"Who do I look like?": Kinning and resemblance in the experience of French donor conceived adults

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Abstract

This article questions the notion of kinning through the analysis of resemblance and transmission talk in the narratives of French donor offspring. Between February 2015 and May 2016, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 French sperm donor conceived adults. For most of them their conception had been a secret for part of their life. After the disclosure of the facts of their conception, donor offspring reassessed their kin relationships, integrating the new information into their narrative. The father's absence of participation in procreation was integrated without denying his role and status as a father. The donor's participation in procreation was also included in the narratives but he was not considered as kin. I thus argue that resemblance and transmission talk does not necessarily imply kinship and kinning. When it does refer to kin, it participates in a process of reaffirmation of family relations affected by disclosure, that I propose to describe as *re-kinning*.

Key-words: Donor conception; Donor offspring; Resemblance; Transmission; Kinship

Introduction[1]

> Amélie: Not long ago I showed a picture of my sister to (…) friends. And straight away they said "you don't look anything like each other". I said "well, no really, we do". (…) It's true that I'd still like us to look a little bit alike.

This article investigates a common theme in testimonies about donor conception: the issue of resemblance within donor conceived families. It focuses on the experience of sperm donor conceived adults in France. Resemblance talk is investigated as a kinship practice in order to gain a better understand-

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ing of the ways the connections created by donation are experienced and defined by donor offspring. These connections refer both to relationships within donor conceived families and links with donors and donor siblings[2]. What does it mean for donor offspring to look alike (or not)? What do discourses on resemblance convey about the way these relations are understood? By doing so, the article questions the notion of kinning developed by Howell (2007) to refer to the process by which parents incorporate the child they have conceived (with or without donation), adopted and/or lived with as kin. To date, the notion of kinning has been mainly explored from the point of view of parents; the article considers that of offspring.

Currently in France information regarding donors cannot be disclosed to anybody regardless of whether it is identifying or not. Donor conception is exclusively authorised for heterosexual couples. Clinical professionals match donors with couples based on their resemblance with the infertile intended parent. Thus the question of resemblance is integral to the donation system. As Théry (2010) argues, it participates in framing a model where use of donation can be unnoticed and hidden ("*le modèle ni vu ni connu*"). In this frame, donors and parents or, more specifically, sperm donors and fathers, are presented as opposing and competing figures. The article brings a different perspective to this issue.

Resemblance is taken here as a relational concept highlighting what people share (or do not share) with others. It is thus linked to the broader notion of transmission. Transmission simultaneously encompasses biological and social processes of sharing knowledge, features, social attributes, gestures, assets, etc., which may happen more or less voluntarily between individuals as well as within a group (Edwards 1999; Treps 2000; Berliner 2010). Drawing on Carsten's concept of relatedness, the relational approach to resemblance allows us to move from "a pre-given opposition between the biological and the social" (2000a, p. 4) to focus on the meaning donor offspring give to resemblance without presuming what the presence or absence of similarities entail.

The first section examines how donor offspring integrate facts about their conception into their personal stories. Donation often remains a secret that, when disclosed, disrupts previous narratives. Resemblance and transmission talk (here taken together) is affected by this disruption and participates in rebuilding narratives. The second section highlights what the discourses on resemblance reveal about the place given to donors. Their participation in procreation is not neutral for donor offspring as it is a source of transmission. Donors are thought of as being similar to the people they helped to conceive. However, the potential resemblance does not make them kin. The article thus adds nuance to studies of resemblance that have mainly

2 People who were conceived using the same donor.

focused on how it creates kinship. In the case of anonymous donors, I argue that while resemblance and transmission talk acknowledges the existence of a link of some sort, this does not participate in a kinning process for the participants. The third part shows how resemblance talk is also used to reaffirm the kinship ties that have been disrupted by the disclosure about donation, especially relationships with fathers. While the narratives include their absence from the procreation process, their status as fathers is not denied. Resemblance talk allows donor conceived people to express how the relationship with their father is still meaningful to them. Building on Howell's (2007) concept of kinning, I propose the new notion of *re-kinning* to describe the process by which the disrupted relationships are reaffirmed.

