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Toxic Money or Paid Altruism: The Meaning of Payments for Identity-Release Gamete Donors

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Introduction

The language of 'gift giving' is ubiquitous in recruitment literature for many forms of bodily donation, including blood, organ and gamete (Healy 2006; Lock 2002; Orobitg and Salazar 2005; Shaw 2015), with procurement systems premised on 'altruism' legally mandated in most Western jurisdictions (Shaw 2015). Debates on the ethics of paying donors continue (Friedman and Friedman 2006; Levine 2010; Resnick 2001) but the voices of donors have often been missing from these discussions, particularly with regard to their views on the meaning of payments and their compatibility (or not) with a conception of donation as a gift (Haimes 2015).

In this article, I analyse new empirical data which addresses this issue, examining how 24 UK identity-release[1] gamete donors negotiated the concept of payment. Although all participants described their donations as acts of giving and themselves as fundamentally motivated by the aim of helping recipients, there was gendered variation as to whether they were able to incorporate payment within such a narrative. Egg donors commonly took the view that *some* payment, depending on the amount and how it was paid, could be accepted without undermining a conception of the donation as a gift. Sperm donors, on the other hand, often expressed the view that acceptance of any money at all would undermine their understanding of their actions as acts of giving.

I draw on theories on the social meanings of both money (Parry and Bloch 1989; Zelizer 1994) and gifts (Mauss 1990; Parry 1986; Shaw 2015) to explain why payments tended to be viewed so differently by male and female donors. I argue that egg donors were more able to

draw on a discourse of ‘relational gifts’ to construct their actions as other-oriented; in this sense, they were able to present their donation as a gift on the basis that it was a personalised activity which symbolically connected them to their recipients. This particular gift discourse was less available to sperm donors for whom connections with recipients were perceived as risky. Male donors therefore tended to rely more heavily on a discourse of ‘pure altruism,’ and absolute opposition to market exchange, in order present their donations as a particular kind of gift. In addition, I suggest that, in our cultural imagination, payments to sperm donors are categorised as ‘earnings’ and sperm donation is perceived as a job undertaken for ‘extra cash’. This stereotype inhibited sperm donors from constructing payments as incidental to altruistic motivations, in the way many egg donors did.

I conclude by arguing that, in order to understand the meaning of payments to bodily donors, social scientists need to analyse, not only how payments are framed and whether or not a gift narrative is expected from bodily donors (points both discussed in the existing literature), but also what form(s) of gift discourse are encouraged in different contexts and how these relate to ideas about money and markets. A complex relationship exists between constructions of gifts and payments, with donors’ ability to accommodate monetary exchanges within narratives of giving dependent on the particular kinds of gift discourses available to them. As this article demonstrates, different actors may be more or less able to construct their actions as particular kinds of gifts, with gendered practices and ideologies important explanatory factors in this particular context.

Payments to bodily donors

Increasing demand for human tissue has led to much debate on the efficacy and ethics of paying donors, with a view to increasing supply (for example Becker and Elias 2007; Friedman and Friedman 2006; Sandel 2012; Shenfield and Steele 1995; Schwindt and Vining 1986). As Shaw and Bell (2015) argue, these debates are often premised on a gift-commodity dichotomy, with advocates of payment arguing that financial incentives are needed in order to increase supply and their critics suggesting that such incentives would bring about exploitation of donors, commodification of the human body and undermine altruistic motivations. Arguably, these objections to the use of financial incentives are a sign of Titmuss' influence as an advocate of a gift system for blood donation. He argued that unpaid systems attract donors who are motivated to give to their community, whereas the use of financial incentives 'crowds out' those who would donate for altruistic reasons (Titmuss 1973).

In recent years, both social scientists and bioethicists have sought to move beyond this gift/commodity dichotomy in their analysis of bodily tissue exchanges (Høeyer 2009; Nuffield Council on Bioethics 2011; Sharp 2001; Shaw and Bell 2015; Waldby and Mitchell 2006; Zeiler 2014), instead demonstrating the mutable status of donated tissues and the variable significance of their transfer. As Waldby and Mitchell (2006) argue, in a globalised neo-liberal society in which the boundaries between nation states and public/private domains are increasingly fluid, this binary framework fails to account for the social trajectories of donated tissues which may be given as 'gifts,' later to be exchanged as commodities. Sharp's

(2001) analysis of organ transfer in the USA also demonstrates that the same tissue may simultaneously be viewed very differently (as a highly personalised gift or a valuable commodity) by medical professionals and the families of deceased donors.

