey.[10] However, once the gestational carrier is pregnant, this perception may change, because the relationship with the gestational carrier often intensifies during the pregnancy.[11] Gert (52) said that he and his partner Bastian (35) wished to present a transparent and coherent 'how I was conceived' story to their children once they were old enough. When interviewed for the first time, they were at the very beginning of the surrogacy process. "If we are going to be asked later: 'Who is my mum?'", Gert explained, "we want to be able to provide a name and a picture and, if possible, a personal contact". He elaborated on how they would keep contact with both egg donor and gestational carrier. They wished to provide their child with the possibility of creating a genealogical lineage in the event that such kinship became important later in their life (see also Nordqvist 2014). Nevertheless, he did not elaborate on whether he means the egg donor, the gestational carrier, or both women when he refers to "the

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10   For a discussion on the "primacy of genetics and devaluation of the gestational role" see e.g. Dillaway (2008: 310).
11   Teman's (2010) study on surrogacy in Israel shows that couples build a stronger relationship to the gestational carrier, while the role of the egg donor turns out not to be as relevant as they expected.

mum". This reveals contingencies: referring to a *mum* is seen as essential, and in family *as well as* kinship narratives a 'mother figure' must not be missing. While she is not present in the family, she also cannot be entirely absent in terms of lineage and kinship. At the same time, the question of who exactly she might be appears negligible.

Karim (42) and Paul (39) take a somewhat different approach. The couple was about five months into their surrogacy pregnancy and expecting twins when we talked about their journey to parenthood. They received help from their mutual friend Kimmi, who donated her oocytes. Having an intimate personal relationship with the donor was particularly important to them because they did not want their children to live with a "blank space" in their genealogy. Paul explained that they want their children to be able to get to know their "mother," whom he equates with genetic heritage:

"It is good if the children can really get to know their mother and aren't in the situation 'Where is the other half of my descent?', right? And this would leave a blank space that I don't want anybody to have to put up with."

When asked about Kimmi's role in their family constellation, Karim explained that once the children are born, they will refer to Kimmi as *the mother*: "So we are not going to show them a picture and say 'This is mummy', but we are going to say 'This is Kimmi, your mother.'" While Kimmi signifies mother, they do not ascribe a mothering role to her: in their understanding, *mummy* describes the social role of a caring and nurturing parent, while *mother* is a more technical and legalistic term. By their logic, *mother* describes only the genealogical relationship between Kimmi and the children— which might be irritating, as one expects a social role and responsibilities following from this. This disentangles motherhood from parenthood and solely entangles it with hegemonic understandings of lineage and kinship. Yet, the children are welcome to stay with Kimmi: "If they want to see her, they can always come to her. However, it is clear they belong to us, and basta"[12], Paul explained. For them, it is obvious that the two dads and the children constitute the nuclear family—as indicated by the exclamation "basta" that does not allow for objections. Negotiating familial roles in this sense, it is clear that while the children do have a genetic mother, Karim and Paul are the *only* parents. Thus, they reproduce the ideal of a two-parent family.

4.1.2 No need for a mother: Sticking with the technical terms

Frank (53) and Anton (39) deal with traditional presumptions about kinship and family in a different way. Their son Sören was born four months prior to the first interview. When asked how they would introduce the egg donor, April, and the gestational carrier, Anna, to Sören once he was old enough to understand, they explained they want to stick with the technical terms "egg donor" and "gestational carrier". Anton pondered the question: "We don't want to convey that this is your mother, but these are, well, two women, who, yes of course, you have to—like, like specific …"—here, he stopped and began talking to the baby and Frank took up the subject: "But you can use the terms that 'this is your surrogate mother and this is your egg donor.'"

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12 The expression "basta" is used in German language to say "Enough!" in order to end an (unpleasant) conversation.

Furthermore, Anton and Frank refrained from including a motherly figure in their family arrangement. In Frank's perception, they are both mother and father at the same time. However, this negotiation took place not only between Frank, Anton and the (imagined) society, but also with Anna, who does not refer to herself as the mother. When asked what they believe to be Anna's understanding of her relationship to the child, they recalled a situation in which Anna told people at work "I am carrying a baby for another couple", and she referred to Anton and Frank as "the parents".

Nevertheless, the narratives about their family are bound to rigid labels because a social discourse on definitions for family relations, kinship ties as well as naming practices beyond father and mother are still lacking (see also Silva/Smart 1999: 10). Consequently, a rigorous concept of parenthood and parental roles that are equated with the procreational role are imposed onto them, although in assisted reproduction, procreative participation does not translate into family practice.

