

Ethics of reproductive technologies assignment

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Ethics of reproductive technologies Introduction With most technological advances in the field of medicine, ethical considerations and concerns are formed. " Just because we can do something , should we do it? " This is a question that has plagued scientists in the last half of the twentieth century. The field of reproductive medicine in particular has faced this question- perhaps more than any other field.

For the first time in history, as an outgrowth of in vitro fertilization technology and research, the three components of parenthood - the genetic, the gestational, and the nurturing - can be separated, so that the loss of one goes not necessarily result in the loss of the others. For a man or woman who may not be able to conceive a child genetically connected to him or her, ovum donation or sperm donation offers the opportunity for gestation and parenting of a child genetically connected to half of the couple.

For a woman unable to carry a pregnancy to term, gestational care may be the alternative of choice. For couples who cannot provide egg or sperm, but who wish to experience pregnancy, embryo adoption may be an alternative route to parenthood. Prospective parent's must think carefully about what it would mean to them to be a parent without experiencing pregnancy, or a parent with no genetic connection to their child. The array of parenting options afforded by reproductive technology is staggering.

The development of in vitro fertilization has made it possible for one child to have as many as five different " parent's"- an ovum donor, a sperm donor, a gestational carrier, and two adoptive (rearing) parent's. The techniques used to assist in the conception and gestation of children have advanced

significantly in the past few decades. While much of the research in this area has been carried forward to allow people to have children, the research now opens the door to allowing people to select certain traits in their children as well.

This essay aims to explore the ethical arguments for and against several issues raised by assisted reproductive technologies, including sex selection, designer babies and multinomial pregnancy reduction. The unprecedented advances made in obstetrics with the aid of these technologies are highly regarded by many medical professionals and infertile couples. The wide-ranging and ever expanding applications of these new technologies are not unanimously supported however, with many groups expressing concerns about their misuse.

Using the main ethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficent, Justice and autonomy each topic is examined in detail to provide a reasoned argument as to their advantages and disadvantages. The advent of IVF and assisted reproductive technologies (ARTS) have revolutionized the aid of medical interventions. As with many new medical advances however, this is not without its ethical dilemmas. More recent technologies such as pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PEG) have created great controversy, with fears of sex selection and designer babies provoking much debate over its use.

This essay will present the arguments for and against sex selection and designer babies. It will also examine the advantages and disadvantages of multinomial pregnancy reduction. Sex Selection PEG allows prospective

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parent's to select the sex of their child by screening embryos prior to transfer to the uterus, and discarding those embryos which are not of the selected sex [1]. This procedure is often carried out for sound medical reasons, for example to prevent transmission of sex-linked genetic disorders.

Debilitating diseases such as hemophilia, thalassaemias and muscular dystrophy [2] [3] can be avoided, which is of obvious benefit to both parents and their offspring. The only argument against such a use of PEG is from pro-life supporters who are against the use of PEG and IVF altogether on moral grounds [4]. Debates about eugenics can also arise from the use of PEG to avoid diseases [5], but I feel that such a use of PEG is ethically justified in terms of the principle of non-maleficence. Sex selection for social reasons is much more controversial.

The main reason for its use is for "family balancing" purposes [6], and because parents desire the experience of raising daughters and sons [7]. However, some claim that it could lead to sex discrimination [6], because male children tend to be preferred, especially as the first child [6]. This would serve to reinforce social and economic inequalities [8], and further devalue women, especially in male-dominated cultures [9]. There are also concerns that if such selection were permitted, sex ratio imbalances would result [10] from the preferential selection of male children.

This would challenge the ethical principle of equality [6]. In Europe and America, it appears that neither sex is preferred to the other [9], so imbalances are unlikely to occur. In addition, permitting sex selection, even in male-dominated cultures could be positive, as it avoids the harm of

compelling women to successive pregnancies until they have sons [9]. Even if a sex ratio imbalance does occur, some argue that this would serve to increase women's value in the eyes of men [4]. It is also reasoned that parental autonomy and reproductive liberties are more important than equality [4,] [9], O].

This technology allows medical professionals to aid the desires of couples with strong preferences for a particular sex- so why should they be denied if there is no demonstrable harm to others? 1] [5] There are potential psychological harms for the sex-selected offspring, as they might not live up to their parent's' high expectations [1 1] . Also, " shopping" for a particular sex devalues the dignity of children and their wellbeing [7]. It is proposed that they are effectively being used as a means to gratify their parent's [12] and that moral and family dimensions are more important than consumer choice [13].

Children should not be accepted or rejected because of their not be granted inappropriate control of non-essential characteristics [14], as they could lose sight of the pleasure of children [1 1] Designer Babies Perhaps one of the most contentious proposed applications of PEG is to create " designer babies", that is children who are selected for specific desired traits [16]. There are medical reasons for using PEG in this way, to create " savior siblings" that can donate life-saving tissue to an existing child [17].

Conditions such as thalamus's, leukemia and rare amnesias can be fatal if untreated [1 7], and for many sufferers the only cure is stem cell or bone marrow donation from a person who is a tissue match [17]. PEG allows a

sibling who will provide such a match to be chosen for the existing child [1]. Therefore savior siblings are clearly beneficial as they can save the lives of existing children [17] and PEG for that purpose gives families a controlled way of obtaining a sibling donor [18] Those opposing the creation of savior siblings assert that children are “ commodities”, and that the parent’s are having them for the wrong reasons