However, few empirical studies have examined in-depth the views of bodily donors on the meaning of payment (Haimes 2015). Exceptions include Shaw and Bell's research with living kidney donors (2015), studies of women who donate (or could donate) eggs for stem cell research (Haimes et al. 2012; Haimes 2015; Waldby et al. 2013) and an interview study with Spanish egg donors for fertility treatment (Orobitg and Salazar 2005). These empirical studies found that, whilst donors often disapprove of the 'buying' and 'selling' of human tissues, this does not mean that payment (in some form) is necessarily rejected. Instead, their findings suggest that the meaning of payments to donors is highly context dependent. Under particular conditions or in particular forms, such as when presented as a benefit-in-kind or as 'compensation,' money may be viewed as compatible with altruistic motivation and need not imply that donation is a market exchange.

Studies of gamete donors provide an interesting context in which to explore the meaning of payment for donation, firstly, because payments to such donors are relatively common in comparison with other forms of bodily donation and, secondly, because the meaning of such payments appears to be highly variable. Research with gamete donors has found that payments to donors are viewed variously as signalling a contractual exchange (Mohr 2015; Speirs 2008), comparable with wages (Almeling 2011), a symbolic means of disconnecting the donor from their gametes (Mohr 2015; Orobitg and Salazar 2005; Speirs 2008) and as fair

and appropriate compensation for the impact of donation on donors' lives (Orobitg and Salazar 2005; Almeling 2011).

Almeling's (2011) ethnographic study provides empirical data and theoretical insights which help to explain this variation. Her comparative research in US egg and sperm banks found that egg donors were encouraged to understand their donation as a gift to help recipients (with payments of approximately $5000 framed as 'compensation'), whereas male donors were encouraged to view the process from a more detached perspective, as a job and their payments, of approximately $75 per sample, as 'earnings.' Although Almeling argues that researchers should pay close attention to the *amount* of payments offered to donors in different settings, she adds that variation in how payments are understood cannot be explained by this alone. Instead she draws attention to the way payments are made and how they are discussed, highlighting the importance of gendered organisational practices in framing their significance.

Almeling's (2011) work, as well as others who have challenged the gift/commodity binary (for example Haimes 2015; Høeyer 2009), use theories on the social meanings of money to challenge the view that introducing money into exchanges automatically determines their character. Parry and Bloch (1989) argue that, despite the Western tendency to fetishise money, depicting it as inevitably corrosive of social or personal relationships in which it is implicated, money has no *fixed* meaning or effect on social relations. This fetishisation explains why philosophers and bioethicists have often viewed donor payment as leading inevitably towards commodification of human bodies and the exploitation and objectification

of persons (Sandel 2012; Shenfield and Steele 1995). At the same time, this culturally-specific view of money as rationalising and de-personalising is also the reason why the introduction of payments for gamete donation and its subsequent construction as an economic exchange can be used (by donors and/or clinic staff) to discursively disconnect donors from that which is donated (Mohr 2015; Orobitg and Salazar 2005; Speirs 2008). Taking Parry and Bloch's argument one step further, Zelizer (1994) argues that, this fetishised view of money is not only culturally-specific, but also context specific; even in the West, social practices transform the meaning of money. Examining how money is transformed in the USA, she argues that, by 'earmarking' funds, creating special currencies and talking about money in particular ways, supposedly fungible money becomes all manner of things, from gifts to alimony, which produce and maintain distinct kinds of social relations, including those which we think of as highly personal.

The social significance of gifts

Parry and Bloch (1989) link the Western tendency to fetishise money with an ideological opposition of the gift and commodity exchange. Money, as a condensed symbol of selfish market exchange, is seen to be incompatible with the spirit of altruism. However, Parry also explains that this opposition relies on a conception of gifts as 'pure' (1986). He describes how an idealisation of pure altruism (actions which are entirely other-oriented) develops in parallel with market economies in which individuals are presumed to behave in an entirely self-interested manner. Whilst ideologically opposed, self*less* giving and self*ish* economic exchange are two sides of the same coin, both premised on the existence of bounded individuals whose interests can be neatly separated from those of others.

An ideology of ‘pure altruism’ is evident in medical practices and discourses surrounding bodily donation. Shaw (2008) reports that health care practitioners often mobilise an idealised view of organ donation as an unconditional gift in order to distance the practice from any personal gain or commercialisation. Tutton (2002, 2004) also identifies a notion of gifts as one-way, given without obligation or expectation of reciprocation in the discourses of ethics committees, medical councils and research institutes with an interest in procuring donations. The EU Tissues and Cells Directive (2004) similarly defines altruistic donation in opposition to external (particularly financial) reward. In line with a model of gifts as unconditional, interviews with blood donors (Waldby et al. 2004), egg donors (Konrad 2005) and gamete recipients (Hargreaves 2006; Van Parys et al. 2016) have found that some use the idiom of the gift to emphasise the subsequent disconnection between donors and donated tissue – a gift can neither be given nor taken back.