Our analysis shows that parental roles are somewhat contingent upon the parents' interpretations of kinship, family and genealogy. This reveals the symbolic weight of the term *mother* within cultural meanings of family and kinship. Thus, *mother* is a "floating signifier" (Lévi-Strauss 1987: 63) "that absorbs rather than emits meaning … it is susceptible to multiple and even contradictory interpretations … it does not have a specific meaning itself, but functions primarily as a vehicle for absorbing meanings that viewers want to impose upon it" (Buchanan 2010). All the couples in the sample wanted to provide their children with a coherent story of how they were conceived. In doing so, they naturalize kinship as biological lineage. At the same time, they employed different strategies to deal with social expectations. The couples included both women—the egg donor as well as the gestational carrier—into a wider understanding of kinship, while excluding them from their nuclear family. Some parents referred to a *mother,* operating with a socially accepted vocabulary the children could refer to while simultaneously stretching and decoupling the term from social parental practices. Others preferred the technical terms *egg donor* and *gestational carrier* to more simply describe the relation between their children and these women rather than evoking normative associations of family relations and parental responsibilities.

4.2 Negotiating family and kinship: Boundary management in third-party assisted reproduction

Based on the negotiation of parental roles with the 'outside world', the couples interviewed here needed to establish rules for their social practice with third parties on their journey to parenthood. In third-party assisted reproduction, an institutionalized "reality of everyday life" (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 33ff.) associated with self-evident rules remains absent. The narratives of the interviewees reveal that social interactions in the context of surrogacy arrangements entail uncertainties due to their double contingency (Luhmann 1995: 103ff.). The interacting parties—intended parents, gestational carriers and egg donors as well as their significant others—cannot follow cultural scripts or a set of norms on how to perform and act. They are in an indeterminate situation which is structured by uncertainty due to a lack of institutionalized rules and complementary expectations. Consequently, the couples must negotiate these social positions and rules

implicitly and on site without prior preparation. A shared and common narrative does not (yet) exist and the cultural gaps require increased 'translation' efforts.

This becomes evident in situations in which the intended parents meet the woman who donates her oocytes and also when they encounter this woman's extended family. In this chapter, we analyze two situations in which couples met the mother of the egg donor. These situations turned out to be particularly precarious when negotiating family relations: first, the egg donors are usually quite young and often do not yet have children of their own.[13] Second, it is commonly assumed that the mother of an egg donor is not important in the process of egg donation and consequently in the process of family formation.[14] However, her presence can create a moment of crisis revealing the challenges the couples will need to cope with in order to construct the family as *their* family.

Thinking in terms of kinship and family, the mothers of the egg donors appear to highlight the reality of their daughters' involvement in family formation processes as a result of donating their eggs. Marilyn Strathern (2005) points out that due to our contemporary scientific knowledge about genes and the anticipated relationships emerging from this knowledge, kinship is constructed on biological as well as genetic information. This demands a balance of competing social and individual interests in who is considered to be part of the family and kinship narrative. This narrative discloses an ambiguous process of boundary work in a setting that is usually structured by genealogy. Knecht (2012: 111) shows that genealogies organize relationships, produce belonging and justify exclusion. While the couples interviewed here wanted to get to know the egg donor in order to learn about their child's heritage, the decision of how genetic relatedness will translate into kinship relations is not theirs alone. Arni (2008: 293) analyzes this as the paradox of the presence that evolves at the interface of reproduction and genealogy. Procreative substances like gametes or oocytes become genealogical substances: while on the one hand, genes are increasingly ascribed importance in assisted reproduction and genetic information increasingly defines belonging and identities, genetic relevance is mitigated by laws and contracts that regulate parenthood (e.g. if the sperm donor is not registered as the legal father of a child). This demands complex processes of negotiating roles ascribed by the parties involved in the process of gamete donation.

In the following section, we refer to two narratives that show how couples can find themselves in unexpected situations. Ingo (49) and Dieter (51) discussed their relationship with Diane, who donated her oocytes to them twice because they wanted their twins to be genetically related to their first-born son, Diego. Ingo recalled how they met Diane during their first trip to the United States in 2009. She invited them for dinner and her mother also made an appearance:

"She [the mother] also came around and somehow talked about her German ancestors here and whatnot and names and, it was somehow quite funny and yes, it was nice and then you can see that is what the mother looks like and she showed us a few family pictures."

