

*“Think about the lives you are going to change”:
egg donors’ narratives on blogs hosted by commercial
recruitment agencies and fertility clinics*

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Abstract - English

Egg donors may face substantial health risks, making it essential that they receive comprehensive information to ensure valid informed consent. Additionally, altruistic narratives reinforce traditional gender norms, which may shape perceptions of who is seen as a 'suitable' donor. In light of these challenges, this study examined in what ways egg donor narratives are represented in blogs on websites of commercial recruitment agencies and fertility clinics. A thematic analysis of 43 blogs revealed four major themes: 'Bloggers encouraging others to donate', 'The recipients as the focus points in bloggers' stories', 'Bloggers constructing their identity' and 'Nothing negative to say about agencies and/or clinics'. The findings show that bloggers internalised and reinforced an altruistic, gendered and economic discourse. While further research is needed, this study offers valuable insights into the ways egg donor narratives are represented on commercial recruitment agencies and fertility clinic websites.

Abstract - Nederlands

Eiceldonoren kunnen aanzienlijke gezondheidsrisico's oplopen, waardoor het essentieel is dat zij volledig geïnformeerd worden om geïnformeerde toestemming te kunnen geven. Daarnaast versterken altruïstische verhalen traditionele gendernormen, wat de perceptie kan beïnvloeden van wie als een 'geschikte' donor wordt gezien. In het licht van deze uitdagingen, onderzocht deze studie op welke manieren donorverhalen werden gerepresenteerd in blogs op websites van commerciële rekruteringsagentschappen en fertiliteitsklinieken. Een thematische analyse van 43 blogs bracht vier hoofdthema's naar voren: 'Bloggers moedigen anderen aan om te doneren', 'De ontvangers zijn de focuspunten in de bloggers hun verhalen', 'Bloggers construeren hun identiteit' en 'Niets negatief te zeggen over agentschappen en/of klinieken'. De resultaten tonen aan dat bloggers een altruïstisch, gendergerelateerd en economisch discours internaliseerden en versterkten. Hoewel verder onderzoek noodzakelijk is, biedt deze studie waardevolle inzichten in de manieren waarop eiceldonorverhalen worden gerepresenteerd op de websites van commerciële rekruteringsagentschappen en/of fertiliteitsklinieken.

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Foreword

"The greatest mistake you can make is to constantly fear making one."

This quote has been a quiet companion throughout the writing of this thesis, encouraging me to learn, reflect and persevere. Writing this thesis has been a meaningful experience, both intellectually and personally. Therefore, after a year of hard work and countless cups of tea, I am proud to present this final product, which marks the completion of my Master of Arts in Gender and Diversity.

When I first began, I knew very little about the topic of egg donation. What started as a healthy curiosity has grown into a subject I find deeply fascinating. Throughout this research, I have come to understand the complexity of the egg donation industry, an industry I once viewed simply as driven by care and good intentions. I now see that it is shaped by a web of ethical, social and economic factors that make it far more nuanced than I initially imagined. Today, whenever I come across the term 'egg donation' on television or elsewhere, it immediately captures my attention and I am eager to learn more.

I would like to express my thanks to everyone who gave me the opportunity to explore this topic and supported me throughout the year. In particular, I would like to thank my supervisors, Prof. Dr. Veerle Provoost and doctoral researcher Lara Jacxsens, for their excellent academic guidance, constructive feedback and continuous support throughout the year. This thesis would not have been possible without you.

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Last but certainly not least, I want to thank my family, especially my mother and father, for their unwavering support and for giving me the opportunity to grow and expand my knowledge. Your love and encouragement have meant the world to me. Each of these incredible people has left an indelible mark on this thesis, and for that, I am deeply grateful.

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1. Introduction

In this thesis, I explored the narratives of egg donors as described in their blogs on websites of commercial recruitment agencies (CRAs) and fertility clinics (FCs). Before engaging in a deeper exploration, it is crucial to clarify what I mean by the term 'narratives'. Following Wong and Breheny's (2018, p.246) definition, narratives refer "to the wider accounts of social life that are drawn upon to tell a story". This conceptual framing clarifies the study's focus: to understand what the story conveys, its possible meanings and how they relate to other stories (Wong and Breheny, 2018, p.246). It forms the foundation from which this study departs and is therefore also reflected in the title of this thesis. It is important to note that the quote used in the title has been shortened. The full original title is provided in the footnote.¹

In what follows, I will outline what you can expect from this thesis. I will begin by clarifying the vocabulary used throughout the thesis. Then, I will define egg donation (ED) and outline its various stages. These stages will include screening and counselling, informed consent and ovarian stimulation and egg retrieval. Then, the associated risks of ED will be discussed. After establishing this foundation, we will turn to the online representation of ED. We will take a look at how ED is portrayed on the websites of CRAs and FCs, highlighting problematic representations. Then, we will take a look at how ED is framed as an altruistic act and explore the motivations that donors express for their donation. After presenting my research question, we will take a look at the methods applied in this thesis.

The methods section will detail the data collection process, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the procedure for analysing the data (thematic reflexive analysis) and the ethical considerations involved in studying online blogs.

The results section will present the themes that arose from the blog data. These findings will then be discussed in relation to existing literature in the discussion section. Finally, the conclusion will summarise the main insights and provide an answer to the research question.

¹ The original title is: "*Think about the end product and the lives you are going to change by taking part in this*": egg donors' narratives on blogs hosted by commercial recruitment agencies and fertility clinics

1.1 Vocabulary

Before explaining the vocabulary used, I would like to clarify the use of 'I' and 'we' throughout this thesis. The pronoun 'I' refers to the main researcher (S.H.), while 'we' refers to the main researcher and the supervisory team (V.P. and L.J.). The use of 'I' signals my individual contributions and intellectual engagement with the research. This appears primarily in the literature study and discussion, as these components were largely developed independently. In contrast, the methodology and results sections were shaped through collaborative efforts, as these stages involved more frequent team meetings and joint decision-making. Although the search strategies were discussed among the research team, ultimately the data collection was carried out by me.

I will now reflect on the terminology employed both in this research and within the academic literature. The term 'women' is commonly used in ED research (e.g., Kroløkke, 2015; De Proost et al., 2021; Lafuente-Funes et al., 2023; Lake et al., 2022; Perler & Pérez, 2024). I acknowledge that not all individuals with the capacity to donate eggs identify as women. Lowik (2020, p.105) emphasised the importance of moving beyond the gender binary in addressing reproductive and sexual health needs in research. Despite calls for inclusive language, much research in sexual health continues to rely on female/male categories and often conflates sex assigned at birth with gender (Tordoff et al., 2022, p.1). The use of distinct categories like 'male health' and 'female health' excludes individuals (Moseson et al., 2020, p.1060), such as transgender people, agender, intersex individuals and others, from the healthcare system and societal structures (Lowik, 2020, p.106). Healthcare settings often reinforce gender norms through gendered symbols, like pink chairs or images of cisgender women, fostering stigma and isolation (Moseson et al., 2020, p.1060). Disparities in information and healthcare access among trans and non-binary people are perpetuated by mechanisms such as exclusion, misclassification and erasure (Tordoff et al., 2022, p.2). Moseson et al. (2020, p.1060) further highlighted the lack of research on the health and care needs of transgender and non-binary individuals (Moseson et al., 2020, p.1060).

Another problem became evident when I observed that many researchers continue to use the term 'women' in their research (e.g., Kroløkke, 2015; De Proost et al., 2021; Lafuente-Funes et al., 2023; Lake et al., 2022; Perler & Pérez, 2024). This raises the question of whether to continue using the term 'women' in this research or shift the focus by adopting a more inclusive term, despite the absence of inclusive alternatives that fully capture the

meaning conveyed in other studies. Given these concerns, I have chosen to use 'egg donors' instead of 'women' in this study, as the latter term does not include all individuals with the reproductive potential relevant to ED.

The terminology of 'egg donation' or 'egg donor' remains contested: there is an ongoing debate surrounding the shift from 'egg donation' to 'egg provision or transfer' and from 'egg donor' to 'egg provider' (Shanley, 2002, p.258-259; Pande & Moll, 2018, p.24; Lafuente-Funes et al., 2020, p.222; Lafuente-Funes et al., 2023, p.262). The shift acknowledges that the term 'donation' suggests an altruistic act, while financial compensation is typically involved in ED (Shanley, 2002, p.258-259). Moreover, the term 'egg donation' fails to acknowledge the diverse reasons for the egg transfer (Lundin, 2012, in Pande & Moll, 2018, p.24) and frames the process in a way that suggests specific intentions (Lafuente-Funes et al., 2023, p.262). It also places disproportionate focus on the motivations of providers, while giving less attention to CRAs and FCs that commercialise these processes (Lafuente-Funes et al., 2020, p.222).

Despite these concerns, I have chosen to use the term 'egg donation' in this study, as our research examines the narratives of egg donors within the CRA and FC industry. The industry presents this process as an altruistic and 'selfless' donation (Almeling, 2007, p.325; Pande & Moll, 2018, p.24). Therefore, the terms 'egg donor' and 'egg donation' align with the industry's prevailing discourse and the way it conceptualises these practices. By using 'egg donors', I move beyond the restrictive gender categories, allowing us to focus not on gender or sex, but rather on the reproductive capacities of the body. However, in this research, the term 'women' may occasionally be used, as it reflects the language used by the bloggers or the researchers.

1.2 What is egg donation?

In ED, a distinction is made between heterologous and homologous reproduction (Perler and Pérez, 2024, p.790). ED is classified as heterologous reproduction, as it involves the use of reproductive material from a third party (Lafuente-Funes, 2020, p.222; Perler and Pérez, 2024, p.790). This contrasts with homologous reproduction, which includes techniques such as in vitro fertilisation (IVF) (Perler and Pérez, 2024, p.790). Thus, ED is a type of medically assisted reproduction in which donors voluntarily give their eggs to another person for reproductive or research purposes (Massiah et al., 2020, p.455). Importantly, the donor is not considered the parent of the donor-conceived child (Englert et al., 2004, in Johnson, 2017a, p.621). This thesis focuses on ED for reproductive purposes, rather than for scientific research.

The type of ED (e.g., egg sharing or known donation) varies from country to country, shaped by national laws and regulatory frameworks (Purewal & van den Akker, 2009, p.502-512; Massiah et al., 2020, p.455,459; Lafuente-Funes et al., 2023, p.260). For instance, in the UK, ED is only permitted if the donor is willing to be identifiable. This means that from the onset, both the donor and recipient are known to each other (Lafuente-Funes et al., 2023, p.262). In Spain, however, the procedure is strictly anonymous, meaning that no identifying information is exchanged between the recipient and the egg donor (Lafuente-Funes et al., 2023, p.263). In Belgium, ED can occur anonymously, as a known donation, through egg sharing or via cross-donation (Lafuente-Funes et al., 2023, p.263). Egg sharing involves patient donors, who receive subsidised fertility treatment in exchange for donating a portion of their eggs (Purewal & van den Akker, 2009, p.500; Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.7). Cross-donation, on the other hand, is an arrangement in which a donor is brought to the clinic by the recipient, so that this recipient can receive an anonymous donation from a different donor (Lafuente-Funes et al., 2023, p.263).

1.3 Process of egg donation

I am aware that the experiences of egg donors can differ significantly, yet I aim to provide a general overview of the various stages involved in the ED process. It is essential to explain each of these stages in order to understand their impact.

1.3.1 Screening and counselling

When an individual is interested in becoming an egg donor, this person will first have to undergo a screening process and counselling before the ED process can begin (Massiah et al., 2022, p.457). Before the screening process begins, egg donors are required to meet specific baseline criteria. Candidates are expected to be in good health, free from hereditary diseases and typically between 21 and 34 years old (Nurudeen et al., 2013, p.32; ASRM, 2021, p.1398; Massiah et al., 2022, p.457). To prevent conflicts of interest, individuals professionally involved in ED programmes or working for CRAs are prohibited from donating (Nurudeen et al., 2013, p.33; ASRM, 2021, p.1399).

The aim of the screening process is to identify a healthy individual (Massiah et al., 2020, p.457). This process involves gathering extensive information, including (1) the donor's medical and family history, (2) physical examination (e.g., blood pressure and BMI), (3) investigations (e.g., ovarian reserve test and genetic and infectious disease screening) and (4) psychosocial assessment (Nurudeen et al., 2013, p.31; Massiah et al.,

2020, p.457). Psychological evaluation by a qualified health professional is also recommended for all egg donors (ASRM, 2021, p.1399). This is to ensure that individuals are in a good psychological state to undergo the ED process (Massiah et al., 2020, p.457). Donors are not only assessed based on psychological readiness but also on the nature of their motivations (Almeling, 2007, p.327; Lafuente-Funes, 2017, p.262). The screening process is managed by a multidisciplinary team consisting of endocrinologists, nurses, mental health professionals and social workers (Nurudeen et al., 2013, p.44).

1.3.2 Informed consent

The timing of obtaining informed consent in the ED process can vary. In some cases, consent is sought before the ED process begins, after which responsibility for donor screening and selection is transferred to the ED programme by the CRA or FC (Nurudeen et al., 2013, p.43-44). In other instances, informed consent is obtained only after the donor has completed screening and psychological assessment (Massiah et al., 2020, p.457). Regardless of the timing, it is essential that informed consent is secured before the cycle of egg retrieval begins (Massiah et al., 2020, p.457; ASRM, 2021, p.1399).

Egg donors are asked to sign a consent form (Massiah et al., 2020, p.457), indicating their understanding and acceptance of the legal, medical and psychosocial aspects of ED (Nurudeen et al., 2013, p.33). Before providing consent, donors must fully understand their rights, obligations and responsibilities (Nurudeen et al., 2013, p.44). An egg donor's autonomy to make an informed decision can be influenced by several factors, including conflicts of interest (Cattapan, 2016, p.455), the lack of longitudinal data on risks (Cattapan, 2016, p.455; Kocas et al., 2021, p.85), inadequate communication of medical risks (Keehn et al., 2012, p.999; Kocas et al., 2021, p.80,85; Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.1; Lake et al., 2024, p.1) and the focus on financial incentives (Skillern et al., 2013, p. 1737; Cattapan, 2016, p.455; Kocas et al., 2021, p.85,80; Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.1; Lake et al., 2024, p.1).

1.3.3 Ovarian stimulation and egg retrieval

The primary goal of ovarian stimulation is to obtain multiple mature oocytes suitable for fertilisation. This is achieved through a carefully controlled ovarian stimulation process. In the case of fresh ED, treatment cycles are carefully coordinated to align the timelines of both the donor and the recipient (Massiah et al., 2020, p.458). However, with oocyte cryopreservation, eggs can now be frozen at maturity and stored outside the body (Massiah et al., 2020, p.458; van de Wiel, 2020, p.88). This

advancement helps overcome issues with synchronising treatment cycles in ED (Jain & Paulson, 2006, p.1037). The egg donor is required to attend regular clinic appointments to monitor the development of the eggs (ASRM, 2021, p.1398; Perler and Pérez, 2024, p.788). The process demands significant effort from the donor, as it involves scheduling and attending appointments, waiting for consultations and organising their daily life around the ED process (Molas, 2023, in Perler and Pérez, 2024, p.788).