However, more often, social science research has highlighted the complex, often contradictory, understandings of the gift of bodily donation. Bodily donors and recipients frequently do *not* experience their gift as a ‘free’ and disconnected act of altruism, as the medical-ethical model arguably encourages. Instead this gift is conceptualised as relational, creative or expressive of social ties between donor and recipient. This is particularly evident in studies of organ transplantation which have found that organ recipients often feel obligated to reciprocate for the gift of an organ (Fox and Swazey 1992; Sharp 1995; Shaw 2008) and frequently feel a sense of connection to their donor and/or their donor’s family (Fox and Swazey 1992; Rosengarten 2001; Sharp 1995). Families of UK deceased organ donors often

desire more information about recipients (Haddow 2005) and recognition that their relative's contribution had been valued (Sque and Payne, 1996). Gamete donors similarly express nuanced and complex views about the meaning of their 'gift.' Interviews with egg donors have found they often report feelings of connection with their recipients, frequently articulated in relation to the gift they have given (Konrad 2005; Shaw 2007; 2008; Van Parys et al. 2016). Furthermore, these studies suggest that many anonymous egg donors would like to know more about their specific recipient and/or the outcome of their donation (Konrad 2005; Shaw 2007).

Recipients and donors seem to draw on an alternative (impure) discourse about gift giving, when they express feelings of connectedness, the obligation to give, the need to reciprocate or a desire to meet the other. Mauss' (1990) theory of the social significance of gift-giving has commonly been applied in order to make sense of such experiences (Fox and Swazey 1992; Gill and Lowes 2008; Shaw 2007). He argued that, in so-called 'archaic' societies, social solidarity is produced and reproduced through reciprocal gift exchange practices which create ties between individuals and groups. Members of these communities are obligated to give, to receive and to reciprocate. Crucially, return gifts are not considered as exact returns and so further obligations to give, receive and reciprocate are created. Unlike the pure gift, which is conceived as entirely alienated, the Maussian gift retains a symbolic connection to the donor, which he calls the 'spirit of the gift.' Seen through Mauss' theoretical lens, gift giving is a relational and personal act which is simultaneously other-oriented *and* self-interested. The studies cited above suggest that donors and recipients of bodily substance often reference this idea, that gifts create social bonds, in order to make sense of their experiences.

Neither of these conceptions of gifts, as either 'pure' or 'relational,' represents how bodily donations are always given and understood. Instead, as Shaw (2015) has convincingly argued in relation to organ donation, understanding of gifts and their consequences are culturally variable and context dependent. Taking up her argument, I suggest we view both 'pure altruism' and 'relational giving' as gift discourses – ways of talking about actions which each have cultural saliency. So, it makes social sense to say that if you give something away then you no longer have any connection to that gift and you should not expect anything in return. However, it is also culturally meaningful to say that we feel guilty or uncomfortable if we are not able to make a return gift or that we take an interest in the impact of our gifts. Depending on the context, one or both of these ways of talking might be seen as appropriate for narrating our experiences. Importantly, for my own argument, by talking about our actions in these terms, we can construct our actions *as* gifts, and as particular kinds of gifts.

In this article, I bring together theories on the social meaning of gifts and money, problematising both the 'gift' of gamete donation and the meaning of payment in this context. I consider not only *whether* donors mobilise discourses of giving (all participants in this study did this) but also attend to the particular gift discourses which they mobilised and consider the ways in which these shaped their ability to construct the meaning of payments to donors and incorporate (or not) such monetary exchanges within their narratives.

Methods

The data reported in this article were produced as part of a wider qualitative study of identity-release (non-anonymous) UK donors. The project was approved by research ethics committees in both The University of Edinburgh and the NHS and was guided by two primary research questions:

1. How do UK identity-release donors view and experience donation?
2. How are their views and experiences shaped by the social contexts in which they donate?

To address these questions, I conducted in-depth interviews with gamete donors, as well as ethnographic fieldwork and staff interviews in two fertility clinics. In this article, I focus on the data generated through donor interviews and particularly discussions around payments offered to them and to gamete donors more widely.

