

# Designing babies



Designing Babies Introduction: Imagine a world where every male is healthy, with an average height of six feet, and woman evenly matched with only biological differences between them. All have a very high IQ and are competitive and aggressive. In other words, man is a spitting image of a Hollywood movie hero and the women is a spitting image of a heroine. The concept of a perfect world has existed for a long time and history is replete with such instances where civilizations have by artificial intervention attempted to create a healthy and genetically strong population. The Cossacks used to leave newborn babies overnight in the snow so that only the strong and healthy ones survived. The Greeks had similar ways to cleanse their society. The Spartans used to have their babies inspected by a council of elders and the potential unhealthy ones were left to die outside. This concept of artificial cleansing is referred to as eugenics, a practice seen in the twentieth century under Hitler's Nazi Germany. The atrocities committed during that time put a dampener on this practice.

Background of the issue:

Advancement in the field of genetics has resulted in a new interest with regard to health and eugenics. Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis is a technique by which one or two cells are removed from a blast cyst generated by in vitro fertilization so that the embryos can be tested for single gene disorders or chromosomal abnormalities. The benefit from this is parents trying to have children have an opportunity to eliminate some possible diseases and abnormalities they may carry a gene for. The development of a technique called pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) gave further fillip to this concept. The basic idea was that an embryo could be tested to find a perfect donor for treatments like organ and bone marrow transplantation.

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But artificial intervention has raised a lot of moral and ethical dilemmas. It can be justified if this is done in a life and death situation where a transplant can save a life (without the donor being seriously deprived in turn).

But this technique has now degenerated into other disturbing areas.

According to the celebrated author Debora L Spar, parents now utilize this procedure not for health reasons but by “ those who want to select their child’s gender.” (Spar, 99). The Steinberg’s Fertility Centre in California even gets requests to help couples have babies with specific traits. Thankfully, technology has not developed to such an extent yet. The new eugenics have not yet resorted to killing of newborn babies, but is getting close by couples choosing not to have a baby of a particular sex (especially girls) after the female becoming pregnant.

The problems:

Problems in two distinct areas arise due to this practice. The first one is that embryos that have not been classified as a perfect donor are left to die. The second problem is ethical or moral in nature. The question that can arise here is whether genetic eugenics as practiced in the country is within the order of nature or religion. It is not right to reject a baby born out of mutually accepted consummation on the basis of its sex, or probable physical/mental traits. Aborting a fetus on this basis does amount to eugenics.

Argument against genetically driven eugenics:

A look at history can prove that this concept has not in any way aided growth and survival of a culture or civilization. The Cossacks, the Greeks and the Spartan civilization no longer exist. Same is the case with Nazi Germany even though they were partly responsible for shocking the public to its senses. The above statement does not take into consideration the viewpoints

of religious leaders and other moral evangelists. People seem to believe in the mistaken notion about 'survival of the fittest'. The strongest argument against eugenics can be voiced through the words of Charles Darwin who had supposed (and rightly) to have said "It is not the strongest of the species that survives... nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change." (Khurana). Parents who strive to produce a baby by unnatural means will find that unless it is taught to survive in a world full of change and challenge, health and perfection does not really count. A person can only get stronger by facing and overcoming challenges, big and small. A perfect society if ever there is one, will soon become arrogant and complacent which will inevitably lead to its downfall. In spite of what history has taught us people will spend money in their quest to produce a perfect baby. The new business of baby hatching is fast catching up because of this attitude. Recent trends nowadays show that the public has a short memory. As mentioned earlier, no one will deny that reproduction to find a perfect donor to save the life of a sibling suffering from a serious malady is wrong. But to go beyond that is a step that is in direct conflict with nature. Nature has shown the consequences of such actions in many fields and areas.

#### Solutions:

There are two solutions to the issue involved, one long term and the other short term. The solution to the first problem (of unwanted embryos being killed) was provided by Ron Stoddart (founder of a reputed international Christian adoption centre). According to him, there were nearly 50,000 such embryos in the US in 1996. He came up with the idea of open embryo adoption in place of a test tube baby or adoption of a live one. The word

open was used because this practice was already in place where transfer was done in secrecy to avoid revealing the identity of players involved. So embryo adoption is the only short term solution currently feasible. Stoddart adds that there are hundreds of couples who opt for adoption across the world and the embryos can be given to them as a solution. The long term solution tackles the moral, religious and ethical issues involved. It requires massive education programs about the lack of ethics in choosing the sex of the child and opting not to have a baby if it belongs to the unwanted sex. It should also educate the society in the uselessness of this practice as illustrated in the earlier section titled 'Argument against genetically driven eugenics'. This can be done by the church, other religious bodies, the government, not-for-profit organizations and even corporations (as part of corporate social responsibility). But this will be a slow and patient process. It will take time for humans to understand the consequences of designing babies, but until then babies will become the commodity and a lot of people will become wealthy in an unnatural and unethical way.

#### Works Cited

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