Resemblance, kinship and donor conception

In social anthropology, resemblance talk has been shown as a valuable tool for understanding representations and meanings associated with kinship in various cultural and historical contexts. In the Trobriand Islands, symbolically men only participate in conception by shaping the child's face via sexual intercourse with the mother. Resemblance is passed down via the paternal line, and substance shared matrilineally (Malinowski 1987). In Karpathos, resemblance talk balances inheritance rules and the naming system, according to which the firstborn of each sex inherits their assets and name from the father (for men) or the mother (for women) (Vernier 1999). A male firstborn would generally be considered to resemble his mother and similarities be found between a female and her father. In Euro-American[3] societies, resemblance is thought as a "commonality of *features* [*communauté de traits*] (physical appearance and/or behaviours) between two or several *kin* individuals"[4] (Lemaire 1995, p. 55). The Euro-American kinship model is based on an exclusive descent principle: a person has two parents, no more, no less, who take on all parenting roles and attributes. In this context, a causal link is made between resemblance and procreation – i.e. a child looks like the people who conceived them. However, new kinship studies have shed light on configurations such as donor conceived families which depart from the exclusive descent principle, so questioning what it means to be kin in contemporary Euro-American societies (Martial in this focus). The study of resemblance can contribute to these developments.

Discourses on resemblance constitute a kinship practice that "express[es] continuity between individuals" (Marre, Bestard 2009, p. 64) and helps to "construct connectedness" (Nordqvist 2017, p. 874). Resemblance talk

3 For a discussion on the notion of 'Euro-Americanness' see Edwards 2006.

4 All translations are mine.

directly participates in the deliberate and universal process through which someone is "brought into a significant and permanent group of people that is expressed in a kin idiom", which Howell defines as *kinning* (2007, p. 63). As with other family forms, parents of donor conceived families build a connection with their child through resemblance from donor selection to pregnancy and after birth by either looking for, affirming or regretting the lack of similarities (Becker *et al.* 2005; Fortier 2009; Nordqvist 2010). As such, resemblance has been used as evidence of kinship. The question in new family forms is how to define the additional connections which characterise these situations, such as the link with the donor and donor siblings in the case of donor conceived people.

For donor offspring, looking alike raises issues regarding the (lack of) similarities with their parents on the one hand, and the potential or acknowledged likeness to their donor and donor siblings on the other hand – which may (or may not) lead to their wish to search for origins (Vanfraussen *et al.* 2001; Mehl 2008; Clément 2012; Hertz *et al.* 2013). By asking "who do I look like?", donor offspring express how disclosure about the circumstances of their conception has raised questions both for the definition of their kin relationships and for their sense of identity (Frith *et al.* 2018) – especially when they were informed at an older age (Hertz *et al.* 2013).

Much of the literature focusing on donor offspring relies on quantitative or asynchronous studies, which has enabled numerous testimonies to be gathered from a varied panel of participants. However, further insights into individual experiences, drawing on face-to-face interviews, are necessary. It is of note that, to date, French donor conceived people have been largely understudied. In the early 2000s, J.-L. Clément (2012) and D. Mehl (2008) published the first – and, to my knowledge, only – qualitative studies focusing on how French donor conceived adults experience the disclosure of the story of their conception and the donor's anonymity. Given that the French laws on bioethics are to be reviewed in 2019, more qualitative studies focusing on donor offspring are needed.

Data supporting this article was collected in France between February 2015 and May 2016 via face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 15 sperm donor conceived adults aged between 25 and 37 years old. Of these, 5 were men and 10 women and all grew up in heterosexual families[5]. Calls for participation were publicised through two French associations representing donor offspring[6]. Participants were asked about their family relationships,

5 The article also draws on a further study commenced in October 2017 in which interviews have been conducted with an additional 42 sperm donor conceived adults (27 in England, 15 in France) among whom 20 have identified their donor and/or a donor sibling.

6 One association advocates for the right to identify the donor. The other is in favour of the status quo. The goal was to get a balanced panel of participants. Most responses

their perception of the donor and donor-siblings, and their opinion about legal principles regulating donor conception. Only 2 participants had always known about how they had been conceived. The others were informed at different stages of their life, between 10 and 35 years old. In line with other research, the stories are heterogeneous, underscoring the individual's family dynamics (Clément 2012; Frith *et al.* 2017). Mothers are often at the centre of disclosure narratives, which, according to Frith et al. (2017), relates to the traditional role of mothers in Euro-American families. Case studies have been produced examining each participant's trajectory, and an inductive thematic analysis of the interviews was conducted.