After ovarian stimulation and administration of a trigger injection to induce ovulation, the donor is required to come to the FC for an egg retrieval procedure. This surgical procedure, performed under a short general anaesthetic, is generally completed within ten minutes (Perler and Pérez, 2024, p.788) and aims to remove eggs (Almeling, 2007, p.320). When the eggs are retrieved, they are either transferred to the recipient or, in cases where no immediate recipient is available, frozen for future use (Massiah et al., 2020, p.458). Bodri (2013, p.208) recommends ensuring easy access to a medical centre for observation or surgical intervention for up to 24 hours following egg retrieval, particularly in cases of intra-abdominal bleeding.

1.4 Risks of egg donation

This section explores the potential risks associated with the ED process, challenges that may significantly shape donors' experiences and therefore warrant careful attention. The ED process carries various risks, discomfort and potential health inconveniences which may increase after multiple donations (ASRM, 2021, p.1398). Bodri (2013, p.205) emphasises that serious short-term complications are rare, but ovarian stimulation and egg retrieval can still cause discomfort and inconvenience, and pose a risk of injury to the donor. First, I will discuss the short-term risks and then follow with the long-term complications associated with the ED process, each group being categorised according to their effect on ovarian stimulation or egg retrieval.

Short-term effects of ovarian stimulation may include abdominal discomfort and/or pain, headaches, mood swings, ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS) and thrombosis (Massiah et al., 2020, p.458). There is also a potential risk of an allergic reaction to the medication (El-Toukhy & Hanna, 2006, in Bodri, 2013, p.208; Massiah et al., 2020, p.458). OHSS, an iatrogenic complication caused by ovarian stimulation through superovulation (Rizk, 1995, in Jayaprakasan et al., 2007, p.183; ASRM Practice Committee, 2004, in Jayaprakasan et al., 2007, p.183; Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.5), varies in reported incidence due to inconsistent definitions

of the condition (Rizk, 1995, in Jayaprakasan et al., 2007, p.183; Delvigne & Rozenberg, 2002, in Jayaprakasan et al., 2007, p.183). Due to the absence of pregnancy, egg donors are only at risk for early-onset OHSS (Bodri, 2013, p.208). Although approximately 6% of individuals experience OHSS, it can lead to serious complications. These may include nausea, abdominal bloating and, in rare cases, kidney failure or death (Pearson, 2006, p.607). Although there is no proven treatment for OHSS, various supportive strategies are used to manage its symptoms. These include fluid replacement, paracentesis to relieve abdominal pressure and LMWH prophylaxis to prevent thromboembolic complications (Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists, 2016, p.14-16). Bodri (2013, p.207) also identifies adnexal torsion as a rare but serious complication of ovarian stimulation, which could lead to the loss of the donor's ovary (Bodri, 2013, p.207).

While egg retrieval is generally considered a safe procedure (Bodri, 2013, p.206; Flood et al., 1989, in Massiah et al., 2020, p.458), it carries a small risk of serious complications (Bodri, 2013, p.206). Short-term risks associated with egg retrieval include abdominal and/or pelvic pain, vaginal bleeding, vascular injury, bowel and/or bladder injury and infection (Massiah et al., 2020, p.458). One of the most common complications is intra-abdominal bleeding (Sauer, 2001, in Bodri, 2013, p.207; Bodri et al., 2008, in Bodri, 2013, p.207).

There is less available information on the long-term risks of ovarian stimulation (Pearson, 2006, p.607; Woodruff et al., 2016, p.662). The long-term effects may differ between egg donor and IVF patients (Woodruff et al., 2016, p.663), as factors like infertility and pregnancy influence outcomes and complicate comparisons (Pearson, 2006, p.607). Therefore, generalising findings from IVF studies to egg donors is questionable (Woodruff et al., 2016, p.663). Additionally, potential long-term effects of ovarian stimulation include an increased risk of ovarian, endometrial, breast or colon cancers. While this is plausible, no definitive conclusions can be drawn due to a lack of conclusive evidence (Massiah et al., 2020, p.458). Bodri (2013, p.215) also examined the long-term relationship between ovulation-stimulation drugs and reproductive cancers. However, most studies have failed to establish a clear cause-and-effect relationship (Bodri, 2013, p.215). Furthermore, limited research suggests a potential link between infertility and previous ED (Bodri, 2013, p.216). Other potential long-term risks include psychological problems. Donors may feel uncertain about whether their donation has resulted in the birth of a child or may have concerns about the child's well-being. There are unknown long-term

effects that remain to be fully understood (Massiah et al., 2020, p.458). Schneider (2008, p.3) highlights a concerning gap in donor knowledge about long-term risks. The distinction between 'no known risks' and 'unknown risks' is subtle but significant and often misunderstood by egg donors (Schneider, 2008, p.3). The presence of health risks with ED and the potential for these serious risks to be misunderstood underscores the importance of further research into whether egg donors truly comprehend the risks involved.

1.5 Problems with the representation of egg donation on websites

CRAs and FCs encounter a relatively small number of people who have chosen to be egg donors, while the demand for egg donors remains high (Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.1; Lake et al., 2024, p.1). This imbalance gives rise to a range of ethical and practical concerns. While both CRAs and FCs play key roles in the recruitment of egg donors and promotion of ED, CRAs tend to raise more ethical concerns than FCs. One reason for this is that CRAs may be run by individuals without formal qualifications or professional affiliation to organisations or guidelines, whereas FCs are staffed by doctors who must adhere to established standards and patient care (Keehn et al., 2015, p.612). This does not mean that FCs always operate ethically.

There is a difference between FCs and CRAs in how they represent risks in advertisements (Lake et al., 2024, p.1), as well as in the presentation of risks, donor characteristics and minimum age requirements on their websites (Keehn et al., 2012, p.995). Many of these websites failed to meet American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) guidelines, raising concerns regarding policy, practice and research (Keehn et al., 2012, p.995). Furthermore, the way risks were represented on FC and CRA websites also varies across countries (Keehn et al., 2012, p.995; Molas & Whittaker, 2022, p.334; Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.11). Spanish websites often omitted long-term risks, while UK websites tended to highlight the financial benefits of ED. Only Belgian websites mentioned infertility for the donor, specifically as a consequence of infections (Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.11). It is important to note that Jacxsens et al. (2024, p.2) employed a maximum variability sampling strategy for the UK and Spanish data, which means that the findings cannot be generalised to all websites from these countries. However, it is essential to provide complete and transparent information about the ED process from the onset. Withholding information about the risks from the onset cannot be fully justified by the argument that donors will receive full disclosure later in the ED process (Gurmankin, 2001, p.10).

FCs have a financial interest in presenting ED in the most positive light possible (Schneider, 2008, p.4). Research has shown a consistent pattern of incomplete and minimised representation of health risks and side-effects across various platforms. For instance, advertisements often minimise potential risks (Carpenter & Campo-Engelstein, 2025, p.405), while websites of CRAs tend to understate side-effects (Carter et al., 2012, p.60). Testimonials featured on websites frequently report minimal side-effects, no lasting problems and present ED as easy and smooth (Hammarberg et al., 2024, p.4). Additionally, FC websites have been found to underrepresent impactful risks and side effects (e.g., OHSS), despite being commonly reported by donors (Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.9,11).

Molas and Whittaker (2022, p.333-334) describe a type of language on websites, where language emphasising ease, comfort and brevity is known as 'overlexicalization'. This form of patronising discourse lacks informational content and serves to obscure or deny the presence of pain, risks, fear and inconvenience (Molas and Whittaker, 2022, p.333-334). Most websites primarily focus on providing medical information with minimal attention to the practical experiences of egg donors (Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.10). For example, while the stimulation process is described, there is often no mention of how it is administered, the word 'injection' is notably absent (Molas & Whittaker, 2022, p.332).

1.6 Altruism

Altruism serves as a recurring narrative in ED, as highlighted in various studies (Almeling, 2007; Curtis, 2010; Carter et al., 2012; Gezinski et al., 2012; Keehn et al., 2015; Lafuente-Funes, 2017; Gilman, 2018; De Proost et al., 2021; Jacxsens et al., 2024). Almeling (2007, p.328,331) stated that gendered expectations influence how ED is framed and advertised (Almeling, 2007, p.328,331). ED is typically portrayed as a selfless and altruistic act, while sperm donation is framed as a job opportunity. Potential egg donors who express financial motivations, such as a desire to earn quick money, are rejected from the donor pool, as such motives are seen as incompatible with the expected altruistic narratives (Almeling, 2007, p. 328). Instead, donors are more readily accepted when they explicitly express altruistic motivations, while financial motivations are expected to remain implicit (Lafuente-Funes, 2017, p.262).

The altruistic framing of ED places emotional expectations on egg donors (Curtis, 2010, p.80; Lafuente-Funes, 2017, p.259), drawing on ideals of femininity associated with motherhood and self-sacrifice (Curtis, 2010, p.80). It reinforces traditional gender norms and stereotypes, for example, during counselling, egg donors are often questioned about their emotional

connection to their eggs, a question that is not posed to sperm donors. It sustains narratives of “caring motherhood” and “distant fatherhood” (Almeling, 2007, p.328,336-337). An altruistic narrative is consistently reinforced by CRAs, FCs and donors in online forums, who refer to ED as a ‘gift’ and highlight emotional fulfilment, human connection and rewards (Keehn et al., 2015, p.616; De Proost et al., 2021, p.696-697; Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.7). This emotionally charged language, which presents ED as emotionally safe and fulfilling, is used both to influence recipients and to frame the possible relationships with donors (Keehn et al., 2015, p.615).

Compensation operates alongside the altruistic narrative (Almeling, 2007, p.336; Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.7). Research by Lafuente-Funes et al. (2023, p.274) demonstrates that the donation regimes in Spain, Belgium and UK shape the narratives, framing and experiences associated with ED. Each country adopts a distinct framing: Spain is characterised by “a system of closed-door, market-driven donation”, Belgium by “a form of trusted tissue exchange” and the UK by “a system of informed gift-giving” (Lafuente-funes et al., 2023, p.274). Fertility professionals may emphasise altruism as a way to distinguish ED from commodification and exploitation (Lafuente-Funes, 2017, p. 258). This altruistic framing is also reflected in the language used on websites, where incentives are framed as compensation rather than payment (Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.7). Compensation is framed as ‘just enough’ to cover discomfort and inconvenience, but not so high as to commercialise ED (Lafuente-Funes, 2017, p.260). To distance ED from gender-deviant transactions, such as financial compensation, the idea of ‘gift exchange’ plays a key role within an altruistic framework (Miner, 2021, p.4). Recipients may offer flowers, jewellery or financial gifts to the egg donor, presenting ED as a mutual gift exchange, where both the donor and recipient benefit (Almeling, 2007, p.335).

According to Molas and Whittaker (2022, p.329), the original motivations of egg donors (e.g., financial motivations) are reshaped and repurposed through online content, which disseminates specific definitions, values and messages (Molas and Whittaker, 2022, p.329). They introduced the concept of “discursive recycling” for this process (Molas and Whittaker, 2022, p.329) and highlighted the contradiction between this dominant altruistic discourse and actual donor motivations. While FCs and their websites strongly emphasise altruism, internet search data reveals a clear financial interest among potential donors (Molas and Whittaker, 2022, p.329).

1.7 Motivations to donate

Egg donors are motivated by a variety of factors. Söderström-Anttila (1995, in Bracewell-Milnes et al., 2016, p.460) and Thaldar (2020, p.6) found that the majority of donors are driven by an altruistic intention to help others. For some, a motivator for ED is financial compensation (Bracewell-Milnes et al, 2016, p.460; Thaldar, 2020, p.6) or a medical interest in understanding what the procedure involves (Byrd et al., 2002, in Bracewell-Milnes et al., 2016, p.460). Bracewell-Milnes et al. (2016, p.461) reported that, according to previous studies, egg donors may be driven by a desire to confirm their fertility, seek emotional compensation for a past termination or have a desire to pass on genetic material. The last finding was also observed by Thaldar (2020, p.6-7). However, motivations are not always consistent. While some donors appreciate financial compensation, others reject it (Bracewell-Milnes et al, 2016, p.460; De Proost et al., 2021, p.696-697). The socio-economic context of each donor greatly influences their decision: while one donor may give due to a temporary financial emergency, another might see ED as a replacement for their previous profession (Perler & Pérez, 2024, p.796). Ultimately, the motivations for ED are diverse and deeply intertwined with the socio-economic circumstances and societal structures in which egg donors live (Keehn et al., 2015, p. 617; Perler & Pérez, 2024, p.796).

1.8 Objectives and research question

Three critical issues emerge in the context of ED, each raising serious ethical and informational concerns. First, ED involves significant health risks (Pearson, 2006; Massiah et al., 2020; ASRM, 2021; Bodri, 2023). However, the distinction between “no known risks” and “unknown risks” is often overlooked or misunderstood by donors (Schneider, 2008, p.3). This lack of awareness can lead to uninformed decisions with potentially harmful consequences. Second, the information available across various platforms is often minimised or incomplete (Carter et al., 2012, p.60; Molas & Whittaker, 2022, p.320; Hammarberg et al., 2024, p.4; Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.9,11; Carpenter & Campo-Engelstein, 2025, p.405), making it difficult for potential donors to fully grasp the implications of their choice. This underscores the importance of studying egg donors’ narratives, which offer more insights into the experiences of ED. Third, the industry’s strategic use of an altruistic narrative reinforces traditional gender norms (Almeling, 2007, p.328; Curtis, 2010, p.80; Lafuente-Funes, 2017, p.259) and influences who is considered a suitable donor (Lafuente-Funes, 2017, p.262). Together, these intertwined issues raise the important question of how donor experiences, especially those of bloggers featured on CRA and

FC websites, are represented and whether they reinforce or challenge dominant narratives.

This thesis serves two key purposes. First, it aims to address the knowledge gap regarding the narratives of egg donors as presented in blogs on websites of CRAs and FCs. This thesis excludes experiences shared by independent bloggers from CRAs and FCs, as there is ongoing research in this area. However, the thesis is connected to this broader research project, while also standing as a distinct and self-contained study. Finally, the research aims to inform policymakers by offering evidence-based insights that can guide the development of a legal framework to protect the rights and interests of egg donors. To achieve these goals, we formulated the following research question:

In what ways are egg donors' narratives represented in blogs on websites of commercial recruitment agencies and fertility clinics?

In this thesis, blogs were chosen as the source to explore this research question, because most research about egg donor experiences is survey research (e.g., Thaldar et al., 2020, p.1,3; Tober et al., 2021, p.1,3) or qualitative interview research (e.g., Okafor et al., 2022, p.68; Goedeke et al., 2023, p.1521; Lafuente-Funes et al., 2023, p.264). Blogs can provide additional information that may not be discussed in interviews or surveys. An advantage of blogs is that the experiences and feelings of the bloggers are shown without being influenced by the research goals or researchers (Arosio, 2010, p.25; Wilson et al., 2015, p.2; Barreto & Whitehair, 2017, p.100). Additionally, the data found in blogs is not the outcome of subjects electing to participate (Lees, 2000, in Snee, 2023, p.53; Pauwels, 2006, in Snee, 2023, p.53) and blogs can also serve as a warning for poor clinical healthcare (Greaves et al., 2013, p.251).

