

Dynamics of knowledge and ignorance in donor insemination families: A qualitative study of German donor-conceived adults

トビアス アンドレアス バウアー

<https://hdl.handle.net/2324/7396306>

出版情報 : Kyushu University, 2025, 博士 (学術) , 課程博士
バージョン :

権利関係 : Public access to the fulltext file is restricted for unavoidable reason (3)



氏 名 : トビアス アンドレアス バウアー

論 文 名 : Dynamics of knowledge and ignorance in donor insemination families: A qualitative study of German donor-conceived adults
(精子提供家族における知と無知のダイナミクス: ドイツで提供精子により生まれた成人を対象とした質的研究)

区 分 : 甲

論 文 内 容 の 要 旨

This study investigated the intra-familial dynamics of knowledge and ignorance experienced by donor-conceived adults in Germany. Specifically, it examined how these individuals discover their donor-conception status, how this new information impacts their sense of identity, and how their relationships with family members evolve upon learning about being donor-conceived.

This study approached these questions by asserting that both the experiences of donor-conceived individuals and their family relationships can be comprehensively understood by investigating how the stakeholders involved manage, interpret, and navigate knowledge and ignorance related to donor conception. To capture and frame these dynamics, this study utilized a taxonomy of ignorance and aimed to address the following research questions: (1) How do donor-conceived adults in Germany experience learning about their donor-conception and what is the impact thereof on their self-concept and on their family relationships? (2) How do donor-conceived adults in Germany experience intra-familial dynamics of knowledge and ignorance? (3) What are the implications of analyzing the dynamics of knowledge and ignorance in donor insemination families for developing a broader theory of ignorance?

To answer these questions, this study developed a tentative conceptual framework of knowledge and ignorance that informed the analysis of empirical data. At its core is an online survey ($n = 59$) that collected detailed information on German donor-conceived adults' (born to heterosexual couples between 1974 and 1999) experiences of discovering their donor-conception and its impact on their self-concept and family relationships. This was complemented by in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a subset of survey participants ($n = 24$), which explored selected aspects of the relational complexities and psychosocial challenges identified in the survey. The empirical data were analyzed using thematic qualitative text analysis, with the conceptual framework informing the analysis and being refined through engagement with the empirical findings.

This study revealed that donor-conceived adults in Germany often experience profound identity challenges and relational tensions upon discovering their donor-conception. Discovery or disclosure can occur under various circumstances and settings. Their experiences are shaped by pre- and post-disclosure management and the negotiation of knowledge and ignorance within donor insemination families.

A key finding of this study is the complex role of social siblings in these dynamics. Social siblings—those raised in the same family—often serve as sources of both support and tension. In some cases, siblings are co-discoverers of the donor-conception, leading to shared experiences of shock and adjustment. In others, the dynamics are more fraught, particularly when siblings exhibit differing levels of engagement with the discovery.

Another important aspect of the study is the application of the theoretical concepts of knowledge and ignorance to analyze these dynamics. Drawing on German sociologist Peter Wehling's taxonomy of ignorance, which considers the dimensions of *awareness*, *intentionality*, and *temporality*, this study developed an adapted framework that also included aspects of *morality* and *relevance*. This framework allowed for the examination of how knowledge and ignorance are distributed, negotiated, and contested within donor insemination families.

This study further identified dynamic and evolving processes involving both ignorance and knowledge. For many participants, engaging with their donor-conception status is not a one-time event, but an ongoing journey marked by phases of discovery, adjustment, and further questioning. This perspective underscores the persistence of issues of knowledge and ignorance in various forms, whether through unanswered questions about the donor or unresolved familial tensions.

This dissertation makes several important contributions to literature. First, it provides the largest dataset on donor-conceived adults in Germany to date. By presenting these findings in English, this study bridges the gap between German and international scholarship, thus facilitating cross-national comparisons. Second, it emphasizes the importance of social siblings in shaping the donor-conceived individuals' experiences and family relationships. While much of the existing literature focuses on parent-child relationships, this study highlights the roles of social siblings, ranging from co-navigating familial secrets to being key figures in identity and donor connection searches. This focus on sibling relationships opens new avenues for research and provides a more comprehensive understanding of family dynamics in donor-conception contexts. Third, the study refines theoretical frameworks of knowledge and ignorance, demonstrating their utility in analyzing the lived experiences of donor-conceived individuals. By incorporating the dimensions of *morality* and *relevance*, the adapted framework offers a nuanced tool for understanding the social productivity of knowledge and ignorance. This contribution extends beyond donor conception and suggests applications in family sociology, medical ethics, and the sociology of ignorance.

Although this study provides valuable insights, it acknowledges its limitations. The sample used in this study, while the largest of its kind in Germany, may not have captured the full diversity of experiences among donor-conceived individuals. Future research could include a more diverse sample of participants, including members of the younger generation of donor-conceived individuals and those born into households with lesbian couples or single mothers, and adopt longitudinal approaches to explore how their experiences evolve over time.

In conclusion, this dissertation confirms the validity of its central hypothesis that the experiences of donor-conceived individuals and their familial dynamics can be productively analyzed through the lens of knowledge and ignorance. By applying and refining this conceptual framework, this study enhances our understanding of donor-conception families and

contributes to broader sociological and ethical discussions.