Being donor conceived: disrupted narratives

> Margaux: I've always been told that I look like my father actually. So I thought who do I look like then? (…) And all those little sentences, those little moments when you're told "you look like so and so" came straight back to me. I thought: I've been told nonsense, it can't be possible. (…) For me, there was nothing.

Margaux was born in the 1990s. She was 16 years-old when her mother sat her down with her younger sister and informed them that they were conceived using a sperm donation. She had always been told that she looked like her father. Learning that he was not her genitor disrupted this narrative and brought into question her place in her kin network. To the question "who does she look like", her answer is "nobody".

Gaining new knowledge about conception disrupts the relationship narrative. The disclosure of the secret leads donor offspring to adjust their story to the new information. Resemblance and transmission talk are ways to integrate this knowledge into the narrative, primarily, as a corroboration of the experience of relationships. Aurore is very close to her mother. But she has always had a more tempestuous relationship with her father. Growing up she received constant reminders of her resemblance to her mother but none concerning her father.

> Aurore: I've always been told "you have your mother's eyes". And that was dreadful for my father. Because people have always said "well… no we can't see… you don't look like your father". It's so hard. Mum, I've always been told "she definitely is her mum".

(8) came from members/sympathisers of the first association. The bias is considered in the analysis.

Aurore was informed about being donor conceived in her early twenties. At first she wrongly understood that neither of her parents was her genitor. This felt particularly problematic when it came to her mother. It would have disrupted her experience of their relationship.

> Aurore: If she'd have told me "yes, there was a donation on both sides and I'm not your biological mother", I believe I'd have been devastated (…). Because this bond had always been there, and very strong and this, this would have been deceit actually. (…) While, in a way, I'd correctly felt all the rest. There really were problems with my father. There really was an issue on that side.

The observation of the resemblance gap with her parents hints at the difference in their relationship, which is also illustrated by the terms of reference used by Aurore: a colloquial and intimate "mum" for her mother but a formal "father" for her father. Bringing to the fore the similarities with her mother, Aurore underlines their close relationship: "she definitely is her mum". On the other hand, the lack of resemblance and biological connection with her father corroborates the difficulties of their relationship. That is not to say that she does not consider her father as such or that the knowledge about her conception has changed their relationship. Rather, she has adjusted her interpretation of it. The presence or lack of a biological link (and hence transmission) and of resemblance becomes an illustration of the existing dynamics in the family.

As was seen with Margaux's testimony, resemblance can also disrupt the experience of relationships. After being informed of the story of their conception, some donor offspring give up the similarities they thought they had with relations, especially their father. Sabine's experience is similar to Margaux's. She and her twin sister do not look alike. The previous narrative was that Sabine looked like their mother and her sister like their father. But around 16 years old, the sisters discovered that their older brother was not their father's biological son. Pressuring their parents into telling them more, they were informed they had been conceived through *in vitro* fertilisation with a sperm donor.

> Sabine: So then when we learned that, we thought, well if Dad… isn't actually our dad, then who does my sister look like? Because she can't look like Dad since he's not her father.

Again, Sabine does not reject her father. But the narrative on resemblance and transmissions has had to be adjusted to the new information. Her father's lack of participation in procreation is incorporated into the discourse on family connections.

Thirdly, a lack of resemblance with kin may lead to relationships being questioned, even before the secret's disclosure. Some participants wondered about their origins as children. Rémy was conceived at the end of the 1980s and grew up as an only child. When he was about 8 years-old, he began searching for resemblance with his parents. He could not find any with his father and asked him about it: "What do I have from you Dad?" He remembers his parents' ensuing discomfort, which made him wonder whether he could have been adopted. He discarded the possibility because of the similarities with his mother: "I thought, I really look like my mother so (…) they'd really have found the right child." He was told about his conception by his father a few years later.

