

Certified Amah

My daughter knows who I am if others don't

by Amy Barratt

Non-biological mother: it has such a clinical sound. It always makes me think of the vegetables in health-food stores certified "biologique" (organic), and conjures the unfortunate image that we've been sprayed with pesticides, while our partners, the "biological mothers" have not.

Although I have been an NBM for two years now, I'm happy to say that the label is not in daily use at our house. My child doesn't say, "Please, non-biological mother, may I watch Caillou?" (She calls me "Amah" and my partner "Mummy". Ask her who is her maman and she'll name us both.) Perhaps that's why, on the occasions I do have to explain my status, the words don't exactly roll off my tongue.

Recently, I brought some pictures of my daughter to show the women in my choir. One woman, whom I don't know well, exclaimed, "her hair is so dark!" - a remark which, as I am quite blonde, was obviously meant to express "she doesn't look anything like you!"

It was certainly not the first time in two years that someone had made a similar remark. Each time an old lady on the bus says "Oh, she must look like her Daddy," or another mother in the park asks, "is her father very dark?" I have to decide "just how much do I tell this person?"

Unlike the many straight couples who use donor sperm and try to keep that information from their children, most lesbian mothers want to be as open and frank as possible about their kids' origins. Especially when my daughter is present, I want to appear poised and unruffled when I say "she doesn't look like me because I am not her biological mother." To date, I wouldn't say that I've ever handled the situation really beautifully.

In the case of the woman in my choir, after I explained that my partner was Georgia's biological mother, we both stood there feeling uncomfortable. She didn't say, "oh, you're not the real mother," but I felt that she was thinking it. I often wish at this point that the person would ask another question, because there's nothing a mum likes better than talking about her child, but usually, "non-biological" is a real conversation stopper.

A few months ago when the LMA announced a meeting to discuss the roles of biological vs. non-bio mothers, my reaction was defensive. "There's nothing to discuss," I sputtered. "We're all mothers!"

I've since realized that the purpose of such a meeting was not to argue about who was better! After two years I'm finally prepared to admit that we NBMs have a particular set of "issues" to deal with, none of which hinder our ability to love, care for, and delight in our children.

I'm finally figuring out that any insecurities I have about my mother status are my problem. Other people probably aren't discounting my role in my daughter's life nearly as often as I think they are. And the person who matters most, Georgia, knows I'm a "real mother". When she calls out "Amah"

in the middle of the night and I go to her, neither of us is confused about our relationship.