I recruited donor participants primarily via two fertility clinics in the UK, one NHS and one privately funded, and a further five via the National Gamete Donation Trust, a charity which aims to raise awareness of gamete donation. Twenty-four donors were interviewed, eight men and sixteen women, who had taken various routes into donation. Five women had been egg-sharers, meaning they had donated half their eggs in exchange for reduced cost IVF treatment (saving approximately £2000). Eight (two men and six women) had been known donors, i.e. they had donated to family members, friends or acquaintances. Fourteen (seven men and seven women) had acted as 'altruistic' donors – the clinics' term (which I have adopted here), used to describe those donating to someone they did not know and not participating in an

egg-sharing scheme. They were aged between 25 and 42 and came from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. All but one Black West African egg donor, were white of Northern European ancestry and all but three of these were white British. The majority identified as heterosexual and three as gay or lesbian. At the time of their first donation, half the participants already had their own children and a further four egg-sharers became parents following treatment.

UK gamete donation is highly regulated, both via legislation directly and by the assignment of regulatory powers to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA). All participants in this study had donated in clinics between 2005 and 2013 and were therefore subject to UK identity-release legislation; they had consented to their name and last known address being released to any donor offspring who might request it, after they reach the age of eighteen. Participants varied with regard to if, and how much, payment they had been offered for donating. Prior to April 2012, UK clinics were able to reimburse donors after-the-fact for expenses incurred as a result of donating, usually up to a maximum of £250. Since this date, clinics have been able to offer fixed payments of £750 per cycle for egg donors and £35 per visit to the clinic for sperm donors (note that payments to sperm donors are generally paid as a lump sum of approximately £400 at the end of a programme of donation). However, only three participants (Rachel, Ian and Daniel) in this study were offered these fixed payments. Most were offered travel expenses only (n=14), the five egg-sharers had their IVF fees reduced and two known donors were not offered payments of any kind.

This study does not therefore claim to evidence the views of 'paid donors' as we might ordinarily categorise such people. However, this does not preclude discussion of the meaning of payment nor deny its relevance to the literature reviewed here. Whether offered fixed payments, reimbursement of expenses, reduced IVF treatment or no payment at all, participants readily discussed the significance which the presence, absence or form of money had for the kind of act they saw themselves as engaging in.

All interviews were conducted between 2013 and 2014 and were semi-structured, following a loosely chronological framework. I began by asking donors to tell me about how they became a donor. Most continued, unprompted, to tell me about their experiences of the donation process and its consequences. I encouraged donors to tell their stories in their own words, focussing on the topics they considered most relevant. However, I did also use a topic guide which included questions on motivations, experiences of the donation process and views on their role in relation to recipients and offspring. All interviews were transcribed in full, using pseudonyms and omitting any other identifying information.

My analysis was informed by the principles of content (Robson 2002) and narrative analysis (Ezzy 1998; Riessman 1993). As well as analysing interview data thematically (categorising the kinds of experiences, events and feelings which donors reported), I was interested in the ways in which participants ordered and framed these events and actions (including past memories and imagined futures) in order to make their donation stories intelligible to me (Riessman 1993). I do not claim that my analysis constitutes a direct reflection of donors' experiences nor that it reflects a singular 'truth' about their motivations. Instead, I assume

that donors' experiences of the donation process (including their perceptions of their motives) are fundamentally bound up with the stories they tell, have told, and imagine being able to tell, about those actions and events (Ezzy 1998), including those constructed in conversation with me. However, for my own purposes, this is not a significant limitation; my analytical focus here is on the relative availability of particular donation stories to different actors and how this is shaped by wider cultural discourses and social-material practices.

'I didn't do it for the money'

All donor participants described their donations as acts of giving, something they had done with the overwhelming aim of helping others. Whether they were known, altruistic or egg-share donors, whether or not that they been offered any payment, they all strongly rejected the idea that they had been financially motivated and the vast majority stated that people should not be donating '*for* the money:'

> Again, I'm not doing it for financial gain. If you're doing this for financial gain then you shouldn't be allowed to do it in my opinion. I know that's a really, I know that's a really strong thing. But if you are doing this for a financial gain then you're doing it for the wrong reasons.
>
> (Daniel, altruistic sperm donor)

Here, Daniel separates his 'donation story' from a (hypothetical) alternative in which donation is undertaken as a way to make money.

In contrast with Almeling's (2011) findings, male, as well as female, donors sought to frame their narratives in this way, with none presenting donation as a 'job.' This is perhaps unsurprising given the differing regulatory contexts in the UK and the USA. Payments to US donors are decided by individual sperm and egg banks and Almeling's participants were paid, on average, $5000 for egg donors and $75 per sample for sperm donors. However, as Almeling argues, we should also consider how these payments are framed. In the USA, financial incentives are used in advertising to attract gamete donors, with sperm donation often presented as an easy way to make money (Almeling 2011). In the UK, the HFEA forbids any use of financial incentives in recruiting potential donors and states that clinics 'should ensure that donors understand that donating gametes and embryos is voluntary and unpaid' (HFEA 2017, 130).