As other studies have shown, donor offspring reappraise their relationships with kin after learning about their conception (Blyth 2012; Frith *et al.* 2018). Talking about resemblance and transmission is one way to qualify these relationships, either by corroborating, disrupting or questioning them. Doing so, it "map[s] out, confirm[s], or bring[s] into question family belonging" (Nordqvist 2017, p. 873). Resemblance and transmission talk are linked to narratives of conception. But in new family forms, such as donor conceived families, some people participate in conception without becoming parents. The different parent-roles, including those of conceiving and educating a child, are not necessarily taken on by the same people. In other words, these family forms do not fit into the Euro-American kinship model's principle of exclusivity. Fine characterises these as *multiparental* families (2002; Martial in this focus). This specificity is reflected in the discourse of participants. All describe their relations clearly and all underline the difference between their father and the donor[7]. There is a marked difference between the way these two figures are talked about. Fathers are always associated with a possessive pronoun: they are *their* fathers. In contrast, donors are generally referred to with the definite article *the*. With all due caution given to the small number of participants, the findings from this study differentiates from other research, especially in the United States, where participants regularly used the term 'biological father' to designate the donor (Hertz *et al.* 2013). Perhaps due to the political context in France, the donor offspring I have met almost never refer to the donor as some kind of "father". Narratives confirm the importance of procreation in the Euro-American kinship model, as it has the potential to change relationships. Nevertheless, the sense of belonging to the father is not denied, even when the relationship is difficult. The donor does not replace him (Blyth 2012; Clément 2012). The discourses on resemblance and transmission take on board the father's lack of participation in procreation without breaking the connection. Rather than being opposed or substituted by one another, fa-

7 Consequently, the term 'father' never refers to the donor in this article.

thers and donors coexist in the narratives, even though the connection to donors is difficult to conceptualise.

Looking alike without kinning: the anonymous donor and the sense of self

In Euro-American representations, it takes sperm and an egg to conceive a child. Even though the father's role is not challenged, if he has not provided the sperm, then someone else must have. The donor's existence is, in this regard, obvious for donor offspring, even though he is a "piece of puzzle that's conspicuous by its absence" (Rémy). Adrien, who does not want to identify his donor, explains: "whether I know him or not, this person existed anyway". The question is then about assigning a place to a donor who has been made invisible by anonymity.

In the testimonies gathered, the place of the donor is not stable. He is neither close, since he has no concrete existence in the participant's daily life, nor a complete stranger, as he helped with their conception (Hertz *et al.* 2013). Some, like Rémy, include him in their family picture.

> Rémy: For me he's a family partner. (…) I imagine myself with my parents at the dinner table and he flies above. Or he turns around. Because we founded this family thanks to him… so he's part of the family. (…) But when I say "he's part of my family", it doesn't mean that I'll have an emotional bond with him. (…) But he's part of my family, whether I want it or not.

The necessity of the donor's act in the creation of the family makes him a protagonist of that family. But he is not "at the dinner table", and there is no emotional bond with him. He is not on the same figurative level as Rémy's parents. He is "around", which Rémy presents as a fact that is almost imposed on him.

Other participants include the donor in a variation of the classic family tree, a sort of ancestry tree. Elsa, who was pregnant for the first time when we met, includes the donor into a "biological" picture.

> Elsa: I broke up my family picture in order to create a new one, let's say. I mean there isn't just the father, the mother and the offspring anymore. There's the father, the mother, the donor and the offspring. (…)
>
> *AM: So do you include the donor in your family picture?*
>
> Elsa: Family is not the right word. (…) But biological would be the word. (…) Even if he's not my family and never will be, you can't deny he's part of myself.

The ancestry tree becomes one way to represent the donor offspring's story, how they came to be who they are. Again, the donor does not have the same standing as Elsa's parents, since he is not part of the family as such.

Conversely, other donor offspring would not include the donor into any kind of family or ancestry circle. Adrien considers the laboratory technician to be the main actor of his conception. The donation was necessary but the final choice and the actual procedure were carried out by clinic professionals.

> Adrien: Well, by whom was I conceived? By the lab-technician. (…) [He] picked the vial.

Across the board, participants hesitate on the place they want to give to the donor. This difficulty is augmented by anonymity, as Sabine notes: "it's so abstract that we don't know how to consider him". The donor is often pictured as an indistinct figure. So much so that Rémy can barely think of him with proper human features.

> Rémy: He's kind of a fog. He's a shadow that strolls, turns around the family. But kind. But I can't… no, it's really difficult for me to picture him as a human being even. (…) I can't think of him as being made of flesh and bones.

The donor is a "shadow zone", a "shape", a "question mark", "kind of a fog"… He is almost dehumanised but he keeps human characteristics: he is part of a history, especially a medical history, he has an ethnic background… (Hertz *et al.* 2013). Yet, the lack of information on such elements makes it difficult to picture him as a singular figure. Consequently, the sense of his belonging is uncertain. "I don't see him as mine", says Rémy. As explained earlier, most participants do not refer to him as *their* donor. The sense of belonging is even fainter as the donation is not reserved for one child. In France, a sperm (or egg) donation can help in conceiving up to 10 children. Some clinical professionals report that they generally disagree with keeping the same donor for second children. A man is the donor for a whole group of offspring.

