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**“Fathers without children” – A discursive study of the
accounts and identities presented by sperm donors.**

A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

PhD
in
Psychology

at Massey University, Tiritia, Palmerston North,
New Zealand.

Kirsty J Ross

2004

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Kirsty J Ross
December 2004.

Discursive psychology challenges traditional psychology by contending that knowledge, reality and the “truth” are socially constructed and actively negotiated through language. Through discourse, people are placed in, or adopt, subject positions and roles that confer certain rights and responsibilities. Current discourses for talking about sperm donors can be seen to negatively position them at a low status, with little power or rights, but multiple obligations. This research interviewed 24 New Zealand sperm donors, with the aim of investigating how donors constructed and made sense of their experiences and their position as a sperm donor. These discourses revealed that being a sperm donor can lead to an enhanced construction of masculinity, and an accompanying powerful subject position with regards to other men in society. This had ramifications for the donors’ relationship with both the ‘social father’ and the biological mother of the offspring. Donors’ discourses of fatherhood revealed a delicate balancing act of trying to claim a position of (biological) father, and establish a role and place within the lives of the offspring without encroaching on the position of the recipients as parents, particularly the male ‘daddy’. Through their language and utilisation of discourses concerning masculinity and fatherhood, the men in this study challenged the dominant construction of sperm donors, and provided an alternative understanding of the psychology of being a sperm donor.

Acknowledgements

I must firstly acknowledge the guidance, support and perseverance of my two supervisors, Dr Keith Tuffin and Dr Mandy Morgan, across many changes in my life, both personally and professionally. Thank you, Keith, for supervising my research and being flexible and patient through my moves between islands, clinical psychology programme requirements and the demands of family life, especially with a new baby. You were very tolerant of my 'surprise' visits to your office and responded quickly to my emails wherever we both were residing.

Thank you, Mandy, for your input into the drafts of the thesis and your support, particularly when Keith was overseas. Our discussions on gender and masculinity were invaluable in providing clarity to a complex project.

To the men who graciously allowed me into their homes and lives, I thank you enormously. You gave so much of yourselves, and this would not have been possible without you. I hope I have done your stories justice.

Thanks must also go to The Massey Doctoral Research Fund for their financial support during this doctorate, and the Freemasons Society for their generous scholarship award.

Thank you to my friends and family for your love, support and encouragement, especially when I needed it the most. Mike, I am very grateful for everything you did and gave in order to help me on this journey.

And, last, but certainly not least, to Alistair, for being so understanding (and helpful!) when Mummy needed to work on her PhD. The cuddles and smiles were such a pick-me-up.

Dedication

For my 'little man' Alistair
One day I hope you read this and that you are proud of your Mum.

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