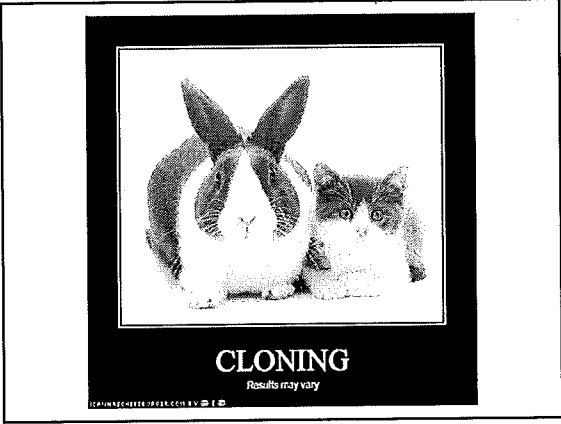




SOCIAL WORK ETHICS AND ASSISTED REPRODUCTION

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**Social Work Ethics
and
Assisted Reproduction**

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Assisted Reproduction

“Never before in history has it been possible for a woman to give birth to an infant who is genetically unrelated to her. Never before has it been possible for a woman to be the genetic parent of living children to whom she has not given birth.” (*Everything Conceivable*, Liza Mundy, 2007)

- *How many 'parents' can a child now have?*
- *How many need to be male?*

Reasons for Assisted Reproduction

- Infertility
 - Affects 1 in every 8 couples
 - Associated with intense feelings and emotions
 - Variable expectations – e.g., is it more important to become a parent or to have a genetic offspring?
 - Uncertainty regarding limits to achieve pregnancy (medical, financial, emotional)
- Non-traditional Relationships
- Procreation Timing – Maximize opportunity for parenthood later in life
- Procreation Preference – Desire to become a mother without experiencing pregnancy

Ethics vs. Law

- Example: Octuplet Physician
 - Who governs?
 - On what basis?

Terms and Definitions

- ART – Assisted reproductive technology
- IVF – In vitro fertilization (AKA “test tube babies”)
- Traditional surrogate – One who contributes both womb and egg
- Gestational carrier – A surrogate who gestates an embryo created through IVF using an egg from the intended mother or a donor (therefore having no genetic connection to the child)

- Co-Mothering – where one partner contributes the egg, which is fertilized with donor sperm through IVF and transferred into the womb of the other partner.
- Social Parents – Non-biological but caretaking parents (Similar to adoption relationship)
- Genetic Bewilderment – Confusion experienced by a child who does not know the true identity of his genetic parent and as a result cannot fashion a satisfactory identity of his or her own. (Again, similar to what can sometimes be seen in adopted children).

- PGD – Pre-implantation genetic diagnosis
- Selective Reduction – A procedure in which one or more fetuses are eliminated through an injection of potassium chloride, which stops the fetal heart
- Embryo Adoption/Embryo Donation – The process whereby embryos are relinquished by whoever created them and transferred to another couple or person. In most states this is considered a property transfer rather than formal adoption (NEJM,6/27/2013. Made-To-Order Embryos for Sale – A Brave New World?)
- 3 Parent Babies – Now legal in Great Britain

- Statistics**
- Success rate of women conceiving naturally
 - Age 30 – 75%
 - Age 35 – 66%
 - Age 40 – 44%
 - Age 45 – 13%
 - Number of children world-wide born from IVF – 3+ million

- The average couple undergoing in vitro fertilization has...
 - 7 frozen embryos in storage,
 - which have been there an average of 4 years,
 - and for which 72% of parents have still not decided what to do with them
- There are currently more than ½ million frozen embryos in storage in the US alone
- More than half of parents who conceive using egg donation never tell their children the truth of how they were conceived

- Organizations**
- Microsort – A patented sperm-sorting technique which offers parents a way to select the gender of their baby.
 - Extend Fertility – A for-profit company offering career women the chance to freeze their eggs to allow for the option of parenting later in life.

- A Perfect Match – “...specializes in the recruitment of intelligent, college-aged egg donors to be matched with well-educated and accomplished intended parents.”
- ReproTech – A company that, like a collection agency, takes over a medical practice’s frozen embryos, tracks down parents delinquent in paying the maintenance fee, and encourages them to make “disposition decisions.”

Legal Cases / Questions

- **Baby M**
 - 1987 case where Mary Beth Whitehead agreed to be a traditional surrogate for M/M Wm Stern.
 - Whitehead was inseminated with Mr. Stern's sperm in exchange for \$10,000, but after delivery changed her mind and refused to relinquish the baby
 - The courts awarded custody to the Sterns with visitation rights for Ms. Whitehead.

- **Should donor selection be limited?**
 - An infertile man wanting a child as close to himself as genetically possible asked his father to act as sperm donor. The man is now parenting his genetic half-brother
- **How should "Parent" be defined?**
 - Legal precedent is now making it possible for non-biologically related individuals to be listed as parents on a child's birth certificate.

- **In a Tennessee divorce settlement ...**
 - A lower court, acting in what they considered to be the best interest of the child, awarded custody of frozen embryos to the parent who intended to bring them to term.
 - An appeal court reversed the decision and ordered the number of embryos to be divided like any other marital property.
 - The TN Supreme Court eventually awarded the embryos to the ex-spouse who did not want to gestate them, preventing involuntary parenting and privileging the right not procreate over the desire to do so.

■ In Chicago ...

- A couple is suing an IVF clinic that inadvertently destroyed their embryos, charging them with “wrongful death.”
- A lower court ruled that the couple had a standing to sue, saying that “a pre-embryo is a human being.”
- The case was appealed ...

“Vergara’s ex-fiance says he’ll fight to save embryos”

- “When (businessman Nick Loeb) and Vergara became engaged, he said, he began ‘to push for children’ but she insisted they use a surrogate.”
- Initially two fertilized embryos were created. The first one implanted didn’t take and the surrogate miscarried the second.
- Two more embryos were created before their relationship ended.

Vergara (continued)

- “A woman is entitled to bring a pregnancy to term even if the man objects,” he said. “Shouldn’t a man who is willing to take on all parental responsibilities be similarly entitled to bring his embryos to term even if the woman objects?”

What Are The Rights of the Children?

- Do children have the right to know the truth of their origins?
- Do they have a right to know the identity of their parental donor?
- Should these children be allowed the opportunity to establish a relationship with their biological parent?
- What happens when the rights of the child conflict with the rights of the parents?
 - ...with the rights of the donor?

Rights of Children (continued)

- An Australian couple with a son diagnosed with a rare congenital condition is working with fertility specialists to conceive an “extra parts baby” who would provide blood tissues to help cure his/her older brother
- A deaf couple used Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis to identify and conceive a deaf child.

References

- Mundy L. *Everything Conceivable*. New York, NY: Alfred Knoff, 2007.
- George RP & Tollefsen D. *Embryo: A Defense of Human Life*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 2008.
 - From the jacket cover: “Typically, right-to-life arguments have been based explicitly on moral and religious grounds. In *Embryo*, the authors eschew religious arguments and make a purely scientific and philosophical case that the fetus, from the instant of conception, is a human being, with all the moral and political rights inherent in that status.”