When the donor is pictured with a human shape, he remains an indistinct figure. He is a somebody, a copy of a generic group, "an average French man before being a specific donor" as Adrien would say.

In this context of uncertainty, one question was regularly posed by the participants, with more or less unease: what has the donor passed onto them? Has he passed on more than physical traits? Rémy wonders what he will look like growing old. Has the donor transmitted a serious disease? As Aurore suffered from a rare childhood disease, he represents to her a medical risk she cannot control, unlike her father's serious medical history. What

will donor offspring transmit to their own children? Elsa does not look like any of her parents and she has always felt odd because of this difference. She wonders what she will transmit to her child-to-be.

> Elsa: When you can't identify with your father, there's this part you can't identify with anyone else. (…) It's unusual and it's not easy (…) to have a big continuous air of the unknown. And to transmit it as well.

Indeed, beyond his indistinct nature, the donor is pictured as being of one's own kind. He is imagined as looking like the person he helped to conceive, physically or possibly personality-wise. Donor offspring absorb part of his indistinctness and of his anonymous figure's uncertainty. Amélie feels estranged and associates the feeling with her donor. She discovered the secret by accident, without her parents knowing. They disclosed it when Amélie went through a period of distress. She has had very few discussions about her conception with them since.

> Amélie: I feel a bit like a stranger to my parents sometimes. I think it's because we don't communicate easily. I associate that with my donor sometimes. Not a stranger in the sense of being a foreigner. But I feel a distance between myself and them. (…)
>
> *AM: Do you think that having more information about his life may help you to…?*
>
> Amélie: Maybe to understand… Maybe. To connect. I don't know.
>
> *AM: To connect with the donor (…) or with you parents?*
>
> Amélie: To connect with myself as well, with what I experience, what I feel…

Prospective appearances, medical background and risks for the future, transmission to children, emotional experience... The connection to the donor and his potential similarities highlight the participants' own temporality. Talking about resemblance and transmission resulting from donation, donor offspring refer to the two-pronged sense of their own unity and of their relationality as persons. Fine defines this as their "sense of self" (*sentiment de soi*) (2008). As opposed to individual inner characteristics outside of any social norms, the notion of self is here understood as the way a person is singular while being connected to others. The sense of self is both part of self-understanding – "one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act" (Brubaker, Cooper 2000, p. 17) – and of a relational mode of (self-)identification – a way to "iden-

tify oneself (or another person) by position in a relational web" (Brubaker, Cooper 2000, p. 15).

I argue that resemblance and transmission talk regarding the anonymous donor does not take part in a kinning process. The existence of the connection is obvious, although unclear as to its effects. But the narratives gathered in this study do not create or foresee a relationship with the donor, nor do they participate in integrating him as kin. In the anonymous model, the relation to the donor is "impossible", as defined by Descombes (2007), drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein. In the same way that scoring a goal is impossible in tennis – since there is no goal on the tennis court – the relation to donors is not part of the rules of the "game". Rather than being *forbidden* it is *impossible* and therefore hardly thinkable. Looking like the donor does not imply kinning him. Further evidence of this is demonstrated by offspring who have found their donor or donor-siblings. My own current study, which aligns with work by Blyth (2012), Klotz (2016) and Frith *et al.* (2018), shows that the establishment and/or the maintenance of a relationship is predicated on the protagonists' will and choice to sustain it. Similarities might be observed (Blyth 2012) but they do not necessarily involve a meaningful relationship. Similar to reunions between adoptees and their birth-families, these connections constitute a form of elective relations (Sagnes 2000; Carsten 2000b; Edwards 2015).

The specificity of donor offspring's configuration thus introduces a nuance in the study of resemblance. The narratives regarding the anonymous sperm donor show that while resemblance and transmission are a sign of connection they do not necessarily imply kinship and kinning. Nonetheless, when resemblance and transmission talk does refer to kin, it can be a way of re-assessing and re-claiming a sense of belonging. Talking about their father's transmission, donor offspring do not only take on board his absence of participation in procreation, they also state how their relationship is nevertheless meaningful and thereby *re-kin* him.