2. Methodology

2.1 Data collection

Since we aim to compare our findings with those of Jacxsens et al. (2025, manuscript under review) in a subsequent study, we largely adopted the same methods and instruments for our qualitative research to ensure comparability (Saint Arnault & Sinko, 2021, p.5). However, in order to ensure the data were suited for this specific study, some aspects differed. A detailed comparison of the two search strategies can be found in [Attachment 1: Comparing search strategies](#). We applied largely the same exclusion criteria as those used by Jacxsens et al. (2025, manuscript under review). The main differences, however, lay in the inclusion of blogs hosted

on CRA and FC websites in this present study. This inclusion necessitated the formulation of a specific definition for a CRA and a FC in our study. Additionally, unlike Jacxsens et al.' (2025, manuscript under review) approach, we limited the number of blogs per website to a maximum of three.

Between 16th of February and 23rd of March 2025, a systematic online search was conducted. We mimicked the search strategy of a potential egg donor. To do this, we used keywords related to ED ('egg donor', 'egg donation', 'oocyte donor', 'oocyte donation') and combined each of these terms separately with the terms 'blogs', 'story', and 'experience' in the search engines Yahoo and Google. In these search engines, we searched up to the tenth page. We followed a step-by-step plan for data collection, which is outlined in [Attachment 2: Step-by-step plan for data collection](#).

In this thesis, we included blogs, which we defined as content hosted on a website where egg donors can express their personal experiences of the ED process and these experiences must be written by the egg donor themselves. The blogs were compiled into a Word document, along with the name of the website of the CRA or the FC, the URL-link to the blog and the specific location on the website where the blog was found. Each website had different titles of sections. We primarily looked under sections such as 'blog', 'testimonial' and 'success stories' on the websites of these CRAs and FCs, as these were the platforms where blogs were typically showcased. However, the placement of these blogs under 'success stories' implies that negative narratives are less likely to be represented. This does not mean that such data is less interesting. It is reasonable to expect that there were editor(s) from the CRA or FC who went through these stories and selected specific stories to feature on their website. Kroløkke (2015, p.19) suggested that these donor narratives should be seen as narratives tailored to the interests of the CRAs or FCs and used for recruitment purposes. Nevertheless, these narratives were unique, as they provided nuanced insights into the diverse experiences of donors. They offered a personal and in-depth perspective on the ethical and emotional economies of ED (Kroløkke, 2015, p.19). This perspective underscores the value of studying these blogs.

It is important to note that there is no single, universally accepted definition of a blog (Garden, 2012, p.483). Offering a working definition remained essential to reduce ambiguity and provide conceptual clarity (Garden, 2012, p.495). Kabachinski (2007, p.379) describes blogs as online spaces for discussions on specific topics, while Arosio (2010, p.31) describes them as platforms managed by their authors (bloggers) to express thoughts,

opinions, information and news. The definition provided by Kabachinski (2007, p.379) and Arosio (2010, p.31) highlights key differences from how we conceptualise a blog. Notably, in our study, the blogs were hosted by CRAs or FCs rather than by the authors themselves. Their definitions emphasise reciprocity between the blogger and reader as a defining feature (Kabachinski, 2007, p.379; Arosio, 2010, p.31). However, since the blogs in our study were posted by CRAs or FCs, this interactive aspect was absent. Garden (2011, p.494) argued that interactivity is optional. Additionally, bloggers typically write without knowing how their story will unfold, making their account non-retrospective (Arosio, 2010, p.31). However, this research introduced a retrospective element, as the narratives were likely curated by editor(s) working for CRAs and/or FCs after the ED process.

2.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

2.2.1 Inclusion criteria

The blogs we collected were publicly available blogs about the ED process written in English. We included blogs that were hosted on a website where egg donors could express their personal experiences of the ED process and these experiences had to be written by the egg donor themselves. Similarly, websites of CRAs and FCs were selected based on their alignment with our description, which is: CRAs recruit young egg donors to produce eggs for paying clients seeking to conceive children through reproductive technologies. These CRAs were often established or staffed by a variety of professionals, including physicians, social workers, nurses, psychologists (Almeling, 2007, p.319,322-323), previous donors, former CEOs of modelling agencies, family practitioners and even reproductive lawyers (Johnson, 2017b, p.356). CRAs operate by offering their services to FCs, recipients, or a combination of both. They typically create a database of egg donors that FCs or recipients could use to select a suitable match (Hudson et al., 2025, manuscript under review). Halcomb (2020, p.839) notes that while CRAs outsource medical procedures, FCs are medical organisations managed by doctors. They tend to recruit donors locally or from within their own facilities (Halcomb, 2020, p.839). FCs may be part of larger institutions (e.g., universities or hospitals) or operate as private practices. In contrast, CRAs are generally privately owned and operate as independent businesses. This distinction means that they are accountable to different authorities, each with its own organizational goals (Keehn et al., 2015, p.612; Aldrich & Ruef 2006, in Johnson, 2017b, p.356).

Websites were excluded when the information provided about the CRA or FC did not allow for a clear assessment of whether they met the defined description. Some websites contained both eligible and ineligible blogs; this

research included only those blogs that met the inclusion criteria. Arriving at this description of a CRA and FC was not straightforward and we had several observations about its limitations. One limitation concerns Almeling's (2007, p.319,322-323) definition, which presented the process as unidirectional. CRAs play a crucial role in a wider medical process (searching, informing, matching, etc. of egg donors). At the same time, FCs often outsource these aspects to CRAs, creating a complex relationship.

To make our description more workable, we focused on medical procedures that were typically outsourced, such as egg retrieval. Johnson (2017b, p.356), drawing on Treiser (n.d., in Johnson, 2017b, p.356), explains that a CRA facilitates arrangements between donors and recipients. This aspect was excluded from the description we used, as it was too direct. Requests for egg donors could also come from recipients or from FCs who paid CRAs for their services, a cost that was ultimately borne by the recipients.

The definitions provided by Keehn et al. (2015, p.610) and Lake et al. (2024, p.2) used terms such as 'assist' and 'supplement', suggesting a subordinate role for CRAs. We chose not to include this aspect in our definition, as these CRAs operate independently with their own business models, reflecting a more collaborative or intertwined relationship between CRAs and FCs.

2.2.2 Exclusion criteria

We excluded blogs that were presented in an interview format, as we wanted the donors to determine what they wanted to tell and/or write. Additionally, there was a possibility that the content had been partly written by the editor(s) of CRAs and FCs, which could also have been the case with blogs not presented in an interview format. However, interviews were excluded from the study due to the inability to control the questions posed.

Videos and photos of the ED process were also excluded to protect the donors' identities, as explicit consent for the use of the blog content by the bloggers had not been obtained. However, we acknowledged that videos and photos could sometimes convey the emotional experience more vividly than written text.

Another exclusion criterion was based on the omission of blogs that focused solely on the social aspects of ED, or exclusively on experiences related to a particular CRA or FC. It should also be noted that blogs expressing only personal opinions about ED were also excluded.

Exclusion was also based on the time the blogs were written. Since there have been relatively few medical developments, a strict timeframe was not

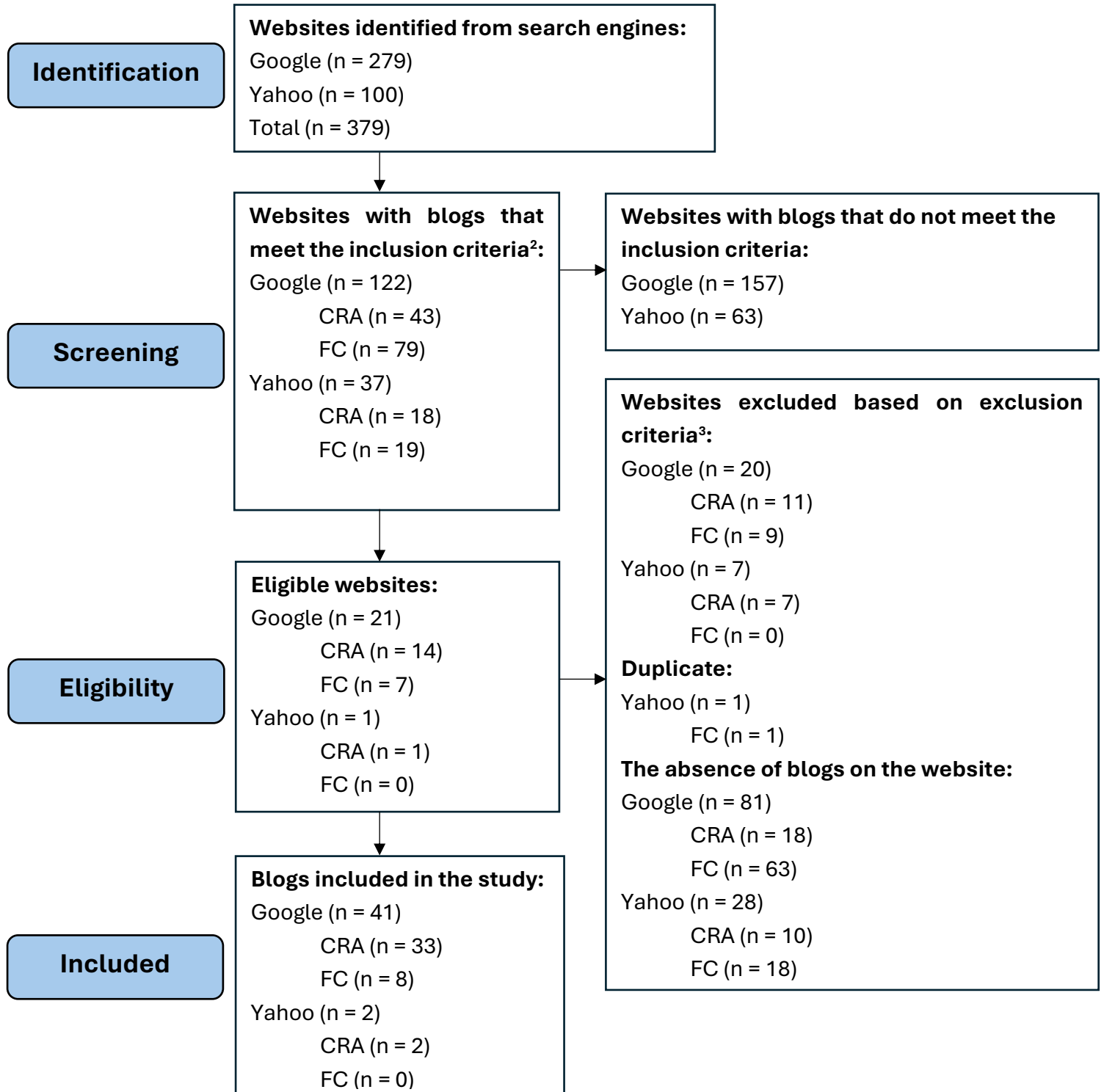
deemed necessary. However, given the abundance of available data and to ensure relevance, we excluded blogs written before 2015, applying a maximum timeframe of ten years. Blogs written within this ten-year period, as well as those without a specified publication date, were included. This approach allowed us to include a large number of blogs. No exclusion was made based on geography and on the number of times a donor had donated.

We excluded blogs hosted on websites that required a paywall or account access. We also excluded blogs about egg sharing and those with indications that a CRA or FC had acted unethically towards the egg donor, in terms of publication (e.g., failure to protect and pseudonymise their identity). Regarding this last exclusion criterion, one blogger expressed regret about oversharing personal details with blog readers, which gave rise to a desire for anonymity. This created a conflicting narrative, as the blogger was aware that their post would be made public, yet simultaneously wished for anonymity. Despite this, the CRA or FC proceeded to publish the blog. This led us to the decision to exclude this one blog.

We selected a maximum of three blogs from each website. This method was chosen to ensure a balanced representation of blogs from different CRA and FC websites. If all egg donor blogs were considered 'testimonials' on the website, the first three entries were chosen. If blogs on the website were divided into multiple categories (e.g., 'testimonials', 'success stories' and 'blogs'), one blog was selected from each category. For websites with texts that fell in two categories (e.g., 'testimonials' and 'success stories'), two entries were selected from one category and one from the other, to ensure a total of three blogs.

This section provides an overview of the number of websites and blogs gathered during the data collection process. On Google, we found 43 websites from CRAs and 79 from FCs. We identified 33 blogs from egg donors on fourteen CRA websites and eight blogs from egg donors on seven FC websites that met the inclusion criteria. After the search on Google, we conducted a search on Yahoo. We incorporated new websites that we had not found on Google, which included one CRA website and one FC website. We identified two blogs from one CRA website that met all inclusion criteria, as well as one blog from one FC website that met these criteria. The blog provided by the FC was identical to one used by the CRA. Therefore, we excluded this duplicate and included only two blogs from Yahoo. The flowchart below presents further details of the collected data.

Flow Diagram of the data collection



² The CRA and FC had to comply with our description provided above. The blogs we collected were publicly available blogs about the ED process written in English.

³ Exclusion of the website with blogs was based on several criteria: the presence of an interview format within the blog, blogs dated beyond a ten-year frame, videos and photos of the ED process and the fact that the CRA and/or FC treated the egg donor unethically. Additionally, blogs that focus solely on an opinion, the social aspects of ED or personal experiences with a particular CRA or FC were excluded. Blogs about egg sharing were also excluded.

2.3 Reflexive thematic analysis

The blogs were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2022, p.20) in combination with interdisciplinary collaborative auditing (ICA) (Provoost, 2020, p.14-16). An advantage of ICA is that, through an internal validation process, it embeds diversity within its organisational framework (Provoost, 2020, p.14). ICA involves auditors who serve both as auditor and co-researcher in research conducted by the main researcher (S.H.) (Provoost, 2020, p.14). Although two others were involved, the main researcher maintained a high level of control over their own project (Provoost, 2020, p.16). The involvement of two other researchers in data collection and data-analysis helped prevent the conclusions from being overly shaped by a single researcher's perspective. This approach, known as researcher triangulation, helps to strengthen internal reliability (Maesschalck, 2016, p.147-148). In this research, the auditors were the two supervisors (V.P. and L.J.) of this master's thesis.

Familiarisation with the data began early in the process, during the formulation and selection of the search strategy. Reading the blogs helped determine the choice between two search strategies and influenced decisions in our search strategy. Further familiarisation occurred during the actual data collection. After the collection was completed, an initial meeting with the auditors was held to reflect on initial impressions.

The collected data were first compiled in a Word document and later imported into MAXQDA. While the software supported the analysis process, it could not perform the analysis on its own (Decorte, 2016, p.501). The main researcher analysed the data by identifying meaningful segments and assigning relevant codes, which were continuously refined throughout the process (Decorte, 2016, p.482; Braun et al., 2022, p.29). During this phase, the main researcher shared two drafts of the coding structure, including code descriptions and a number of illustrative blog quotes for each code, with the auditors. Based on these quotes, the auditors familiarised themselves with the material and provided feedback and possible alternative codes or interpretations, ensuring multiple perspectives were considered.