Donors themselves did not cite regulations as the reason for their opposition to financially motivated donation. Instead, the most frequent explanation donors gave as to why people should not be donating '*for* the money' was the prospect of donor-conceived offspring learning of such motivations. Many imagined a scenario in which a donor-conceived person asks their donor why they had donated, only to be told that it was 'just for the money.' Donors imagined that this outcome would be devastating to offspring and assumed that donors who donated '*for* the money' would lack empathy for, or interest in, their offspring:

> If the child came to me at the door and I said, well actually I did it all for money. Well that would be horrendous to say that to a person. So if I was a person of that moral standing then it would just be awful, I think, to be telling someone that.
>
> (Rob, altruistic sperm donor)

It was because of their imagined future relationship to their offspring and the responsibility they felt towards them that it was so crucial to these donors that they distance their actions from market exchange. Implicit here is the assumption that financial motivations are incompatible with emotional connection and would therefore be corrosive to the personal relationships which they imagined their offspring may seek (Parry and Bloch 1989; Zelizer 1994).

Interestingly, many of Almeling's (2011) male participants had also agreed for their identity to be released to offspring in the future. However, for them, this did not preclude an understanding of donation as a job. This difference is perhaps influenced by the differing role of the law in UK and US regulations on donor anonymity. In UK clinics, identity-release donation is compulsory (suggestive of a moral obligation towards donor-conceived offspring), whereas in the USA it is left for individual organisations to decide whether to recruit identity-release and/or anonymous donors. Many clinics, including the sperm banks in Almeling's study, therefore recruit both kinds of donor, frequently offering additional financial incentives for those who consent to identity-release.

Paid altruism or toxic money?

Whilst there was widespread agreement that donors should not donate for financial reasons, participants disagreed as to whether not donating '*for* the money' implied that no payment could be accepted. For some, paid gifts were possible and for others any acceptance of money was toxic to a gift narrative. These two perceptions were strongly correlated with the donor's gender.

Many egg donors expressed a nuanced view of payment, stating that some payment (depending on the amount) could be accepted without undermining the overall framing of their donation as an altruistic act. Although only Rachel had received one, most egg donors considered that the new fixed payments of £750 per cycle were 'about right' and frequently explained that the money they had been offered (whether fixed sums, travel expenses or reduced IVF fees) did not constitute a significant benefit, once all the requirements of egg donation had been taken into account:

> See in the grand scheme of things, I don't think it's *that much* money for what you go through. You know, really it's not. Considering, especially the amount of money I spent in transport, up and down. You know, if you're taking days off work. Cause if you're taking days off work as well, you've got that to think about. And then you've got, you're injecting yourself with drugs and swallowing all these tablets. And then you're getting the actual procedure done. You know, if you think about it, it's not really enough to cover what you go through. But you know, again, it's not the point. I'm really not fussed about the money and I would do it for nothing.
>
> (Rachel, altruistic egg donor, original emphasis)

Similarly, Yasmin explains that her discounted treatment was 'like a bonus'- an incidental benefit rather than a primary motivating factor:

> Cause although, like I said before, there was a financial part of it, that wasn't the driving factor behind it. It was just, I really see that as like a bonus. As in, oh by the way, not only can you help either the researchers or women who want to have children, you're getting a discount. And you didn't feel like you were getting paid for it either. It was like a discount.

(Yasmin, egg share donor)

By framing payments offered to them (and other egg donors) as 'compensation,' 'discounts' or 'bonuses' rather than 'earnings' or 'incentives,' egg donors disassociated payments from markets and financial motivations (see also Almeling 2011; Haimes 2015; Waldby et al. 2013). Clinic discourses and practices generally facilitated this view of payments through their categorisation of unknown, non-patient donors as 'altruistic,' a tendency to use the term 'compensation' rather than 'payment' in donor-facing literature and by treating the calculation and discussion of money in a casual manner (see also Haimes 2015; Høeyer 2009). Donors reported that clinic staff rarely discussed payment with them and that they did not ask about it. This ambiguity about whether, when and how much they might be offered was an important part of the process by which they could construct payments as incidental, rather than incentives. For egg-share donors, the fact that they received a benefit-in-kind rather than cash payment was likely also a factor in their ability to construct these as 'bonuses' (Haimes 2015; Waldby et al. 2013).