Re-kinning

> Adrien: I wish I could have told him that I love him anyway (…). He died with the secret, so he doesn't know that I love him anyway, even if he's not the one who came into a test-tube.

Almost all participants stated their love for their father at some point in the interview. Adrien's father died a few years before Adrien's mother disclosed how he had been conceived. He regrets not having had the opportunity to tell his father that his feelings towards him were unchanged. The participants whose fathers were still alive often described how they reassured

him after they were told about their conception. Even Aurore, whose relationship with her father has always been difficult, made sure that he did not feel rejected.

> Aurore: I definitely didn't want to reject my father. Even if we have a very complicated relationship. (...) But I remember hugging him, well… Because I couldn't act differently, otherwise he would have felt rejected.

Information about conception gives a new insight to offspring on how to interpret their relationship with their father. Emery, for example, states that his father's infertility has prevented him from being as emotionally available as he might have been. Before divorcing, Emery's mother acted as a mediator between him and his father, even when it came to the hobby they shared for several years.

> Emery: I understand my relationship with him way better. (…) We've never talked. He's always used my mother as a go-between to tell me things. (…) Always restrained because he's afraid of… Well I think at some point he didn't feel it was his right so each time he showed us attention, it was always with restraint. Or he'd go in a corner where he wouldn't be seen… I think he would have liked to be closer. But I think there's a barrier.

Nevertheless, Emery considers that his father has passed onto him some features of his personality of which he is quite critical. He presents the resemblance to his father as a sort of fate imposed on him, using an understanding of transmission close to genetic heredity.

> Emery: I know I look a lot like my father. (…) Unfortunately… Well that's a big dilemma for me, because I don't like this person. (Laughs) No, well, I don't like some aspects of his personality. But in terms of human relationships we're a bit the same… Joking and all that. (…) My sister has this kind of things as well, to think "I hope I'm not like [Mum]". In some ways. Some very muddled aspects of their personality, about which you think "crap! I hope I didn't inherit that!" (…) But, you know, you feel like you're going there anyway (laughs).

The transmission was not voluntary, neither on his or his father's part, and yet it seems inescapable. Like Emery, many participants talk about personality features, tastes, abilities or attitudes that have been passed onto them by their father. Imitation, time spent together and education are often claimed to be channels for transmission. Delphine highlights the similarities in tastes and skills between her and her father, which illustrate how close she feels to him.

> Delphine: I'm very close to my father. And I'm a lot like him in personality. (…) In terms of tastes, culture and education I'm very close to my father. He plays the violin like me. I wanted to play the violin like him. Same, he's super-literary and he's a doctor. And I'm a scientist, so there it is.

Their closeness is further confirmed thanks to the donor-matching process. Delphine's conception has never been a secret. But she only fully realised that she had been conceived via sperm donation in her twenties. Delphine compares conception with and without donation. For her, in both cases, the fathers are not involved in the corporeal processes of pregnancy. As such, fathers have to make a special effort to kin their children, which she relates to adoption. Offspring's resemblance with their fathers allowed by donor-matching reinforces the similarity between the two situations.

> Delphine: I've always considered (…) that in the end a father always adopts his children. So in that, it's not very different I think. Because yes, if the sperm that was given to you has close characteristics with yours, which apparently is the case for my father, well it's not very different honestly.

The similarities allowed by donor-matching also helps to preserve the father's parentage from being questioned by people outside of the family. Since Delphine and her father do not look very different, they do not need to justify the fact that they are family.

Through donor-matching, Delphine hence reinterprets the corporeal continuity with her father, just like Adrien reassesses the connection to his. His parents are distant cousins. He thus concludes that although he is not his father's direct descendant, he is still connected to him through his mother and their common ancestor.

> Adrien: I have searched for physical similarities on my mother's side. That has changed for me. You think, well, where does this come from? From the donor? Or rather from my parents? Well, from… But as they're distant cousins, I think I'm still connected to my father on the great-grand-mothers' side anyway. So I'm my father's cousin.

In both examples, the link with the father is reinterpreted in a way that preserves and reaffirms the relationship with the offspring. Furthermore, beyond the connection to fathers, donor conception affects the link to all paternal family members as well as siblings. The resemblance with her paternal cousin is important to Amélie. It incorporates her in the continuity of a line of kin to whom she feels close.