In the next phase, related codes were grouped to develop broader patterns and themes, rather than merely categorising data. A collaborative meeting between the main researcher and the two auditors followed, in which they expressed their overall interpretations and discussed the main arising themes. After initial themes were defined, the data was revisited in order to further identify recurring patterns. Finally, the main researcher

structured the findings by introducing key concepts, presenting an analytical narrative of the themes and supporting the interpretation with relevant citations. The two auditors reviewed this thematic structure and provided feedback. Differences in interpretation emerged between the two auditors, offering further nuance to the thematic development.

2.4 Ethical implications

Working with blogs involved ethical considerations. In the research conducted by Snee (2013, p.58-60), a clear distinction was made between authors and subjects. This distinction had implications for informed consent and the processing of the data in research (Snee, 2013, p.59). Some researchers argued that publicly accessible online content required no informed consent (Walther, 2002, p.213; Sudweeks & Rafaeli, 1995, in Hookway, 2008, p.105), while others maintained that such content was often created with an expectation of privacy and should be protected accordingly (Elgesem, 2002, p.195,202; Hookway, 2008, p.105; King, 2011, p.120). Additionally, some believed online interactions challenged the clear distinction between public and private spaces (Hookway, 2008, p.105).

Snee (2013, p.59) argued that informed consent was not applicable for publicly accessible information. It might have felt odd to potential participants if researchers had contacted them to ask for permission to use publicly available information. However, revealing the identity of the participant could have caused them harm (Snee, 2013, p.59). According to Snee (2013, p.59), anonymising internet data was also challenging due to its traceability. The author can be identified, which can potentially violate their privacy (Snee, 2013, p.59). Therefore, safeguarding bloggers' identities is crucial, as their disclosure could result in harm.

At the same time, anonymising blog data without the blogger's permission raises ownership issues, as the ownership of the content might transfer to the researcher (Snee, 2013, p.59). Ownership concerns, therefore, arose from the decision to view bloggers as authors of their content (Snee, 2013, p.60). Once a post was uploaded, it was protected by copyright, as "copyright protects a range of original literary, dramatic, musical or artistic 'work', including those posted on the internet" (Hookway, 2008, p.105). Their ownership must be acknowledged by citing the blog and its content if they have chosen to make it publicly available. Otherwise, this can lead to copyright and privacy issues (Snee, 2013, p.60). Bloggers disregarded copyright laws, sharing proprietary or confidential information and sometimes publishing content that might have been slanderous or

defamatory (Kabachinski, 2007, p.380-381). This highlighted a lack of awareness among some authors about the visibility and impact of their posts.

There is a tension between recognising the ownership of blogs and protecting the identity of their creators (Hookway, 2008, p.106). Ultimately, this challenging decision lay in the choice between treating the bloggers as authors or as subjects. Since we considered them to be the authors, it was important to refer to the individual who had written the text while also protecting their identity. The table below provides an overview of the included blogs.

Table 1: The blogs and their corresponding links

Blog 1	<u>Is Donating Eggs Painful? My Experience as an Egg Donor</u>
Blog 2	<u>Fairfax Eggbank Egg Donor Testimonials - Baily</u>
Blog 3	<u>Fairfax Eggbank Egg Donor Testimonials - Luna</u>
Blog 4	<u>Donor Story - Audrey's Story</u>
Blog 5	<u>Donor Story - Lily's Story</u>
Blog 6	<u>Donor Story - Mila's Story</u>
Blog 7	<u>Samantha's Story</u>
Blog 8	<u>Verity's Story</u>
Blog 9	<u>My Egg Donation Journey</u>
Blog 10	<u>Testimony of a 4x Egg Donor</u>
Blog 11	<u>Egg Donor Testimony</u>
Blog 12	<u>Donating after OHSS, An Egg Donor's Story</u>
Blog 13	<u>My Egg Donor Experience, by Donor M</u>
Blog 14	<u>"Unlike any other feeling..."</u>
Blog 15	<u>My Egg Donor Experience, by Donor A</u>
Blog 16	<u>I had an amazing egg donation experience with Fertility Match!</u>
Blog 17	<u>Now I know what it is to give back to the world!</u>
Blog 18	<u>My journey has been nothing short of fabulous</u>
Blog 19	<u>Impressed by New Life</u>
Blog 20	<u>My Asian Experience</u>
Blog 21	<u>Egg Donation in India</u>
Blog 22	<u>Is Egg Donation Right for Me?</u>
Blog 23	<u>From Olives to Oranges: An Egg Donor's Bladder</u>
Blog 24	<u>Donating with Ruach</u>
Blog 25	<u>Donation Journey 2017-2023</u>
Blog 26	<u>baby2mom experience</u>

Blog 27	Why I Chose to Donate My Eggs: An Anonymous Egg Donor Explains
Blog 28	Egg Donor Stories - Donor K
Blog 29	Egg Donor Stories - Donor E
Blog 30	Egg Donor Stories - Donor A
Blog 31	Egg donation: A donor's insight
Blog 32	My Egg Donation Experience
Blog 33	Egg donor: the birth of my own child helped me decide
Blog 34	Diary of an egg donor - 23 Tiny Chromosomes
Blog 35	In my own words - My experience of being an egg donor
Blog 36	A Donor's Testimonial
Blog 37	One Egg Donor's Experience - Part IX
Blog 38	One Egg Donor's Experience - Part VIII
Blog 39	Egg donor, when the process gets difficult (...)
Blog 40	Being an Egg Donor
Blog 41	"I donated 30 of my own eggs to create babies I'll never meet." My egg donor experience.⁴
Blog 42	I'm absolutely thrilled with my entire experience at Elite Donor Solutions
Blog 43	I recently completed my egg donation with Elite Donor Solutions and I couldn't be happier with my experience.

3. Results

First, we present some general observations, followed by four themes about how bloggers presented their narratives through blogging on websites from CRAs and FCs. We identified the following themes: 'Bloggers encouraging others to donate', 'The recipients as the focus points in bloggers' stories', 'Bloggers constructing their identity' and 'Nothing negative to say about agencies and/or clinics'. Each theme has several smaller subthemes.

We noticed that the bloggers experienced ED as an emotionally complex and transformative process (e.g., "*What started as anxious thoughts soon turned to excitement*" (Blog 6)), one that shaped not only their individual experience but also influenced those within their close social circle. The emotional complexity of ED captured both positive (e.g., joy) and negative (e.g., sadness) emotions, as well as the emotional shifts bloggers underwent throughout the process. Some bloggers emphasised how difficult it was to fully capture and articulate the emotional depth of the ED experience, describing it as "*Unlike any other feeling...*" (Blog 14), which

⁴ We would like to note that Blog 41 is no longer accessible online. We can, however, make the blog available upon request.

also served as the blog's title and reflected ED's deeply personal and unique nature. One blogger even remarked on the challenge of finding an appropriate title for the blog, which can be seen as underlining the complexity of conveying such an intense journey. Many bloggers described how their motivation and emotions shifted over time, highlighting the emotional weight of waiting (e.g., during the matching process) and the uncertainty as a defining feature of their ED narrative. These observations highlighted the central role of time in influencing the emotional experiences of ED. Additionally, some bloggers' expectations did not align with their actual experience of the ED process, imagining more difficulty than they actually encountered.

The bloggers employed both reflexive and medical language to describe personal experiences. Many bloggers referred to their experience as a "*journey*" (Blog 18), a term even used in the title of three blogs. While some bloggers did travel for their ED, this was not meant to describe a literal trip. Instead, it was used metaphorically, reflecting how the bloggers viewed ED not as a single event, but as a transformative and personal path. In addition to this reflective vocabulary, the bloggers also adopted medical terminology to articulate the technical steps of the ED process. Terms such as "*trigger shot*" (Blog 21), "*trigger injection*" (Blog 34), "*Tylenol*" (Blog 40), "*Ibuprofen*" (Blog 9) and "*follicles*" (Blog 21) are not only part of clinical discourse but were also integrated into the bloggers' narratives.

3.1 Bloggers encouraging others to donate

This first theme involves how bloggers used websites to encourage potential future egg donors. It highlights the strategies bloggers employed to positively frame ED and guide others in considering ED. The theme includes subthemes such as 'Inspiring others through blogging', 'Minimisation as a strategy to encourage ED' and 'Bloggers' role in normalising egg donation'.

3.1.1 Inspiring others through blogging

The bloggers shared their personal stories not only as a form of self-expression but also as a source of inspiration for others considering ED (e.g., "*My journey is an inspiration to others considering egg donation*" (Blog 7)). Their intentions seemed to be to write a genuine, unfiltered account of personal experiences, emphasising honesty and authenticity. Moreover, some were quick to point out that they were not sharing their stories to receive praise. The goal, they explained, was to raise awareness, "*I don't want to do this so people can tell me how amazing I am (my husband is there for that) I want to generate conversation... good and bad.*" (Blog 34) and "*I'm not posting this to toot my own horn, I think it's*

important to raise awareness" (Blog 11). An inspiring aspect of blogging that we observed was how the bloggers went beyond simply raising awareness. Blogging was also a way to provide advice, to support informed decision-making, to highlight the potential benefits (e.g., financial) and to warn potential egg donors about the ED process itself (e.g., impact on relationships and friendships) and the risks associated with ED. In doing so, it appears that the bloggers implicitly positioned themselves as knowledgeable and influential voices within the ED landscape.

The availability of accessible information seemed to play a role in shaping the decisions of potential egg donors. Several bloggers explicitly mentioned that they proactively sought out information on CRA and/or FC websites before deciding to become an egg donor. Their decisions were grounded not only in the available information on CRA and/or FC websites, but also in the persuasive power of advertising from CRAs and/or FCs. Two bloggers even actively sought information from staff members:

"I could have easily found information over the Internet but felt that it might be biased or from an unreliable source. I figured my best bet would be to actually talk to a staff member who could give me all the answers." (Blog 40).

It appeared that the bloggers were inspired by the information provided by CRAs and/or FCs. As the following quote illustrates, this blogger was influenced by the stories they encountered:

"Determined to make a difference, I chose Egg Donors UK, attracted by their excellent reputation, inspiring success stories, and the comforting vibe I felt during my first interaction with them." (Blog 7).

The attempt to inspire their readers was often subtle, through carefully chosen words. For instance, one blogger began with the reassuring phrase *"This isn't meant to sound scary"* (Blog 1), subtly framing ED as a manageable and non-threatening process and continued with an appeal to informed choice: *"This isn't meant to sound scary but to help you make an informed decision about becoming a donor."* (Blog 1). Similarly, another blogger combined a call to raise awareness with a personal experience, indirectly inspiring others by highlighting the positive outcomes of the ED experience: *"I think it's important to raise awareness and let others know how it's positively affected my life!"* (Blog 11). Beyond these implicit messages, many bloggers also offered direct encouragement, as seen in:

"My advice to anyone considering this, is just go for it; and don't think of it as 'giving away a baby', think of it as 'giving away a period so someone else can use it to make their own baby'" (Blog 30).

Specific narratives, such as "giving away a period" (Blog 30) or the idea of preventing the 'waste' of unused eggs, could be inspiring and encouraging for other potential donors. Some bloggers highlighted that, if not retrieved, these eggs were simply discarded, thereby framing ED as a meaningful way to prevent this 'waste': *"The way I understand it is that I have heaps of immature eggs just hanging around in my ovaries - waiting waiting waiting."* (Blog 34). This quote not only emphasised the notion of biological waste but also touched on the emotional experience of time during the ED process. By framing this phase as a time when the eggs were merely waiting, it seemed to convey a sense of time passing. This framing also implied that letting the eggs go unused was a loss, an interpretation that could be misleading. This perspective may have created a sense of urgency or pressure for potential future donors to act.

The bloggers' messages intertwined inspiration with encouragement to motivate others to consider ED. We noticed that encouragement was conveyed in various ways, as explained above, through the use of specific narratives. Another possible approach was through documenting their experience, such as keeping a diary. As one blogger shared:

"I met with the clinic Dr and nurse today and the nurse asked me if I would consider keeping a diary that they can use as a tool to help other women considering donation and I thought it was a great idea." (Blog 34).

The bloggers also inspired and encouraged others by sharing inspirational quotes, offering emotional reassurance (e.g., *"It's not harmful to you at all"* (Blog 17)) and emphasising the meaningful impact of ED as a way to motivate potential future donors (e.g., *"think about the end product and the lives you are going to change by taking part in this"* (Blog 4)). We saw that the line between personal experience and promotion for ED was often blurred in bloggers' narratives. By sharing their experiences, they not only reflected on their own experiences, but simultaneously inspired and encouraged others to consider donating. Additionally, some information shared in the blogs may not have been entirely accurate. For example, one blogger shared a misconception in the blog, expressing the belief that the body naturally produces new eggs each month.

3.1.2 Minimisation as a strategy to encourage egg donation

Many bloggers generally described ED as smooth, easy, fabulous, incredible, straightforward, or even flawless. They often emphasised the quick pace of the ED process; one blogger, for example, mentioned: "*The whole process seemed to fly by so quickly.*" (Blog 18). However, one blogger did note that the process was not always easy. Despite this, many bloggers seemed to minimise the impact of the ED process, framing it as less impactful or uncomfortable than it might actually be. This included aspects such as risks, daily life, egg retrieval, recovery and side effects. We also observed a shift from the ED process to a focus on practical concerns.

Risks were minimised and their own fertility was framed as unaffected. Some bloggers framed ED as having little to no impact or even having positive effects on their daily life. Others, however, acknowledged the challenges to their daily routines, such as limitations on activities (e.g., running and sexual activities), professional responsibilities, time commitment and time management. These disruptions, however, were perceived as temporary and manageable.

Egg retrieval was typically described as the easiest stage of the process, with sedation portrayed as a pleasant event. Sometimes it was even romanticised as a "*wonderful sleep*" (Blog 6), "*simple blip*" (Blog 2) "*the best kip of my life*" (Blog 28) or "*uninterrupted nap*" (Blog 1). The bloggers described the time spent under sedation as brief, typically ranging from 15 minutes to 30 minutes. Similarly, recovery was described as quick with a fast return to normal routines. One blogger shared their experience of a difficult recovery, highlighting the discomfort they faced due to bloating.

Side-effects such as bloating, emotional discomfort, OHSS, weight gain, menstrual cramps, vaginal bleeding and nausea were common following egg retrieval. Many bloggers perceived them as minimal or even viewed the egg retrieval as a positive improvement on the hormonal stimulation phase (e.g., "*Having those follicles drained and those eggs collected made me feel a lot less full*" (Blog 23)). Many bloggers also discussed medication-related side effects, including fatigue, emotional discomfort, sore lower back, headaches, weight gain, itching, bloating and bruising. These were typically described as minor or even absent. When bloggers did mention difficulties with medication, they often referred to the preparation process or emotional responses such as apprehension, nervousness, fear of needles or feeling scared. The physical changes caused by fertility treatment were described in a deeply personal and metaphorical way: "*during the very last few days, I felt like a penguin*" (Blog 23). The bloggers reflected not only on the

symptoms, but also on the onset of the symptoms (e.g., the last day of injections) and their duration (e.g., a week).