However, for some donors the belief that people should not donate *for* the money was incompatible with *any* payment being accepted. This view, in which money was presented as toxic to an understanding of donation as a gift, was most strongly and frequently asserted by male donors. Many male participants opposed the introduction of fixed payments to sperm donors, on the basis that this created a 'market' in donation or attracted those who were donating for the 'wrong reasons.' Several sperm donors also rejected payments offered to them; Liam rejected the offer of travel expenses and, of the two sperm donors offered fixed

payments, Ian had donated his to charity and Daniel (who had not yet completed his donation) also discussed this possibility:

> The aspect for me as well, if you're paying then that doesn't feel like helping. You offer help. You don't offer help and say, here's the bill.
>
> And also there's that whole element of paying, it just didn't sit right…For me, it's are you helping? Yes. This is a good thing. Right. Fine. And then that's the way you're doing this. If it's, I'm only doing this and I'm being paid. Well….doesn't feel right.
>
> (Liam, altruistic sperm donor)

> See I never ever done it for the money, money didn't interest me at all**.** I done it to help people. Any penny I've ever had I've given to [children's hospital]**.** Why would you want paid for helping somebody?
>
> (Ian, altruistic sperm donor)

In the above citations, Liam and Ian suggest that accepting any payment would undermine their narrative of donation as an act of giving or helping. The extent to which these extracts portray money as toxic to a narrative of giving is all the more apparent when we consider their context; Liam's absolute and highly moralised rejection of payment is made in explanation of his decision to reject the clinic's offer to reimburse his travel expenses only. In other contexts, we might not think of this as 'being paid' but, for him, accepting money for costs incurred as a result of donating would have been categorised in this way and undermined his act of giving. It should also be noted that the amount of money which these men were refusing or re-donating (approximately £400 for Ian and Daniel and £200 for Liam) would not have been insignificant to them. At the time of interview, Liam and Ian both

worked in skilled-manual occupations, the latter with a large family to support and Daniel was unemployed.

Sperm donors' reliance on a pure gift narrative

Why is it that the meaning of payments, and their relationship to an other-oriented donation narrative, is so different for egg and sperm donors? In this article, I propose two key reasons. Firstly, I suggest that sperm donors tended to be particularly reliant on a 'pure gift' discourse in order to frame their donation narrative as other-oriented.

The sperm donors I interviewed very often mobilised a dichotomy between gifts or altruism and commodity exchange (Parry and Bloch 1989) in order to present their donations as other-oriented. Money, as a symbol of the latter, was incompatible with the spirit of giving in which they had framed their donation. In line with this opposition, these men presented their donations as 'pure' or 'free' gifts (Laidlaw 2000; Parry 1986), something given absolutely without any expectation of any return of any kind.

Whilst egg donors also mobilised this ideology of 'pure altruism,' they often also drew on a notion of gifts as personal and relational practices (Mauss 1990; Shaw 2015). Echoing the findings of previous studies (Almeling 2011; Konrad 2005; Orobitg and Salazar 2005; Shaw 2007; Van Parys et al. 2016), egg donors often spoke about feelings of connection with, or interest in, their recipients. Unsurprisingly, this was common amongst known donors (of whom, all but two, were female) but unknown egg donors also expressed these sentiments;

sometimes they wanted to meet their recipients or find out more about them. They thought about the impact their donation would have on their lives and they often imagined shared experiences like pregnancy, motherhood, procedures in the clinic and, in the case of the egg-sharers, infertility and treatment:

> Interviewer: Would you actually like if you knew who the recipients were?
>
> Y: Yeah I think that would be wonderful. Because I think mainly because the reason we're doing it is from an emotional side of things, you want to help somebody. I think it'd be wonderful to. I think it's exactly the same as when families want to meet, you know when the person who's received an organ donation, wants to meet the family who lost their loved one. It's like that's the same for me. I want to know. I'd find it far more. It doesn't necessarily need to be a friend or anything but to know who they are I think would be wonderful because you could really say, oh *this* is where it's going to.
>
> (Yasmin, egg share donor, original emphasis)

> It's like a wee sense of achievement as well that this has happened. I'm glad to have been a part of it to be able to help somebody. I said to the staff at the ACU [assisted conception unit] that I would like to know all the way along, how things go with retrieval, if the woman gets pregnant how it goes, if she's successful, if she has a successful pregnancy and delivers and…..then I did get word back finally that she's had a boy in October so I was really pleased. I thought great. It's just another thing. Oh I was able to help somebody. And it's not just helping somebody by carrying their shopping. It's giving them something they really want.
>
> (Karen, altruistic egg donor)

In these extracts, Karen and Yasmin portray their donation as an act of personalised giving which symbolically connects them to their specific recipient. I suggest that by telling their

donation stories in this way, emphasising their connectedness to the recipient, egg donors drew on a discourse of relational giving in order to present their actions as other-oriented gifts. In these accounts, giving is not absolutely opposed to self-interested action but instead the connection between donor and recipient means that the gift brings emotional benefit to both. I suggest a discourse of relational giving therefore provided an alternative or additional framework within which egg donors could present their donation as a gift.