> Amélie: The biggest part of my family is on my father's side. So it's true that in fact I don't have any… shared heritage with them. So my grand-father, my cousins, my uncles and aunts… (sighs) But I'm still told that I look like one of my cousins for example. But then it's also because her father is my father's brother and… Well I think there's something in our facial expression, in the way we… I admit I'm rather pleased when I'm told. I don't feel that I look like nobody.

On the one hand, Amélie's discourse on resemblance and transmission leads her to recognise the absence of a shared genetic heritage with her paternal family members. On the other, it allows her to reaffirm the meaningfulness of the relationship with her cousin.

The knowledge of being donor conceived disrupts narratives that give meaning to relationships with some kin. Consequently, donor offspring reconstruct their narratives. Resemblance and transmission talk enables both these aspects at once. For Margaux, these processes of reconfiguration relate to her relationship with her younger sister, who was conceived using another donor. Referring to a photograph which she feels demonstrates a resemblance, Margaux constructs a new narrative to assert the fullness of their siblingship: "we're the same".

> Margaux: I thought, anyway, my little sister is my little sister. It was weird at some point. (…) And then actually we have a picture where we look so much alike. And so I think it helped me. It's silly but it helped me think, anyway, on this [picture] we're the same. Moreover with my sister we're very close, even more than with my twin sometimes.

The new narrative at once integrates the donation and states the continuity of the existing relationships with kin. Through resemblance and transmission talk donor offspring express and renew their sense of belonging.

I propose the notion of *re-kinning* to describe this process. Kinning has already taken place but is questioned by new information or an event, such as the disclosure of a secret about conception or a meeting with genitors. In such situations the recipients of information reassess their kin relationships and make a deliberate effort to state how they are still meaningful to them. They assert how they are still kinned with the parent and/or other family members affected by the new information. Re-kinning is thus a different step from kinning. It can be defined as the deliberate process through which someone reaffirms existing kin relationships, which have been jeopardised by information or an event that was unknown to them. It involves an active participation of those to whom the information was unknown, which may involve several people at once. Some parents do not tell anyone about their fertility treatment (Frith *et al.* 2017). Donor offspring may then dis-

close the process to cousins, for example, who subsequently go through a re-kinning process to the same extent as the offspring themselves. The focus on offspring nonetheless allows a reconsideration of their role in the construction of kinship, as observed in other multiparental situations such as step-families (e.g. Martial 2003). While parents may be the main actors of the kinning process in donor conception, offspring are (generally) the instigators of re-kinning.

Conclusion

The analysis of the experience of donor conceived adults within the French anonymous system sheds new light on the concept of kinning, which has previously been explored predominately from the parents' point of view. The study supports and adds to findings of research in other national contexts by providing insights on the particularities of the French situation, using face-to-face interviews with offspring. This article offers a re-evaluation of the anthropological definition of the concept of resemblance with regard to kinning. First, I have argued that although stating a resemblance may be a way to establish a connection between kin, it does not necessarily imply kinship and kinning. Conception is a source for transmissions and the donors' participation in procreation is not neutral in this regard. But they are not considered as kin. Defining the sense of the connection between donors and donor offspring is difficult in an anonymous context. The relation to the donor is impossible and therefore hardly thinkable for donor conceived adults. Through the body their sense of self is questioned. In France since December 2017 the first cases where donor offspring have been able to identify their donor and donor siblings have appeared. Further research on these situations, supported by studies abroad, should deepen our understanding of the new connections created by donation.

Secondly, I have proposed the new notion of re-kinning. Knowledge about conception has consequences on the way relations are interpreted and talked about. The disclosure of new information on the matter leads to an adjustment of the narrative on kin relations. Donor offspring integrate their father's lack of participation in their procreation into their story. The concrete relationships – with the father and other affected kin – remain unchanged. But donor conceived adults make active efforts to express how they remain meaningful to them, thereby re-kinning involved family members.

Beyond narratives, the analysis of resemblance and transmission talk highlights the relationality of bodies in Euro-American representations. Considering resemblance only as an expression of the biological dimension of kinship would prevent us from grasping the complexity and nuances of the

experience of donor offspring. Donor conceived bodies both incorporate the relationship with the father and the connection to the donor. Corporeal transmission forms a larger relational web of people sharing similarities, who may or may not be seen as kin. The focus on resemblance and transmission in donor offspring's experience hence encourages a shift away from a binary consideration of social and biological aspects of kinship (Carsten 2000a; Edwards 2006).

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