The duration of the symptoms and the reliance on medication to cope with them stood in contrast to the frequent minimisation of the side effects in the blogs, pointing to a more serious physical and emotional impact than acknowledged. The bloggers used prescribed or recommended medication (e.g., heating pad or painkillers) to manage physical or emotional side effects caused by hormonal stimulation or other aspects of the ED process. One blogger even mentioned that the absence of pain after egg retrieval was likely due to the effectiveness of the medication. Lastly, some bloggers mentioned practical concerns that hinted at the actual toll of the procedure. One blogger even reflected on needing two full weeks to recover, which could be interpreted as subtly hinting at the seriousness of the process.

3.1.3 Bloggers' role in normalising egg donation

The bloggers seemed to normalise their experience with injections. What might otherwise have been perceived as a challenging or repetitive task was instead framed as simply a routine part of the process. One blogger described the injection experience as simply a "*part of the job*" (Blog 32), which could also be interpreted as viewing ED as a job in itself. Additionally, the hormone treatment associated with the injections was framed as a natural extension of the body's own processes (e.g., "*hormones that your body already makes just to encourage the growth of your eggs*" (Blog 24)), helping to reduce fear around the medical aspect of treatment. We also observed that, when explaining the natural function of the ovaries during a typical cycle, the role or purpose of the hormonal injections was framed in a normalising way, for instance, "*They say, 'All of you [eggs] stay right here and get ready for fertilization.'*" (Blog 1). Comparison to other altruistic acts, such as giving blood, further normalised ED.

3.2 The recipients as the focus points in bloggers' stories

This second theme highlights the role that recipients played in the bloggers' narratives, often arising as focus points throughout their blogs. It encompasses three subthemes: 'Adopting the recipient's viewpoint', 'Empathy for recipients' and 'Bloggers' quest for recognition'.

3.2.1 Adopting the recipient's viewpoint

Adopting the recipient's viewpoint was the attempt of many bloggers to understand the thoughts, feelings and perspectives of recipients involved in the ED process. The bloggers showed awareness of the deep emotional impact the experience might have had on recipients (e.g., "*it must be a little exciting but also nerve wracking*" (Blog 34)), the uncertainty they

faced (e.g., *"they will get the call they have been waiting for... or not..."* (Blog 34)) and their profound desire to become parents (e.g., *"many people around the country have the exact same dream of becoming a parent"* (Blog 41)). In addition, some bloggers reflected on their own current or future perspectives on parenthood. For some, their prior experience of being a mother influenced their decision to become an egg donor, as highlighted in the title of Blog 33 (i.e., *"Egg donor: the birth of my own child helped me decide"*). We saw that some bloggers expressed a conscious effort to place themselves in the recipient's position, motivated by a sense of mutual support: *"I think of all of the horrific things that the intended parents have been through. How could I let one fluke accident prevent me from further helping them?"* (Blog 12).

3.2.2 Empathy for recipients

The empathy bloggers seemed to have for recipients extended beyond simply adopting the recipient's perspective; it reflected a deep emotional connection. We saw that many bloggers had positive and well-meaning intentions, directed both towards the recipients and towards the potential outcome of the ED process. The bloggers formed an emotional bond with the struggles and emotions of the families they donated to. According to them, they did not just understand the challenges recipients faced; they *felt* them. Their empathy reached a profound level, as illustrated in the quote: *"I got a glimpse of what my families possibly went through, maybe many times, and experience that gut wrenching feeling personally."* (Blog 10). The use of terms such as 'my families' seemed to suggest that the blogger felt a personal connection to the recipients, perceiving them as their own familiar circle rather than anonymous individuals from a general database. This choice of wording reflected a sense of closeness and familiarity, highlighting how the blogger-recipient-connection embodied a deep sense of personal connection and empathy.

The ED process revealed a contradiction: despite the anonymity between bloggers and recipients, the experience remained profoundly personal and emotional for the blogger:

"As my donation date was getting closer I felt a serious emotional connection with my recipients. I had never met them nor would I ever meet them, but our bond somehow (very supernaturally) was incredible." (Blog 17).

Some bloggers expressed a longing to meet the recipients and others were given that opportunity. One blogger even mentioned that the recipients could read the blog about the ED experience, allowing recipients to closely

follow their donor's experience. Meeting the intended recipients seemed to evoke feelings of humility, joy and a deep sense of a personal connection. For some, this bond extended even further, towards the children born from their donation, with bloggers expressing ongoing emotional ties (e.g., *"I think about them all the time"* (Blog 30)). Some even welcomed the idea of future contact with these donor-conceived children, describing it as something they would be happy and comfortable with.

The bloggers began from a place of empathy and expressed genuine compassion for the recipients. By minimising their own role, they underscored their focus on the recipients. They emphasised that both genetic inheritance (nature) and environmental influence (nurture) were essential in shaping who a person becomes. They recognised the importance of their biological contribution and the deep emotional connection it created with the recipients' life and family due to the transfer of DNA. Some bloggers described feeling a profound emotional response to the realisation of what their donation had made possible. There was often a sense of wonder and fulfilment that accompanied the awareness of their impact:

"Seeing their baby was an amazing feeling, I don't even know how to describe it. I felt so happy knowing that I had positively contributed to their lives and their dreams of having family." (Blog 11).

By referring to 'their baby', the blogger acknowledged the limited nature of their role and made clear that the child was not perceived as their own. They acknowledged that their role, though meaningful, was just one part of the larger journey of creating and raising a child. This also illustrated a paradox: even as they affirm the importance of their involvement, they simultaneously minimise the significance of their own role:

"Not all the nails [eggs] are perfect, some won't be perfectly straight, some bigger than others etc etc. I don't help with the design of the house or choose the location - although the type of nails will have some impact on the limitations of the house, I don't help with the build of the house either. I do my part and then it's up to the people building the house - in this case I want to refer to them as Mum and Dad (not my mum and dad - but a title that they hope to have one day) because that is really the whole point." (Blog 34).

By focusing on the biological aspects of donation, it could also create emotional distance from their contribution. Some bloggers tended to shift the attention from themselves to their eggs, subtly framing the biological material as the central actor and minimising the blogger's active role in the

process. It seemed that the eggs developed almost autonomously with little to no active involvement from the bloggers themselves. For instance, one noted: *"The eggs are allowed to rest for a couple of hours"* (Blog 34), while another reflected on: *"I love watching the monitor while I'm having my ultrasounds; it's so interesting to see how my eggs are growing from one checkup to the next."* (Blog 40).

3.2.3 Bloggers' quest for recognition

Some bloggers seemed to seek social acceptance and approval, particularly from the recipients. They showed a heightened sensitivity to how they were perceived by others and had sensitivity towards being judged or understood throughout the donation process. During their interactions with recipients, bloggers experienced a range of feelings, including nervousness, trust (e.g., in a positive outcome for children), empathy, curiosity and a sense of vulnerability: *"It was weird. I felt like I was on a blind date - nervous, hoping to make a good impression"* (Blog 34) and *"Would she look like me, would she like me, would I be what she wanted me to be?"* (Blog 34). This vulnerability seemed to coexist with a desire for affirmation, possibly indicating a need for reassurance that they were fulfilling their role in a meaningful way. We noted in the blogs that this confirmation could come from the recipients. Some bloggers described recipients' responses as marked by gratitude and appreciation (e.g., flowers) for their donation.

Recognition also came from their social context and professionals. In one blog, the blogger initially expressed indifference towards the number of eggs retrieved. However, the professional later acknowledged the value of their contribution, particularly highlighting the number of eggs retrieved. In some cases, recognition was also tied to the success of the donation, such as when it led to pregnancy. The staff thus functioned as a catalyst for this sense of recognition, which may have served as a form of validation for the blogger. For some, the quantity of eggs even seemed to introduce a subtle sense of competition, as if producing more eggs equalled to having done a better job:

"When they told me the number of eggs they had retrieved at my first retrieval, I was like ok cool. The Nurse looked at me a bit baffled that I was not more excited. In terms of what the numbers and results were, I would have never contemplated what they would mean to those receiving my donation. It turned out my body did absolutely amazing and offered my recipients great hope for a child." (Blog 29).

Some bloggers used humour as a way to manage, alleviate and cope with the stress, vulnerability and challenges of the ED process. For instance, they

used humour when meeting the recipients. Humour helped to lighten the atmosphere and allowed bloggers to express a personal, approachable attitude towards the ED process: *"I even got to don a sexy gown, coupled with some foam padded slippers and a saucy fabric shower cap! What more could you ask for?"* (Blog 28).

3.3 Bloggers constructing their identity

This third theme captures how the ED process prompts bloggers to reflect on their personal identity and contributes to shaping it. It encompasses subthemes such as 'Self-identity', 'ED as a calling', 'Self-sacrifice', 'ED as a demonstration of resilience' and 'Social context'.

3.3.1 Self-identity

The bloggers seemed to maintain self-awareness and self-perception throughout the ED process. This included reflections on personal identity (e.g., *"I am young and healthy"* (Blog 17)), an appreciation for unique physical traits (e.g., *"I always took my red hair and fair skin for granted"* (Blog 17)) and characteristics perceived as valuable in the context of ED (e.g., *"being a tad stubborn on top of that makes it [ED] easier"* (Blog 1)). They also reflected on health implications for the donor-conceived children, given their own medical conditions. Beyond their own traits or perceptions, one blogger also reflected on similarities or shared characteristics between themselves and the recipients (e.g., *"They were lovely - very much like us"* (Blog 34)), as well as with other egg donors:

"It was a reality check to me that something so mundane and simple [hormone injections] is actually a huge deal to people who don't do this stuff all the time." (Blog 34).

In the blogs, we noted that throughout the ED process, bloggers engaged in a deep self-reflection, confronting complex and emotionally charged questions. They explored their own values, preferences, interests and identity on a deeper level:

"Then I spoke with the nurse who asked me about who I might or might not like to donate to... this is hard. I have to decide who is and who is not "worthy of my donation?" I get that they are my eggs and I get to decide but HOW do I decide?? Do I care if they are Catholic or Muslim? Do I care if they are 49? Do I care if they already have a child and this is an attempt for a second one? What if they need sperm donation and a surrogate too? What if they are an interracial couple? What if this is a second marriage? What if they aren't married?" (Blog 34).

Additionally, some bloggers described feeling deeply honoured and grateful to be chosen for something so meaningful: *"Infertility is huge, it's all over the world, it affects thousands of people, and I felt honoured to be part of something bigger than myself."* (Blog 17). This seemed to touch on the aspects of self-identity, recognition and fulfilment, as being chosen by the recipients affirmed the blogger's sense of worth in something deeply meaningful. This recognition seemed to allow the bloggers to see themselves in a new light, as someone who could make a meaningful difference in another person's life. However, it also seemed that the power position of the bloggers was somewhat overlooked. The bloggers actively engaged with the process, considering various factors (e.g., childless recipients) and making decisions regarding the selection of recipients.

Many bloggers described the ED process as one that involved overcoming challenges, achieving a deeply meaningful goal and experiencing emotional fulfilment, satisfaction, a deep sense of accomplishment and reward through their participation. This accomplishment was recognised and appreciated by others (e.g., *"My friends already knew I was doing this and were so proud of me"* (Blog 6)), which could play a role in shaping their self-identity, as identity is constructed in relation to how others perceive and acknowledge them.

The process fostered increased self-awareness and a sense of personal development with some bloggers expressing a feeling of mastery gained from navigating through the ED process (e.g., *"I now feel like an old pro at having my blood drawn."* (Blog 40)). Alongside this, there was a recurring sense of gratitude, not only for the ability to donate, but also for their own health and personal blessings. In general, many bloggers framed their feelings throughout the ED experience in positive terms.

We noticed that ED became a transformative experience that left a lasting impact on the bloggers' own sense of self. The bloggers reflected on how even the most challenging or uncomfortable moments could become meaningful and even life-changing. Therefore, the ED process was not only a physical act, but it also offered a profound opportunity for personal growth, self-reflection and the recognition and acknowledgement of their participation by others. These elements could all play a crucial role in constructing the bloggers' identities.

3.3.2 Egg donation as a calling

In the blogs, the decision to donate eggs was sometimes framed not merely as a personal choice, but as a higher calling or purpose:

"I had always thought about being an egg donor. It probably sounds a bit funny but even as a teenager, and well before I was a Mum, I liked the idea of being a donor to help someone have a baby." (Blog 31).

Blog narratives seemed to reveal that some bloggers had considered ED from a remarkably young age (e.g., *"I have had "Donating my eggs" on my bucket list since I was twelve years old"* (Blog 5)). It appears that, by framing it as a bucket list item, ED was positioned as something expected, potentially encouraging others to view it as a milestone they should also pursue. They also expressed a strong sense of clarity and confidence in their choice to become an egg donor, framing it as an easy choice.

However, some bloggers described the decision to donate as difficult and approached it with hesitation, needing some time to overcome doubts and clarify their reasons for donating. For others, the decision arose more spontaneously, based on intuition and made in collaboration with others. Some factors influenced their decisions such as personal circumstances or the reassurance about the decision from someone else (e.g., a psychologist). This highlighted the diversity in how individuals arrived at the decision to become an egg donor, reflecting a wide range of personal decision-making processes and influencing factors.

3.3.3 Self-sacrifice

We observed that the bloggers were willing to give up a part of themselves to donate to the recipients. The term self-sacrifice was deliberately chosen, as it encompassed more than just devotion or generosity. It reflected a deeper level of personal commitment. One blogger even used this term clearly: *"These sacrifices may be a little difficult, but they're nothing I can't deal with. It will probably be good for me to give up coffee."* (Blog 40).

Many bloggers seemed to view the ED process as a meaningful way to contribute to someone else's happiness and the creation of a family. This sense of purpose was frequently sparked by empathy for the personal stories of individuals struggling with infertility or by inspiration drawn from others who had already helped recipients. They often described ED as a gift, be it the gift of parenthood, the gift of life or the gift of happiness. They were driven by a selfless desire to help others, without expecting anything in return. We observed, however, that participating in ED was not purely altruistic. Many bloggers shared additional reasons for their decision to donate (e.g., financial gain), yet this did not negate the presence of altruistic motivations.

We noticed that the altruistic motivations were closely linked to a strong sense of personal agency. The bloggers highlighted that their decision to donate was made independently, underscoring that the act of goodwill could emerge from a deliberate, self-directed choice:

"I know that's where their main concerns came from, but at the end of the day, this is what I chose to do. I was informed and educated enough by the staff to know that nothing would happen to me or my future babies, so even if they weren't accepting of the decision, I would have still done it and have been proud to do so." (Blog 6).

The bloggers were willing to endure certain difficulties (e.g., lifestyle adjustments) in order to support others. They explained that the challenges or discomforts encountered during the ED process were far outweighed by positive outcomes or a deep sense of fulfilment it brought: *"Seeing the families I've helped create with egg donation has made every moment of discomfort worth it one hundred times over."* (Blog 23). Such reflections suggested that these personal sacrifices were seen as necessary actions towards completing the ED process successfully.