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13 Conversely, the gestational carriers must have at least one child of their own before entering the surrogacy process.
14 Significantly, only the mothers and not the fathers of the egg donors were mentioned in the narratives.

This sequence shows that Ingo and Dieter implicitly negotiated genealogical certainties, while at the same time it is difficult to anticipate what will be understood as genealogy, filiation, kinship or parenthood. While Ingo greatly appreciated that Diane's mother was interested in their family, she was also perceived as intrusive. She seemed to threaten the familial unity of Ingo and Dieter by making her familial descent—and thus herself—a part of the family history, which Dieter and Ingo have never asked for. She created a position for herself in the narrative to the effect that she unintentionally crossed social boundaries.[15] Conversely, Ingo had to invest in affective boundary work. He needed to accept that Diane's mother might feel like the grandmother to the child; in an era of growing genetic relevance and understanding of kinship relations from the perspective of biological material, he felt he needed to be understanding and appreciate her interest. Strathern refers to this as the "web of moral responsibilities" (Strathern 2005: 36), people in the context of assisted reproduction engage with in order to balance "social and individual interests" (Strathern 2005: 36).

Moreover, since there are no explicit rules to be violated, Ingo and Dieter had little choice but to accommodate her. They could not complain or make their feelings obvious. Diane herself was not as involved as her mother. Although her mother probably understood that she will never be the grandmother of Ingo's and Dieter's children, she felt connected to them. From the perspective of the genealogical order, she has a *de facto* kin relationship to the children. Genealogy practices have always been a matter of negotiation; nevertheless, "[h]uman kinship is regarded as a fact of society rooted in facts of nature" (Strathern 1992: 16). In the context of reproductive technologies, these supposedly 'natural' facts are contested and openly negotiated.

Anton and Frank found themselves in a similar situation with the mother of their egg donor, April, whom they described as a young and confident woman. They also mentioned that her mother knitted a baby blanket when their first son Sören was born. When Anton traveled to the U.S. to begin the process for their second child, he also met April's mother. April asked in advance whether it was okay to bring her mother along and Anton agreed. He brought a photo book with pictures of Sören and their family.

Anton: "[…] I asked them explicitly, 'Are you interested that I send you pictures? I am sending you pictures on a regular basis.' Well, I am not going to spam them like every week, but like on a regular basis. And they said 'Of course' and that didn't come across as American, in the sense yeeeeees, but […] like they want it. They generally appreciate it. And in the end, I don't have a problem that April's mother feels a bit like a granny. They are three sisters and there aren't any other grandchildren yet."

Frank: "We have the impression that April doesn't see herself as, has some sort of a motherly feeling […]"

Anton: "She has a pretty clear idea"

Frank: "What is our role and what is her role, but her mother, well, we don't have the feeling that she feels like the granny but somehow towards that direction. And with the blanket she knitted, we were really touched. […] We got the impression that she kind of thinks 'my first grandchild' and we are probably not against it if some sort of contact develops. We find it rather good than bad."

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15   Furthermore, Ingo also addresses cultural difference between Americans and Europeans in this interview sequence. Social norms in the United States involve a level of openness and intimacy with near-strangers that can be uncomfortable for 'Europeans'. While we only focus on the consequences for parental differentiation, the cultural aspect framing the interaction makes the situation more complex but cannot be addressed thoroughly in this paper.

While April was very clear about her position as the egg donor in the family constellation and was interested in the relationship to Anton and Frank and their private lives, her mother asked many questions about Sören and tried to find resemblance of April in pictures of the baby. The sequence shows that Anton and Frank had to negotiate their feelings about the 'grandmother''s commitment to their child among themselves: while they were not opposed to the idea of April's mother feeling a bit like the 'granny', they were also not necessarily comfortable with the idea. Her relationship to the child, as well as the relationship of other individuals involved, was negotiated as the situation arose: neither April nor Anton were certain about what type of interaction would be comfortable and acceptable for all parties. While April was sensitive to inquire beforehand whether or not it was okay to bring her mother, Anton was careful about the number of pictures he sent them. He was insecure about whether it felt alright for April to receive pictures of a child she is genetically related to but with whom she has no other connection. Pictures, in this sense, become a relationship building factor that must be maneuvered in small doses. Since April is a known donor, not only herself, but also her family, becomes part of the extended kinship system of Anton and Frank.