In contrast, male donors very rarely expressed connections with their specific recipients nor a desire to find out more about, or meet, them. This is, in part, because it was particularly socially risky for sperm donors to talk about connections with recipients. Although all the donors I interviewed were aware that they could be perceived as a threat to the status of the recipients as the 'real' parents, male donors were particularly aware that their presence could be challenging, particularly for male partners. Adam, for example, explains that it would be difficult for a male recipient to make contact with, or thank, their donor:

> Because, because for a man to be infertile that is a blow to the ego. And sending a letter to *some other guy*. It would feel weird to me if I was on that end. And so I'm not expecting [them to get in contact]. I probably would not have written anyway, if I had been in that situation.
>
> (Adam, altruistic sperm donor, original emphasis)

Similarly, Neil, explaining why male recipients would not normally be interested in staying in contact with a sperm donor, states that, 'You can understand men…feeling that they're not a man because they can't have kids themselves.'

Adam and Neil refer to the particular stigma attached to male infertility (Gannon, Glover, and Abel 2004; Snowden, Mitchell, and Snowden 1983; Wischmann and Thorn 2013) to explain why their recipients might perceive them as 'some other guy' – a potential threat to their identity, as a man or as a father. We might also interpret Adam's words as a suggestion that the male recipient might see the donor as threat to his relationship with his partner. Although he might not subscribe to this view, he recognises that donor insemination, and the relationship between donor and recipient may have sexual or adulterous connotations (Burr 2009; Haimes 1993). I suggest that, because they were aware of the symbolic threat they presented, sperm donors kept their distance, not just physically but also discursively. They were therefore less likely to talk about their donation as a personal, relational gift to specific recipients and relied on an opposition between other-oriented and self-interested action to frame their donation as a gift.

To some extent, differences between the processes of sperm and egg donation reinforce these gendered differences, discouraging sperm donors from imagining specific recipients and enabling egg donors to think about their donation as a personalised gift. Egg donors were aware that in order for them to begin the process of donation, they needed to be 'matched' with (usually just one) recipient and their treatment schedules managed so that the recipient could have the fertilised egg implanted shortly after the egg retrieval process was completed. In contrast, male donors were aware that their donations would be frozen and stored for six months before they will be available for use in treatment and, legally, they could be used by up to ten families. For many women, knowledge of one-to-one synchronous procedures fuelled their imagination about the recipient's concurrent experiences; echoing Orobitg and

Salazar's (2005) findings, unknown egg donors often reported looking for their recipients in the waiting room.

Sperm donor payments as 'beer money'

The second reason I want to suggest for the gendered pattern to donors' views on payment is a continued stereotype of sperm donors as financially-motivated and a view of their payments as additional earnings, frequently characterised as 'beer money' (Thompson 2008). Although they rejected its legitimacy, male donors were aware of this cultural association between sperm donation and payment:

> I think there is something that's seen as a bit kind of… well, you're getting paid to have a wank aren't you?
>
> (John, altruistic sperm donor)

> 'Cos if you watch, this is what I said to [counsellor], you watch Friends, you watch other American sitcoms, where sperm donation is, you walk in off the street, you get money. That's how it's portrayed in the media.
>
> (Daniel, altruistic sperm donor)

Male participants also reported that friends and acquaintances often assumed they were paid and that they had donated '*for* the money:'

> See I never ever done it for the money, money didn't interest me at all. I done it to help people. But I dare say, a lot of people that I spoke to about it were, oh you get paid for it.
>
> (Ian, altruistic sperm donor)

These extracts demonstrate that male donors who discussed, or imagined discussing, their donation with others were aware that the public image of sperm donors could create challenges to the legitimacy of their other-oriented donation stories. In contrast, only one egg donor reported other people assuming she had donated for financial reasons and women who shared their stories generally experienced widespread praise for their generosity. None described any particular media portrayals or stereotypes of egg donors.