3.3.4 Egg donation as a demonstration of resilience

Many bloggers demonstrated remarkable resilience throughout the ED process. They showed the determination to withstand both physical and emotional challenges, to adapt to unexpected developments and to persevere despite difficulties. One blogger sensed something was wrong after the third retrieval, experiencing severe symptoms such as gaining 15-20 pounds of water weight almost instantly, which led to surgery. Despite the severity of the symptoms, the blogger reflected: *"The OHSS was a crazy experience, but to me, continuing to help create families is more important. I would risk it again to continue to help others."* (Blog 12). This can be interpreted as the subordination of personal interests, while also revealing a form of heroic behaviour. Some bloggers acknowledged that the physical and emotional experience of ED can vary between individuals and recognised that it may not be a suitable choice for everyone.

We observed a clear tendency among bloggers to rationalise the challenges associated with the ED process. They often provided rational explanations or justifications for continuing with the ED process. They framed the act of ED within broader social, ethical or personal narratives in order to give meaning to the experience and help overcome potential physical or psychological challenges. Rationalisation served not only as a coping strategy but also as a way to meet the personal expectation of embodying strength throughout the process. One area where we observed this

rationalisation was in relation to the injections, which were described as a step that the bloggers needed to face on their own. The first hormone injection was often framed as a major hurdle. Once this initial step was overcome, the remainder of the process was portrayed as much more manageable. Bloggers could be seen to rationalise both the medication dosage (e.g., *"the dose of the medication was very small"* (blog 9)) and the materials used (e.g., *"the needle was tiny"* (Blog 9)). One blogger, for instance, called themselves *"a little bit of a wimp"* (Blog 1) when describing their reaction to the injections. This self-critique appeared to demonstrate how resilience was not only expected but also internalised by the blogger. Rationalisation seemed to become a way to remain committed to the ED process.

For many bloggers, the experience of ED served as the catalyst that inspired them to donate again. Our analysis revealed that many bloggers either had already re-donated or expressed a willingness to re-donate. They even expressed a sense of regret for not having discovered ED earlier in life and many bloggers showed little to no hesitation towards donating again, e.g., *"I will do this again without a doubt."* (Blog 6). There were also blogs in which re-donating was not mentioned at all, nor was any explanation given for why they would choose not to. However, one blogger mentioned needing a break for the body to recover after the fourth donation. The thought of discontinuing or giving up on the process did not seem to occur; the bloggers remained committed. Some bloggers recognised that ED demanded thoughtful consideration, as it represented a serious and involved commitment.

3.3.5 Social context

We observed that some bloggers mentioned the anonymity surrounding the ED process, as well as the social stigma they encountered along the way. We noticed that some bloggers also expressed concerns about being judged by their family for their decision to become an egg donor. One blogger even expressed regret about not sharing their decision to donate (e.g., *"Many of my family members still don't know that I donated, and I honestly regret not saying anything."* (Blog 41)). Another blogger faced internal conflict when choosing whether or not to disclose their decision:

"My only concern was telling my family that I had done it. They're a typical Eastern European family who hold stubborn opinions. If they didn't understand something, they would likely disapprove." (Blog 6).

Some bloggers seemed to face negative reactions to their decision to become an egg donor, highlighting the emotional impact of criticism or

negativity from others who did not understand their choice: *"Even though some of my family members disagreed with my decision, it was my choice and I am over the moon to have finally followed through on 12-year-old me's wishes!"* (Blog 5). This demonstrated how bloggers asserted their autonomy despite external judgment. Apart from negative responses, they also faced questions from significant others: *"I've been asked by so many people, both young and old: 'Why donate your eggs? What about your own Family?' And the answer is simple – what about others?"* (Blog 28). Some bloggers asserted themselves against recipients, professionals and others, by voicing their needs and standing firm in their boundaries or viewpoints (e.g., *"I was reading through comments, and I saw someone say that young donors are desperate. I agree this is really unfair"* (Blog 27)).

Some bloggers encountered a broad range of emotional reactions from their close social circle. These responses ranged from curiosity and supportive interest to humorous or innocent misunderstandings, particularly from children:

"When we told our son that 'mummy was going to give a lady some of her eggs' he said 'she might eat them', and when we suggested that she might have a baby with them, he said 'or a baby chicken'." (Blog 35).

Bloggers also highlighted the emotional and practical (e.g., transport to and from the FC) encouragement and support provided by family and friends throughout the ED process. There appeared to be a sense of community surrounding ED. One blogger shared the experience publicly on Facebook, which brought unexpected positive feedback and support. Other bloggers similarly described feeling empowered and noted solidarity among other egg donors who had also gone through ED, noting how initial hesitation about being part of a group evolved into meaningful, supportive connections. These interactions highlighted the value of others who had gone through similar journeys, creating a sense of belonging, almost as if being part of a larger family.

"Learn more about how to donate eggs and reach out to those who have gone through the egg collection before you. It's not such a scary process and community is so important! Know that you are doing an incredible thing, and it's amazing to be a part of it." (Blog 5).

Finally, some bloggers seemed to feel the need to present their motivations in a way that aligned with perceived socially accepted reasons for participating in the ED process (e.g., *"I also received expense compensation, though the financial benefit was not important to me when*

I made my decision.” (Blog 33)). This seemed to suggest that they were mindful of how others might perceive their actions (e.g., “Maybe others would think I jumped into it too quickly, but I wouldn’t agree.” (Blog 28)).

3.4 Nothing negative to say about agencies and/or clinics

This fourth theme examines the bloggers’ experience with a CRA and/or FC during the ED process. It is broken down into four subthemes: ‘Feelings towards agencies and/or clinics’, ‘Being addressed in a personal manner’, ‘Supported and guided by connection’ and ‘Seeking care beyond the procedure’.

3.4.1 Feelings towards agencies and/or clinics

The bloggers appeared to respond with trust, gratitude and appreciation towards the CRA and/or FC professionals. They expressed feeling respected and understood and had confidence in the competence of the medical professionals involved in the ED process. Some bloggers also shared the reasons behind their choice of a specific CRA and/or FC. Influential factors included previous experiences, a sense of comfort, the design and tone of the CRA’s or FC’s website, shared values and ethics, personal recommendations and the clinic’s overall reputation. Together, these considerations reflected the importance of trust and feeling connected to the organisation.

3.4.2 Being addressed in a personal manner

We noticed that some bloggers emphasised the importance of clear communication. They seemed to appreciate receiving consistent, open and supportive updates from professionals at their CRA and/or FC throughout the ED process. The bloggers also valued receiving information about the outcome of their ED, such as the number of eggs retrieved and whether the ED had resulted in a pregnancy.

“She even passed on messages from the Intended Parents who selected me throughout the whole process, which was really nice!” (Blog 16).

Clear communication was considered crucial in these cases, as it helped to prevent concerns about not being fully informed or included in the process. However, some bloggers expressed feeling overwhelmed or intimidated by the amount of information provided (e.g., *“The Donor Egg Co-Ordinator emailed me an information pack – BOY there was a lot of information, and I found it a little daunting” (Blog 35)).*

3.4.3 Supported and guided by connection

Support from CRA and/or FC professionals seemed to be equally vital to bloggers as clear communication. Many bloggers highlighted how supportive the professionals were. They praised the emotional and interpersonal support, especially the comfort of being attended to by female professionals and coordinators' exceptional care and logistical assistance (e.g., appointments and travel). A genuine, human connection appeared to develop with individual professionals, as reflected in their use of first names. As one blogger described: *"After a few initial generic emails I was put in contact with Gabby. Then, almost immediately, I felt like I was talking to a friend I'd known for years."* (Blog 28).

The bloggers shared a variety of measures that the FC implemented to reassure the bloggers: clear explanation of procedures, medication and expected outcomes, offering structured guidance through calendars and resources, responding actively to concerns or questions and using empathetic approaches (e.g., kindness and friendliness).

Many bloggers explicitly expressed their overall satisfaction and the positive experience they had with the CRA and/or FC, stating: *"I had an amazing experience donating eggs with Fertility Match!"* (Blog 16). We did not encounter any mention of a negative experience with a CRA and/or FC.

3.4.4 Seeking care beyond the procedure

We noticed that the bloggers placed great importance on the quality of care they received. This encompassed attention to physical well-being during medical procedures, emotional reassurance through supportive staff interactions and a sense of being valued and cared for. They particularly appreciated when professionals in FCs responded to their feedback and tailored their treatment accordingly. Many bloggers appreciated the attentive care they received from the professionals.

The interaction between the professional and the bloggers continued even after the egg retrieval. Some bloggers also felt it was important to keep the nurses informed about their recovery, providing daily updates and attending all follow-up appointments:

"The nurse called me this morning to see how I'm feeling and said that if I'm not feeling better by the end of the day, that she would bring me back in tomorrow morning for another follow-up appointment. She's asked me to monitor my weight and to let her know if I gain more than 2 pounds per day. So far, I think that I've only gained 3 pounds since the retrieval. This is not weight from fat, but rather weight from fluid/water retention." (Blog 38).

6. Discussion

Our analysis of egg donors' narratives represented in blogs on websites of CRA and FC revealed four key themes. To begin with, bloggers aimed to encourage others to become donors. In doing so, they shared information that occasionally included misleading or inaccurate content. The bloggers normalised and minimised the challenges of ED. A second theme focused on the role of recipients in these narratives. Rather than focusing solely on their own experiences, bloggers placed recipients at the focus of their stories. They expressed empathy, attempted to adopt the recipients' perspective and appeared to seek recognition for their contribution. Third, the blogs served as a space where bloggers could construct their identities. The bloggers maintained self-awareness and self-perception throughout the ED process. Additionally, they sometimes framed their decision to donate as a higher calling. They described a willingness to give up a part of themselves to donate to the recipients as a form of self-sacrifice and demonstrated remarkable resilience. Connecting with other donors was experienced as empowering and fostered a sense of solidarity. This connection contributed to feelings of belonging and community, almost like being part of a larger family. Finally, bloggers also expressed solely positive views about the CRA and/or FC with no negative experiences reported.

The analysis of the results revealed recurring patterns that surfaced between the different themes, rather than within them, pointing to overarching connections and dynamics. By publicly narrating their ED experiences, bloggers not only aimed to encourage others to consider donation, but also engaged in shaping their identities. According to LaPointe (2010, p.7), identity is "a performance and co-construction always achieved within the immediate context of interaction". In other words, identity is a narrative practice: we construct who we are through the stories we tell (LaPointe, 2010, p.2,7). This implies that what bloggers share contributes to the construction of their identity. Through their efforts to inspire others, bloggers seemed to shape an identity as knowledgeable and influential voices within the ED landscape. In doing so, they functioned as informal marketing agents who helped to sustain and amplify the logic of the fertility industry. This became explicit when the staff of the CRA/FC asked a blogger to keep a diary so other potential egg donors would consider ED. While positioning themselves as knowledgeable and influential voices, the bloggers simultaneously highlighted the personal sacrifices entailed in ED. In doing so, they portrayed themselves as altruistic individuals, making selfless contributions for the benefit of others. They seemed to actively shape how they wished to be perceived. Although some bloggers explicitly

stated that they were not seeking praise, many bloggers' narratives revealed a desire for recognition from their social context, recipients and professionals. As a result, they appeared to seek affirmation of both the value of their contribution and their identity as generous and caring individuals. Their self-perception as selfless and responsible individuals was further reinforced by the fact that none of them expressed any criticism towards the CRAs and/or FCs they worked with. Moreover, the recipients as focus points in bloggers' narratives further supported the image of the bloggers as being altruistically motivated.

Previous research had shown that egg donors perceived their eggs as being wasted unless donated, a belief that acted as a motivator for participating in ED (Okafor et al., 2022, p.70; Hammarberg et al., 2024, p.4). Similarly, this thesis reveals a recurring narrative focused on the idea of preventing biological 'waste' or 'giving away a period'. This framing positioned ED as an opportunity to assign value to otherwise unused biological material. By adopting this perspective, I saw that bloggers appeared to engage in a form of self-commodification, interpreting their bodies through the lens of productivity and efficiency. They saw their bodies not only as biologically valuable, but also as economically exploitable. Daniels and Heidt-Forsythe (2012, p.719) provided a useful framework for understanding the economic market, arguing that the commodification of people is closely tied to free market ideologies, which promote the transfer of ideal genetic material. The marketing strategies of egg banks further reinforced idealised gender norms, often resembling beauty competitions (Daniels & Heidt-Forsythe, 2012, p.719). They described this as a form of gendered eugenics, where social hierarchies (e.g., race and class) were perpetuated and individual autonomy in decision-making was undermined. Certain eggs were perceived as more valuable than others (Daniels and Heidt-Forsythe, 2012, p.720). The framing of ED as a way to prevent 'waste' illustrates how bloggers contributed to and internalised a system that commodifies the body. This not only reduces the complexity of ED to practical functions but also raises concerns by obscuring its broader medical, psychological and ethical dimensions, making such narratives potentially misleading. Furthermore, our analysis revealed both misleading and, in one blog, not entirely accurate information. For instance, one blogger expressed the belief that the body naturally produces new eggs each month, which reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of human reproductive biology.

The presence of misleading and inaccurate information in blog posts was striking, especially considering that these blogs were probably monitored or curated by professionals from the CRA and the FC. This observation aligns

with previous research that has identified the presence of misleading or inaccurate information on websites of FCs and CRAs (Hammerberg et al., 2024, p.1; Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.1). Given that websites serve as the primary source of information for potential donors (Hammarberg et al., 2024; Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.1), it is crucial that they provide comprehensive content (Hammarberg et al., 2024, p.1). Although misleading and inaccurate information was not widespread across all blogs, its presence is nonetheless concerning in light of the requirement for informed consent (Massiah et al., 2020, p.457; ASRM, 2021, p.1401). This concern is reinforced by earlier research showing that many consent forms fail to include essential elements (Uroz & Guerra, 2009, p.571-572; Cattapan, 2016, p.455), as egg donors receive incomplete information not only in the early stages through the blogs on websites but also later in the process.

Our own findings showed that bloggers actively sought information on CRA and/or FC websites before deciding to become an egg donor. It is reasonable to suggest that this is more troubling, considering the potential conflict of interest inherent in donor recruitment by these institutions. In one case, a blogger chose to seek guidance directly from professionals, stating fears of encountering misinformation online. While this reflected a commendable desire for trustworthy information, it also pointed to the central role that professionals can play as primary information gatekeepers. Yet, this reliance presented a paradox: it was somewhat concerning that professionals were perceived as the most reliable source of information, despite their direct involvement in the recruitment process. This dynamic may also function as a subtle marketing strategy by the CRA and/or FC. By presenting such narratives of bloggers, potential donors may be encouraged to consult staff directly. The FC and/or CRA positioned themselves as trustworthy and responsible actors.

The ED process was often minimised and normalised by the bloggers, a strategy that could serve as a marketing tool to lower the threshold for participation. Research has shown a consistent pattern of minimising health risks and side-effects across various platforms (Carter et al., 2012, p.60; Hammarberg et al., 2024, p.4; Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.9,11; Carpenter & Campo-Engelstein, 2025, p.405). Notably, in this study, such minimisation extended beyond risks and side-effects alone, it also encompassed minimising aspects of the daily life (e.g., running), egg retrieval and recovery (e.g., duration). Additionally, we observed that some bloggers shifted the focus to practical concerns rather than the medical procedure. This contrasts with the findings in Jacxsens et al. (2024, p.10), who

reported that most FC websites primarily focused on providing medical information with minimal attention to the practical experiences of egg donors. Furthermore, the ED process was described by the bloggers using terms such as 'smooth' and 'easy', while sedation was referred to as a 'wonderful sleep'. Molas and Whittaker (2022, p.333-334) described this type of language as 'overlexicalization', which may be seen as a patronising discourse that lacked informational content and served to obscure or deny the presence of pain, risk, fear of discomfort (Molas and Whittaker, 2022, p.333-334). In this study, such portrayals by bloggers appeared to be deliberately crafted to encourage others to donate, reinforcing the notion that blogs functioned as informal recruitment tools for the CRA and/or FC. This was further supported by the contrast between the optimistic framing in these blogs and the more complex experience of medication and recovery periods, suggesting a far more invasive and medically significant experience.