These findings indicate the necessity of a careful negotiation of familial boundaries: Diane's mother violates these boundaries by referring to her German descent, while April's mother does so as well by knitting blankets and comparing Sören to April. Neither Anton and Frank nor Ingo and Dieter are especially comfortable with this, but they are appreciative of the interest and behave kindly in the interest of their children. Both couples must hold out against this intrusion, and their friendly words can also be interpreted as a defense mechanism in order to sustain the two-parent nuclear family by not addressing this issue. While the genetic relationship appears important to the couples interviewed here—one of the reasons why they choose surrogacy as their method of having children—the relevance of the egg donor's genetic relationship is supposed to be negligible in the context of family relationships, but is relevant for genealogy in the sense of genetic decent. This is a highly ambivalent situation. Having a personal and affective relationship with the egg donor also carries weight in terms of expectations and cultural beliefs about genealogy and kinship. The couples who were interviewed cannot control these processes, which is contradictory considering that the field of assisted reproduction produces a cultural script of 'being in charge and having control'. Moreover, there are no common-sense rules—such as those taken for granted by 'conventional' families—to indicate what behavior is appropriate in such situations.

5 Family and kinship: Fragile negotiations of roles, boundaries and intimate practices

Focusing on narratives of gay parents describing intimate encounters with egg donors and gestational carriers, we discuss how they reveal the negotiations of roles, boundaries, and intimate practices in the context of family and kinship. The couples Author One interviewed must engage in new forms of kinship ties outside of the parental dyad by integrating the gestational carrier and the egg donor to their kinship narrative; in doing so, they question ideological family norms. At the same time, they reenact the institutionalized

practices of the hegemonic ideal of the heterosexual two-parent family. As gay parents founding a family with the help of an egg donor and a gestational carrier, they must invent a family narrative addressing the absent mother, while simultaneously making sense of the involvement of two women in the family formation process. Both characteristics only appear as 'deviant' in the context of social and normative constraints produced by gender differentiation, the gender binary, and heteronormativity. Against this backdrop, the interviewees emphasized the importance of both women in their process of becoming a family, as well as their desire to be transparent about that process with their children. However, they also carefully exclude the women by stressing that although they may play some role in their children's lives, this must not be mistaken as a parenting role. While the women are perceived as an integral part of the kinship making process, they are excluded from the family narrative in order to sustain the two-parent-nuclear family norm.

As the interviews show, this becomes an intricate process of inclusion, distinction and exclusion regarding family and kinship practices. In these negotiations they decouple gender and parenthood (more precisely, motherhood and fatherhood) and question the societal expectation that every child has one mother and one father, who are simultaneously genetically, corporeally, legally and socially related to them. Parenthood based on gender differentiation becomes less important in these families. They address the social expectation of a mother by either using the term *mother* as a floating signifier, inventing new names for her, or simply referring to technical terms such as 'egg donor' or 'gestational carrier'. The 'traditional' idea(l) of the mother thus takes on a vague quality, diminishing in the narratives of their everyday 'doing (being) family'. As Silva and Smart (1999: 7) explain: "What a family is appears intrinsically to what it does."

Furthermore, normative ideas of genealogy and genetic relations can lead to unintentional violation of familial boundaries due to double contingency and the lack of a shared symbolic system. This must be addressed and resolved over time. The interactions of the egg donors' mothers described here exemplify how intricate and sensitive the process of drawing family boundaries can be: understandings of 'family' are a matter of negotiation between the reproductive parties involved and are made in the context of societal expectations. This raises questions of how society perceives parenthood and family, whom it considers to be parents and how families engage with the rigid labels society provides for them. Social discourses lack broader definitions for (family) relations and naming practices beyond the gendered categorizations of father and mother, because the rigorous concept of parenthood is equated with procreation. However, in the modern era of third-party assisted reproduction and greater diversity in family constellations, procreative participation does not translate into family practice.

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Authors' details

Julia Teschlade, MA, research fellow at the Department of Socioeconomics, University of Hamburg. Research focus: Sociology of gender, sexuality and (re)production, reproductive technologies, intimate relationships and qualitative methodology.
Contact: University of Hamburg, Department of Socioeconomics, Welckerstraße 8, 20354 Hamburg
E-Mail: julia.teschlade@uni-hamburg.de

Almut Peukert, Prof. Dr., Assistant Professor in Sociology (Gender, Work and Organization) at the Department of Socioeconomics, University of Hamburg. Research focus: un-/doing gender, gendered division of labour, gender inequality, sociology of intimate relationships and LGBTQ* families, qualitative methodology.
Contact: University of Hamburg, Department of Socioeconomics, Welckerstraße 8, 20354 Hamburg
E-Mail: almut.peukert@uni-hamburg.de