Whilst Zelizer (1994) uses the concept of 'earmarking' to capture how individuals transform the meaning of money in their social relationships, I suggest that sperm donor payments are *culturally* framed and earmarked. That is to say, in public discourses and media portrayals (sometimes originating from the USA), payments to donors are frequently represented as a little supplementary income or, as Thompson (2008) writes, 'beer money for the weekend.' Perceptions of sperm donor payments as supplementary earnings, and their cultural earmarking as 'beer money,' is linked to an image of the typical donor as a young student. In the 2004 House of Lords debates on regulating donor information, Baroness Warnock commented:

> There is no doubt that in the past there was something surreptitious and slightly comic about sperm donors who tended to be medical students who needed money for a pint or something.
>
> (HL Deb 09 June 2004 vol. 662 col. 355)

Although she states that this image is out-dated, referencing a donor profile more common in the 1960s-1980s (Speirs 2008), I propose that this public image of sperm donors continues to the extent that current UK sperm donors are inhibited from constructing payments offered to them as incidental 'bonuses.' This is because, when associated with sperm donation,

payments to donors are widely assumed to constitute financial incentives, earmarked as additional cash for 'beer money.'

A view of sperm donor payments as 'earnings' is reinforced by information literature which describes the new fixed payments to sperm donors as 'per visit' rather than as a lump sum (as it is expressed for egg donors). Paying per visit implicitly constructs donation as a job because the amount paid relates directly to the amount of time spent in the clinic. In contrast, whilst the number of times they might visit the clinic does vary, egg donors are always paid the same amount. I should emphasise that the clinic staff I spoke to did not describe sperm donors as financially motivated and, in contrast to Almeling's (2011) findings, clinic literature made equal use of the term 'compensation' to describe both egg and sperm donation. However, I would argue that, for more recent sperm donors, paying per visit limited their ability to accommodate payments within a gift narrative because it undermined the ambiguity and casual calculation that was necessary to distance them from market exchange (Høeyer 2009).

Conclusion

In this article, I have sought to explain why sperm donors were less likely than egg donors to incorporate payments within a narrative of their donation as a gift. I have argued that the barriers to male participants talking about their donations as relational gifts and a continued stereotype of sperm donors donating for 'beer money' presented difficulties to male donors accommodating payments offered to them within this narrative framework. It was crucial to

these identity-release donors that they frame their donations as other-oriented acts of giving because they were aware that they may one day be telling these donation stories to offspring.

To what extent these specific findings can be transferred to other contexts is unknown. The majority of the participants in this sample had donated at just two clinics. The practices and recruitment policies of individual clinics (as well as national regulations and policies) are likely to impact both the kinds of people who act as donors and the ways in which they understand their actions. In addition, my comparison between male and female donors is complicated by the range of donor 'types' within the sample. It is probable that known donors, egg-sharers and 'altruistic donors' may view donation and payment in different ways and it is difficult to separate the impact of these different forms of donation from gendered practices and discourses. This is partly due to the small size of the sample and partly due to the fact that routes into donation are themselves gendered, with known egg donation being much more common than known sperm donation (at least, via clinics) and sperm-sharing much less common than egg-sharing programmes.

Acknowledging these limitations, this article contributes to sociological debates on the meaning of payment in bodily donation. Firstly, it supports the work of Haimes (2015), Almeling (2011), Høeyer (2009) and others who have demonstrated that, despite the *ideological* opposition often evidenced in bioethical discussions, when it comes to *actual* transfers of bodily material, there is no clear line between practices of gift exchange and market exchange. Like these authors, I show that monetary transfers *can* be incorporated within understandings of bodily transfers as gifts. However, what this article also

demonstrates is that for people to legitimately present themselves as both giving a gift *and* (in some sense) paid, relies, not only on cultural and organisational framings of those payments as distinct from earnings or incentives, but also on a particular understanding of the kind of gift being given. In order to understand and portray themselves as 'paid altruists,' donors require an alternative to the 'pure gift' discourse in order to legitimately present their donation as an other-oriented act. In this context, gendered practices and stereotypes limit the availability of alternative gift discourses for male donors. In other contexts, this may play out differently and factors other than gender may shape and limit the particular kinds of gifts that different actors are able to give, and subsequently how they are able to negotiate the issue of payment. This would be a fruitful topic for further sociological research to explore.

These findings have implications for policy-makers, as well as social scientists. In the UK, the HFEA increased payments for gamete donors with the rationale that, although donors ought to be altruistically motivated, it should be ensured that they did not incur financial losses as a result of their donation (HFEA 2017). Shaw and Bell (2015) have recently made a similar case in relation to known kidney donation. The findings from this study would suggest that, as well as planning carefully how such payments are to be framed at an organisational level, policy-makers need to address how those payments are framed at a cultural level and whether any barriers exist for particular groups of donors to adopt an 'impure' gift narrative within which they might accommodate them.

End Notes

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[1] Since April 2005, UK donors in licenced clinics must consent to their identity being disclosed to any offspring who request it, after they reach the age of eighteen.

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