The normalisation of ED as a strategy tended to frame the procedure as just another routine activity in the life of a young person (Molas & Whittaker, 2022, p.338). In our study, bloggers normalised the use of hormone injections, referring to them as simply a "part of the job" (Blog 32). This normalisation was further reinforced by framing ED as an extension of the body's natural physical capacities and by comparing it to other altruistic acts. These observations aligned with Keehn et al. (2015, p.615), who argued that normalisation served to present ED as both natural and meaningful. Yet, paradoxically, bloggers often described their own donation experience as deeply personal, transformative and difficult to articulate. This contradiction revealed a narrative tension: while aiming to normalise ED, these accounts simultaneously portrayed it as emotionally exceptional. Normalisation and minimisation surfaced as two discursive strategies that may help sustain the appeal of the ED market by downplaying the risks, side-effects, egg retrieval, daily life and recovery process. However, these strategies also risk obscuring the medical and emotional seriousness of the procedure, potentially misleading prospective donors about the true nature and implications of ED.

Within the second theme 'the recipients as focus points in bloggers' stories' and third theme 'bloggers constructing their identity', I observed that bloggers actively adopted an altruistic discourse, portraying ED as a gift of parenthood, of family or of happiness. This narrative closely mirrored the discourse found on CRA and FC websites (Jacxsens et al., 2024, p.1). While previous research had shown that ED was often framed as a 'gift' by CRAs (Carter et al., 2012, p.61) or as the 'gift of life' on websites (Gezinski et al.,

2012, p.397), our findings revealed that bloggers themselves internalised and reproduced this rhetoric. This aligned with Gilman's (2018, p.702) observation that egg donors often framed ED as altruistic. However, by foregrounding altruism, their own feelings, needs and interests were pushed into the background. These bloggers tended to reproduce traditional gender norms, portraying themselves as inherently empathic and willing to offer their bodies for the benefit of others. In doing so, they reinforced a cultural script in which altruism was both expected and valorised. It served as both moral justification and a mechanism that facilitated the functioning of the ED market. Curtis (2010, p.80) similarly noted that altruistic rhetoric in ED is not gender-neutral; rather, it expected emotional connections with recipient families. Altruism encourage self-sacrifice, risk-taking and draws on ideals of motherhood (Curtis, 2010, p.80).

The bloggers attempted to adopt the recipients' perspectives and seemed to show empathy that extended beyond simply trying to adopt the recipients' perspectives. The bloggers even expressed a deep emotional connection with the recipient families, despite anonymity, highlighting a contradiction of closeness and distance. This raises the question of whether bloggers might have developed a form of identification with the recipients. Yet, as Mackenzie and Scully (2007, p.335) argued, our imaginative capacities are constrained by physical experiences. Thus, moral engagement should not be understood as placing oneself in another's position, but rather as expanding one's capacity for empathy. Bowman (2020, p.478) added another layer to this discussion by introducing the concept of epistemic vices, which are "attitudes deeply rooted in one's personal and cognitive functioning" (Bowman, 2020, p.478). These inhibit one's ability to learn from facts and from others (Bowman, 2020, p.478). Together, these perspectives highlight the limitations of truly adopting another's point of view. While bloggers are not truly in a position to fully understand or embody the recipients' perspectives, they construct their narratives as if they have complete insight into and understanding of those perspectives.

Bloggers emphasised that genetic inheritance (nature) and environmental influence (nurture) were considered essential in shaping who a person becomes. They portrayed their role in the ED process as strictly biological, emphasising and focusing on the value of their eggs. I saw that this framing allowed them to distance themselves from more traditional gendered expectations, where egg donors were perceived as emotionally connected to their bodies and nurturing (Almeling, 2007, p.328). This allowed them to reduce their bodies to a biological function, despite the active role they

played in the ED process, such as undergoing hormonal stimulation and medical procedures. Although bloggers appeared to have agency, for instance, in choosing or approving potential recipients, this power was often overshadowed by dominant altruistic discourse. The bloggers portrayed themselves as being 'chosen' rather than as active decision-makers, which obscured the asymmetrical nature of these relationships. Such an asymmetrical nature can also be found between femininity and masculinity (de Beauvoir, 1983, p.XV). As de Beauvoir (1983, p.XV) argued, although they may appear as opposites, only the masculine was seen as the universal, the positive, the norm and the autonomous subject. In contrast, the feminine was defined as the negative or the 'other' (de Beauvoir, 1983, p.XVI). The bloggers appeared to internalise and reproduce this gendered framework. By framing themselves as passive participants in the ED process, they reinforced a narrative in which male subjectivity, represented here by the recipients, remained central and dominant.

The idea proposed by de Beauvoir (1983, p.XVI), that women are positioned as the 'other', is reflected in the way bloggers construct their identities. This was distinctly gendered: our analysis highlighted the relational dimension of ED, positioning the blogger in relation to their recipients and the professionals. Gilligan (1982) provided a theoretical framework for understanding this dynamic, suggesting that women's development is largely rooted in connection and the continuation of relationships, with a strong emphasis on care (Gilligan, 1982, p.10-11). According to Cross and Madson (1997, p.22), women tended to construct a 'self' focused on interdependence, whereas men tended to construct a more independent 'self' (Cross & Madson, 1997, p.22). It is therefore not surprising that women described themselves in relational terms, as they are historically positioned as the 'other' (de Beauvoir, 1983, p.XVI). The difference between men and women helped explain gender variations in cognition, motivation and social interaction (Cross & Madson, 1997, p.22). This perspective could be used to shed light on why bloggers presented themselves as altruistic and caring: in the way that their identity was shaped in relation to those around them. Altruism functioned as a powerful narrative tool through which bloggers constructed their identities. While the theories of de Beauvoir (1983), Gilligan (1982) and Cross and Madson (1997) offer valuable insight into gendered identity construction, they reflect a binary understanding of gender. This binary framework excludes bloggers who do not identify as women or men (e.g., non-binary persons), making it an incomplete framework incapable of capturing the full spectrum of gender identities.

The bloggers' self-expression of being an egg donor appeared closely intertwined with a desire for recognition, whether from recipients, their social environment or professionals. As McBride (2023, p.73) argued, recognition lies at the heart of the human need for respect and dignity. It was a core element in how individuals understood their place in society and built relationships with others (McBride, 2023, p.73). When recognition was denied, it could result in harm (McBride, 2023, p.75). The bloggers' role as egg donors also appeared to be closely tied to a desire for recognition. I saw that the professionals in the blogs functioned as a catalyst for this sense of recognition by highlighting the numbers of eggs retrieved or the success of the ED. For some bloggers, the quantity of eggs even seemed to introduce a subtle sense of competition, as if producing more eggs equated to having done a better job. This dynamic revealed how professionals could play a central role in stimulating and reinforcing bloggers' self-commodification. Almeling's (2007, p.331,333) findings similarly indicated that medical professionals often acted as intermediaries in the ED process, mediating both the economic and logistic dimensions (e.g., matching process) of the experience.

Some bloggers did not describe their decision to become an egg donor as easy. Rather, ED was framed as a 'calling', something they had felt destined to do from a young age. One blogger, for example, mentioned that ED had been on the bucket list since the age of twelve. This raised questions about the plausibility of such early self-awareness: was it realistic to believe one could truly understand this decision at a young age or was this narrative retrospectively constructed to provide meaning and coherence to their actions? McAdams (2001, p.118) argued that life stories were shaped within social relationships and broader cultural contexts. These narratives were not static but were continuously constructed and reconstructed in response to prevailing values, norms and power dynamics (McAdams, 2001, p.118). From this perspective, it is reasonable to suggest that the idea of a 'calling' might have been part of a larger narrative framework that helped bloggers make sense of the ED decision and integrate it into a meaningful life story. The 'calling' narrative could serve as a catalyst for shaping their identity as egg donors.

The bloggers emphasised the supportive role of professionals and expressed overall satisfaction with the experience at the CRA and the FC. This aligned with previous research, which had shown generally positive attitudes toward ED among donors and high levels of satisfaction (Bracewell-Milnes et al., 2016, p.451; Thaldar, 2020, p.7). However, the bloggers reported negative reactions from others. Although perceptions of ED vary across cultures,

certain similarities can be observed. Consistent with the findings of Okafor et al. (2022, p.70) in Nigeria, donors noted that societal attitudes towards ED remained largely negative. In their study, 54,8% of the participants reported that ED was perceived as being sinful, while 45,2% described it as taboo, not generally accepted and openly discussed (Okafor et al., 2022, p.70). Our findings similarly revealed the persistence of stigma surrounding ED. In response to limited understanding or acceptance within bloggers' immediate environment, bloggers found validation and emotional support through connections with other donors. These peer relationships seemed to foster a sense of belonging and mutual understanding. Molas and Whittaker (2022, p.346) argued that the identity framework showed that egg donors saw themselves as part of a broader collective of empowered women, women who exercised agency over their bodies. In this framework, ED was not only an act of solidarity but also a form of identity expression and empowerment (Molas & Whittaker, 2022, p.346).

6.1 Limitations and further research

We now turn to a discussion of the limitations of this research. The search engines played a determining role in shaping which websites appeared and were consequently included in this research. Although the algorithms guiding these results were beyond the researcher's control, it is important to acknowledge that these algorithms had an impact on the results of this research. The use of predominantly American search engines, such as Google and Yahoo, likely introduced a bias by prioritising content aligned with USA-based perspectives. However, by mimicking the search behaviour of a potential egg donor, this study strengthens the relevance of the applied search strategy and its findings.

Another limitation concerns the generalisability of the findings. It is important to emphasise that the findings of this thesis were based on the experiences of bloggers. Additionally, since not every donor is inclined to write a blog, many donor experiences remain undocumented. As such, these findings should not be considered representative for the broader population of egg donors.

Additionally, as CRAs and FCs continue to develop as organisations, so do their websites. As a result, the original links to the blog content may no longer be accessible online. This may affect the perceived credibility and transparency of this research.

While the research focused on bloggers, no direct dialogue was conducted with them, nor was this research conducted with them in a participatory sense. This methodological approach introduces a degree of distance

between the researchers and the narratives, which risk overshadowing the narratives of the original authors due to power dynamics.

Moreover, several avenues for further research arise from this study. First, while the presence of misleading and inaccurate information was limited, its existence remains concerning and may point to broader institutional patterns of information management beyond formal communication channels. This represents a compelling area for further research. Second, no insight was available into the editorial processes used by CRAs and FCs to select blog content, nor into the decision-making criteria used by professionals to determine which donor blogs were published. This lack of clarity about editorial processes and decision-making criteria highlights a valuable direction for further research, especially in light of the insights this study offers into the ways egg donor narratives are represented in blogs on the websites of CRAs and FCs. Further research is needed to deepen and broaden these findings.

7. Conclusion

ED raises ethical and informational concerns, highlighting the need for critical and reflective research. This thesis has explored in what ways egg donors' narratives are represented in blogs featured on the websites of CRAs and FCs, institutions directly involved in donor recruitment. The findings revealed that these blogs function as spaces where bloggers internalised and reinforced an altruistic, gendered and economic discourse. This way, the bloggers acted as informal marketing agents for the fertility industry, disseminating information that occasionally included misleading or inaccurate content. Moreover, the bloggers reinforced gendered norms in which altruism was expected from and valorised by egg donors. This framing served as a moral justification for ED and as a mechanism that sustains the ED market. Surprisingly, by presenting their contributions as purely biological, bloggers distanced themselves from traditional gender expectations while still reinforcing them in subtle ways. This thesis contributes to the literature by examining in what ways donor narratives are represented in blogs on websites of CRAs and FCs and underscores the need for further research, not only around this topic, but also into the editorial and decision-making processes behind the presentation of such blogs.

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9. Attachments

Attachment 1: Comparing search strategies

In order to decide which search strategy to use, we first compared the search method used in the research by Jacxsens et al. (2025, manuscript under review) with an alternative approach we intended to explore ourselves. In the first search strategy, the keywords 'egg donor' were combined with 'experience', 'blog' and 'story'. In the second search strategy of this thesis, we used the keywords 'agency egg donation testimonials', 'clinic egg donation testimonials' and 'fertility egg donation testimonials'. In both search strategies, we used Google as the search engine in the period between 3rd and 10th of November 2024. For the first search strategy, we searched up to the tenth page and for the second search strategy, we searched for the first ten websites that appeared.

The aim was to mimic the search strategy of a potential egg donor. We looked for bloggers linked to a CRA or FC and aimed to study their experiences. To gain insight into the experiences of egg donors, we focused on sections such as 'blog', 'testimonial' and 'success stories', where blogs are typically shared on CRAs and FCs websites. This insight later shaped our search strategy for selecting blogs from each site.

In this exploratory inductive search, we considered a CRA and a FC as organisations that recruit egg donors, which served as an inclusion criterion. The definition was not further refined, and at times, websites of CRAs or FCs were excluded due to the absence of blogs on their pages. We included blogs that were written by the bloggers, publicly accessible and written in English. Furthermore, no exclusion was made based on the anonymity of bloggers and the date of publication. Since there have been relatively few medical developments, a strict timeframe was not deemed necessary. This approach allowed us to include a large number of blogs.

We excluded articles that were written by staff members and aid workers. Additionally, we excluded blogs that were presented in an interview format, as we wanted bloggers to independently determine what they considered important without being influenced by an interviewer's questions. Videos and photos were also excluded to protect the donors' identities, as explicit consent from the bloggers for the use of their blog content had not been obtained. However, we acknowledged that videos and photos can sometimes convey the emotional experience more vividly than written text.

In both methods, we identified advantages and disadvantages, which will be discussed below. To begin, we will describe the first search strategy, which used the keywords 'egg donor' combined with 'experience', 'blog' and

'story'. In total, we found 29 websites from CRAs and FCs with over 158 blogs during this initial phase.

Using the first keyword combination 'egg donor' and 'blogs', we uncovered numerous websites, primarily from CRAs. This finding was further refined during the actual data collection process, resulting in 31 CRA websites and 20 FC websites. However, during the initial phase, the keywords 'egg donor' combined with 'story' and 'egg donor' combined with 'experience' also led to new results from FCs. Later in the actual data collection, we were able to specify these findings with the following numbers: using the search term 'egg donor' combined with 'story', we found five new websites from CRAs and eleven from FCs. The second search term 'egg donor' combined with 'experience' yielded two new websites from CRAs and ten from FCs.

