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In Vitro Fertilization and Genetically Altering Children

In Vitro Fertilization, or IVF, is the process of joining a man's sperm with a woman's egg in a laboratory rather than the natural fertilization process inside of the body. It is "an artificial way to start or conceive a baby" (Parker 4). IVF provides couples who have a difficult time becoming pregnant or same-sex couples that cannot have their own child the chance to have the baby they have always wanted. This amazing biotechnological feat seems nice and gives couples hope, but the fact is it is morally and ethically wrong, it raises social concerns, and it could bring about unknown dangers if it continues in the direction it is going. The problem is not IVF itself, but genetically engineering and altering IVF babies, which should be put to an end.

The most controversial subject pertaining to In Vitro Fertilization is that it goes against basic morals, ethics, and religion. In IVF, "the human embryo is treated as a product of technology and not as a gift of God" (Naff 97). According to the Bible, God made everyone the way they are for a reason and they are all perfect in his eyes. By changing the genetic make-up of a child, they are also changing the child's destiny, their future, and others' future's who would have been impacted by them. Some embryos are used for, even specifically made for, stem cell research. This does not even give the embryo a chance to become a child and live life. In some cases, unused embryos can simply be discarded. Some people believe that this is going against God's will, as embryos are potential lives. A more recent trend in IVF is child sex-selection,

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which gives parents the choice of having a boy or girl child. The problem with sex-selection is that it can be used in wrong ways in different cultures. In India, they choose to have boys instead of girls to avoid paying a dowry, and some families use it for family balancing, which is having the same amount of boys and girls. Some parents would do it only for their benefit or to live out their dream of having a boy or girl of their choice. Sex-selection could cause an overall sex imbalance, such as in China and Korea where there are more boys than girls. Another trend in IVF is having “designer babies,” which allows parents to choose characteristics and traits of their child including their physical appearances, personality, intelligence and diseases. These are all things that should be left in God’s hands. This can also be misused by parents. For example, in 2007 a lesbian deaf couple who chose to have IVF chose the embryo that carried the deaf gene, only to keep the “deaf culture” alive (Naff). This shows that parents may not always choose the traits that would benefit their child, but instead cripple or harm them, which is also the case with “savior siblings.” A savior sibling is when a parent has a child with some sort of defect or disease, and then they have a second child using IVF so that they can choose the healthiest embryo (that does not carry the disease). This means that the healthy second child can help the first child with the disease. “Parents of children with serious diseases, who might be helped by a transplant, are often tempted to have another child who could provide transplant material for the child with problems... because they are less likely to be rejected because of the close genetic relationship between (siblings)” (Parker 35-36). Should a child be born only to help another child? Should they have that responsibility set on them before they are even born? The parents had the second child with the expectation that they would give up one of their organs for their sibling, which does not give them a fair shot.

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Inequality and misuse of IVF is another issue that will only widen the social gaps between upper and lower classes. “Perhaps the most powerful objection to sex-selection is that it may distort the natural sex ratio and lead to a severe imbalance of the sexes, as has occurred in countries such as China and Korea. “A surplus of men and a shortage of women... will invariably cause an enormous rise in enforced celibacy, homosexuality, polyandry, prostitution, molestation, rape and other sex-related crimes” (Naff 134). This could also lead to gender stereotypes. The biggest controversial issue in society is the unequal benefits of IVF. For example, only the people who can afford IVF, which would be the upper class, can have it done. Is it fair that the middle and lower classes, who cannot afford it, do not get to live out their dream of having a child when they are unable to, or sex-selection, or preventing their child from having a disease? Another unfair benefit for IVF patients are that people who cannot afford it would not have the medical advances and accessibility to stem cell banks. Stem cell banks are places that have stem cells that are saved to grow “perfect match organs” for transplants. Should only IVF patients have this available while others wait and suffer for months and sometimes even die before they can have a transplant?

Although there are many benefits to In Vitro Fertilization, there are risks that come along with it including medical risks, tampering with the natural balance, and the unknown factors of what the future of IVF holds. In IVF there is an “8.6% risk of major birth defects... including heart and kidney abnormalities, cleft palate and undescended testicles... compared with the 4.2% rate in babies made the old-fashioned way” (Lemonick). “The second study, conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), reported that babies conceived through what doctors call assisted reproductive technologies (ART) have 2.6 times the risk of low or very low birth weight— a significant risk factor for cardiac and cognitive problems” (Lemonick).

Some other medical studies conducted in 2004-2005 proved that women under 35 years old had a success rate of 40% and women over 40 years old had a success rate less than 5% (Naff 44).

This just proves that IVF does not always work. Another concern is the unknown factors of messing with nature. This science is still fairly new and there is much to be learned. All it would take is one mistake and it could be disaster. New diseases, defects, or cancers could rise and cause serious problems. People need to try to see the big picture and understand that this is like playing with fire. Parents who are considering In Vitro Fertilization should also think about other options as well. Adoption is available and surrogate mothers can be an option.

The counter claim to genetically altering IVF children is that it can have benefits such as preventing genetic diseases in children and in future generations. It provides some parents, who otherwise would not be able to have children, the chance to have a family. By using genetic engineering to alter or take out the genes that cause diseases, the struggles that come along with the disease are eliminated which gives them a chance to live a normal life with the same opportunities as other children.

The best solution to this controversial topic is for all viable embryos to be implanted in the IVF process, and no genetic engineering should be done whatsoever. This is a way to ensure that all life is protected, "God's will" can be carried out, and nature can play its role in keeping our world balanced. This gives each embryo, each potential child, an equal opportunity to live. The *existing* unused embryos should be donated to research to find cures to the diseases they were discovered to have had. The bottom line is that genetically altering embryos is morally and ethically wrong, it raises social concerns dealing with inequality and the misuse of IVF, and it could bring about unknown dangers if it continues in the direction it is going. It is depriving people of the chance to live life and depriving the world of what that person would have become.

Works Cited

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