The selected keywords from the first search strategy proved effective for identifying relevant websites across both types of organisations. By extending our search to the tenth results page, we saw that our selection of websites was not limited to only the most prominently ranked and frequently visited websites. The search engine seemed to have minimal influence on the range of websites retrieved. Although this approach offered a clear advantage, it was also an exhausting and time-consuming approach. The fact that reviewing all ten pages did not always yield additional valuable websites represents a disadvantage.

Using the second search strategy, we identified a total of 22 websites from CRAs and FCs, featuring over 229 blogs during the initial phase. Focusing on the first ten search results yielded numerous websites and blogs, particularly when using the keyword combination 'clinic egg donation testimonials', which predominantly highlighted FCs. However, limiting the search to the top ten results reduced the variety of CRAs and FCs found across keyword combinations. A possible explanation for this could be that the search engine personalised the results, prioritising websites frequently visited by me. An advantage of this strategy was that we were able to find all the websites with the blogs that needed to be studied and identified within one day on Google. This method was less time-consuming.

We have chosen to continue with the first search strategy (i.e., the search strategy that combines the terms 'egg donor', 'egg donation', 'oocyte donor' and 'oocyte donation' with 'experience', 'blog' and 'story'). This approach was also used in the research by Jacxsens et al. (2025, manuscript under review). The main reason for choosing this search strategy was that it was recommended by researchers Saint Arnault and Sinko (2021, p.5) to use the same method for qualitative comparative research. Additionally, since

we aim to compare our findings in a subsequent study with those of Jacxsens et al. (2025, manuscript under review), this approach is the most suitable. Furthermore, we found more websites with this search strategy than with the second search strategy. Additionally, the search engine did not appear to influence the results.

Search strategy 1

Website name	Country	Commercial recruitment agency/ clinic	Where on the website?	Keywords	Number of blogs	Website URL	Collection date	Google tab
London egg bank	UK	Commercial recruitment agency	Donating eggs – patient stories	Egg donor blogs	10 blogs	https://www.londoneggbank.com/news/patient-stories/	03/11/24	First tab
				Egg donor experience			04/11/24	First tab
				Egg donor story			10/11/24	First tab
Fairfax eggbank	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Egg donor testimonials	Egg donor blogs	3 blogs	https://www.fairfaxeggbank.com/blog/category/donor-stories/	03/11/24	First tab
				Egg donor experience			04/11/24	Third tab
				Egg donor story			10/11/24	Fourth tab
Asiawest egg donors	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Donor testimonials	Egg donor blogs	11 blogs	https://asiawesteggdonors.com/donor-testimonials/	03/11/24	First tab
				Egg donor story			10/11/24	Sixth tab
Pinnacle egg bank	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Blog - ‘my egg donation journey’	Egg donor blogs	1 blog	https://pinnacleeggbank.com/egg-donation-blog/	03/11/24	First tab
				Egg donor experience			04/11/24	First tab
				Egg donor story			10/11/24	Second tab
Graceful beginnings egg donation	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	More - testimonials	Egg donor blogs	3 blogs	https://www.gracefulbeginningseggdonation.com/testimonials	03/11/24	First tab
Egg donor & surrogate solutions	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Egg donor – blog - testimonials	Egg donor blogs	13 blogs	https://eggdonorsolutions.com/application/egg-donors/egg-donor-testimonials/	03/11/24	Second tab
				Egg donor story			10/11/24	Fifth tab
DonorNexus	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	For egg donors’ – ‘stories and experiences’ + For egg donors -testimonials	Egg donor blogs	26 blogs	https://donornexus.com/blog/tags/egg-donor-stories	03/11/24	Second tab
				Egg donor story		https://donornexus.com/egg-donor-testimonials/	10/11/24	Fourth tab
Family inceptions	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	‘About us’ - testimonials	Egg donor blogs	1 blog	https://familyinceptions.com/about-us/testimonials/	03/11/24	Second tab
Fertility match	Canada	Commercial recruitment agency	Company – success stories + testimonials	Egg donor blogs	5 blogs	https://www.fertilitymatch.ca/success-stories/egg-donor/ https://www.fertilitymatch.ca/testimonial/	03/11/24	Fourth tab
				egg donor experience			04/11/24	Eighth tab
				egg donor story			10/11/24	Sixth tab
Egg helpers	Canada	Commercial recruitment agency	Home - blog	Egg donor blogs	3 blogs	https://egghelpers.com/blog/nick-eyes-egg-donation-story/	10/11/24	Sixth tab
				Egg donor story			10/11/24	Sixth tab
Fertility source companies	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Egg donation testimonials	Egg donor blogs	10 blogs	https://www.fertilitysourcecompanies.com/egg-donation/testimonials	03/11/24	Fifth tab
Everie donation	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Resources - testimonial	Egg donor blogs	1 blog	https://www.everiedonation.com/resources	03/11/24	Fifth tab
Proud egg donation	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Home -testimonial	Egg donor blogs	3 blogs	https://proudeggdonation.com/testimonials/	03/11/24	Fifth tab
Nurture egg donor program	South-Africa	Commercial recruitment agency	Stories – donor stories	Egg donor blogs	4 blogs	https://www.nurture.co.za/stories/	03/11/24	Sixth tab
				Egg donor experience			04/11/24	Fourth tab
				Egg donor story			10/11/24	Third tab

Growing generation	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Resources – egg donor testimonials	Egg donor blogs	3 blogs	https://www.growinggenerations.com/resources	03/11/24	Seventh tab
Baby2mom	South-Africa	Commercial recruitment agency	Blog – new artikels	Egg donor blogs	>9 blogs	https://baby2mom.co.za/	03/11/24	Seventh tab
Hatch fertility	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Resources – testimonials – egg donors	Egg donor blogs	11 blogs	https://www.hatch.us/egg-donor-testimonials	03/11/24	Eighth tab
				Egg donor story			10/11/24	Ninth tab
Family creations	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Resources – testimonials	Egg donor blogs	5 blogs	https://www.familycreations.net/resources/testimonials/	03/11/24	Eighth tab
				Egg donor experience			04/11/24	Sixth tab
Proud fertility	Canada	Commercial recruitment agency	About – our testimonials	Egg donor blogs	4 blogs	https://proudfertility.com/testimonials/	03/11/24	Eighth tab
Your Eggs	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Recources - testimonials	Egg donor blogs	1 blog	https://youreggs.com/testimonials/	03/11/24	Ninth tab
The donor solution	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	About - testimonials	Egg donor blogs	1 blog	https://www.thedonorsolution.com/about-us/testimonials	03/11/24	Ninth tab
Extraordinary conceptions	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	About - testimonials	Egg donor blogs	6 blogs	https://www.extraconceptions.com/about/testimonials/	03/11/24	Ninth tab
				Egg donor experience			04/11/24	Eighth tab
CRGH	UK	Fertility clinic	Quick links – resources – my egg donation experience	Egg donor experience	1 blog	https://www.fertilitymatch.ca/success-stories/egg-donor/ https://www.fertilitymatch.ca/testimonial/	04/11/24	First tab
				Egg donor story			10/11/24	Second tab
Repromed	New-Zealand	Fertility clinic	News and stories – treatments – all about eggs	Egg donor experience	1 blog	https://www.repromed.co.nz/a-donors-insight/	04/11/24	Second tab
				Egg donor story			10/11/24	Fifth tab
Care fertility	UK	Fertility clinic	Donation – donation your eggs	Egg donor experience	1 blog	https://www.carefertility.com/donation/donating-your-eggs/	04/11/24	Third tab
				Egg donor story			10/11/24	Fourth tab
						https://www.manchesterfertility.com/about/testimonials/anonymous-274/		
Manchester fertility	UK	Fertility clinic	About – testimonials	Egg donor experience	2 blogs	https://www.manchesterfertility.com/about/testimonials/anonymous-176/	04/11/24	Fifth tab
TFP – fertility UK	UK, Poland and Netherlands	Fertility clinic	Support – donation	Egg donor experience	7 blogs	https://tfp-fertility.com/en-gb/our-success-stories?category=donation	04/11/24	Fifth tab
				Egg donor story			10/11/24	First tab
Egg Donor UK	UK	Fertility clinic	About – donor stories	Egg donor experience	8 blogs	https://www.eggdonorsuk.co.uk/about/donor-stories/	04/11/24	Sixth tab
				Egg donor story			10/11/24	Third tab
Grace – egg donors	South-Africa	Commercial recruitment agency	Egg donors – egg donors stories	Egg donor experience	4 blogs	https://gracedonors.co.za/egg-donation/egg-donor-stories/	04/11/24	Seventh tab
				Egg donor story			10/11/24	Fifth tab

Search strategy 2

Name website	Country	Commercial recruitment agency/ clinic	Where on the website?	Keywords	Number of blogs	Website URL	Collection date	Google tab
DonorNexus	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	For egg donors' – 'stories and experiences' + For egg donors - testimonials	Agency egg donation testimonials	26 blogs	https://donornexus.com/blog/tags/egg-donor-stories	04/11/24	First tab
				Clinic egg donation testimonials			07/11/24	First tab
				Fertility egg donation testimonials			04/11/24	First tab
Fertility source companies	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Egg donation testimon	Agency egg donation testimonials	10 blogs	https://www.fertilitysourcecompanies.com/egg-donation/testimonials	04/11/24	First tab
				Clinic egg donation testimonials			07/11/24	Third tab
				Fertility egg donation testimonials			04/11/24	Second tab
Egg donor & surrogate solutions	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Egg donor – blog - testimonials	Agency egg donation testimonials	13 blogs	https://eggdonorsolutions.com/application/egg-donors/egg-donor-testimonials/	04/11/24	First tab
Hatch fertility	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Resources – testimonials – egg donors	Agency egg donation testimonials	11 blogs	https://www.hatch.us/egg-donor-testimonials	04/11/24	First tab
				Fertility egg donation testimonials			04/11/24	First tab
Global egg donors	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	About - testimonials	Agency egg donation testimonials	9 blogs	https://www.globaleggdonors.com/testimonials/	04/11/24	First tab
				Clinic egg donation testimonials			07/11/24	First tab
Exquisite egg donors	South-Africa	Commercial recruitment agency	Links - testimonials	Agency egg donation testimonials	4 blogs	https://www.exquisitesdonors.com/testimonials/	04/11/24	First tab
						https://fertilitymatch.ca/success-stories/egg-donor/		
Fertility match	Canada	Commercial recruitment agency	Company – succes stories + testimonials	Agency egg donation testimonials	5 blogs	https://www.fertilitymatch.ca/testimonial/	04/11/24	First tab
Giving hope: egg donation & surrogacy	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Link - testimonial	Agency egg donation testimonials	36 blogs	https://givinghopeinc.com/testimonial/	04/11/24	First tab
My donor connection	Unknown	Commercial recruitment agency	On the mainpage	Agency egg donation testimonials	1 blog	https://www.mydonorconnection.com/get-started-with-surrogacy/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cp&utm_campaign=21670467967&utm_term=best%20surrogacy%20agency&gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQiA-qG5BhDTARIsAA0UHSKpyz_5-CT0vVK2JM7UxlDnzyBnGpD_NEGhT1Oiw3cht2Nm https://crgh.co.uk/resources/patient-stories/my-egg-donation-experience/	04/11/24	First tab
CRGH	UK	Fertility clinic	Quick links – resources – my egg donation experience	Agency egg donation testimonials	1 blog		04/11/24	Second tab
				Clinic egg donation testimonials			07/11/24	First tab
				Fertility egg donation testimonials			04/11/24	First tab
New life egg donors	This organisation operates in various countries	Commercial recruitment agency	For egg donors – egg donorstestimonials	Agency egg donation testimonials	>34 blogs	https://www.newlifeeggdonors.com/section/egg-donors/	04/11/24	Second tab
				Fertility egg donation testimonials			04/11/24	First tab
The donor solution	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	About - testimonials	Agency egg donation testimonials	1 blog	https://www.thedonorsolution.com/about-us/testimonials	04/11/24	Second tab
Family creations	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Resources – testimonials	Agency egg donation testimonials	5 blogs	https://www.familycreations.net/resources/testimonials/	03/11/24	Second tab
London egg bank	UK	Fertility clinic	Donating eggs – patient storys	Clinic egg donation testimonials	10 blogs	https://www.londoneggbank.com/news/patient-stories/	07/11/24	First tab
				Fertility egg donation testimonials			04/11/24	First tab
Your Eggs	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Recources - testimonials	Clinic egg donation testimonials	1 blog	https://youreggs.com/testimonials/	07/11/24	First tab
Fairfax eggbank	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Egg donor testimonials	Clinic egg donation testimonials	3 blogs	https://www.fairfaxeggbank.com/blog/category/donor-stories/	07/11/24	Second tab
Dunya IVF clinic	Cyprus	Fertility clinic	About us – succes stories	Clinic egg donation testimonials	1 blog	https://www.dunyaivf.com/en/success-stories/	07/11/24	Second tab
Atlantic Reproductive medicine –building families together	VS	Fertility clinic	Egg donors -testimonials	Clinic egg donation testimonials	2 blogs	https://www.atlanticfertility.com/third-party-reproduction-raleigh-nc/donor-testimonials/	07/11/24	Third tab
				Fertility egg donation testimonials			04/11/24	Second tab
Cape fertility – egg donor pogram	South-Africa	Fertility clinic	Testimonials - donors	Clinic egg donation testimonials	42 blogs	https://eggdonationcapefertility.co.za/testimonials-donors/	07/11/24	Third tab
Pinnacle egg bank	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Blog - 'my egg donation journey'	Clinic egg donation testimonials	1 blog	https://pinnacleeggbank.com/egg-donation-blog/	07/11/24	Second tab
				Fertility egg donation testimonials			04/11/24	Second tab
Genesis Group	VS	Commercial recruitment agency	Egg donor testimonials	Clinic egg donation testimonials	9 blogs	https://www.genesisurrogacy.com/testimonials-2/category/Egg+Donor+Testimonial	07/11/24	Third tab
Nurture egg donor program	South-Africa	Commercial recruitment agency	Stories – donor stories	Fertility egg donation testimonials	4 blogs	https://www.nurture.co.za/stories/	04/11/24	Second tab

Attachment 2: Step-by-step plan for data collection

1. Websites with blogs included based on inclusion criteria

- Verification that the organisation meets the definition of a *CRA* and a *FC*
- The blogs are *publicly* available and written in *English*
- The *definition* of a blog: We define a blog as an website where egg donors can express their personal experiences of the ED process and these experiences must be written by the egg donor themselves.

2. Websites with blogs excluded based on exclusion criteria

- *Interview format*
 - Yes → exclude
 - No → include
- *Blogs in videos and photos format*
 - Yes → exclude
 - No → include
- *Time*
 - >10 j → exclude
 - <10j or no time → include
- *Blogs that involve around the social aspects of ED, an opinion or on experiences with a particular CRA or FC*
 - Yes → exclude
 - No → include
- *Ethical problems?*
 - Yes → exclude
 - No → Include
- *Egg sharing?*
 - Yes → exclude
 - No → include

3. Selection of blogs

- A maximum of three experiences is selected from each website:
 - For each category, such as '*testimonials*', '*success stories*' and '*blogs*', one blog is chosen from each category.
 - For websites with two categories, one blog is selected from one category and two from the other
 - For websites with only one category, all three testimonials are chosen from that category

