

## Health and wellbeing vs. Playing God: where do we draw the line?

In this brief essay I will outline the issues involved with a controversial issue regarding scientific healthcare advancements. These began in the 1970s with In vitro fertilization (IVF) and has progressed into the issue of pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD). During PGD embryos are created outside of the body to determine the presence of genetic disorders. Once detected, a disorder can be corrected before transmission to the uterus.

There are some valid reasons why this may be desirable and even possibly the ethically right thing to do. The example I will use throughout this essay is Down syndrome. For a child with this disorder, there are often many health issues involved. About half of the children with Down syndrome have heart defects. Other medical complications such as Respiratory infections, constipation, and hearing problems are often seen. Given these health problems, it may make PGD the ethically right thing to do so the child is not living in pain or danger or heart failure.

However this process divulges several social and ethical consequences that should be noted. My primary concern is one of both ethical and social consequences. The concern is such: if we are "correcting" genetic disorders, such as Down syndrome, are we implying that people who were born that way are in need of correcting? Are they worth less as human beings because they have this characteristic that was "corrected" by doctors for a different child? Some other issues arise in the question, "where do we draw the line?" What characteristics may the parents choose, and what is out of the question? For example, a doctor is talking to parents and says, "You can cut these extra chromosomes and your kid will be normal, however you are not permitted to change the hair or eye color". Going back to my earlier point, we have just de-humanized that potential child because of an extra chromosome. Our society claims to be evolved, yet we view those different than us as inefficient. And where does it stop? When can we take a child already conceived, alter it, and return it to the mother? When do we start creating super humans, picking and choosing how tall they are, how strong, and how intelligent. If we are genetically engineering children to be the perfect child, at what point will we lose our humanity and free thought? Some alternative questions to consider are ones of accessibility and affordability. Would this be universal or can only the rich and famous engineer their ideal child? Designing the perfect child is not without social consequences. One could also ponder how this issue would affect professional athletes--if we are all superhuman, where does this leave this profession? Breaking it down further, if this is universally accessible, then everyone will want their child to be "the best" and therefore leaving crucial gaps in the workplace infrastructure. However if this technology is only available to the wealthy they may ensure their children continue to rank among the higher paying careers. Are these issues of great ethical and social concern in this area as we continue to advance down the road, or are they just ways to improve people's lives? Where did we get the idea that we have the RIGHT to change a human being based on preference, and what does that say of the society we have created for ourselves. Are we playing God or are we only focused on health and wellbeing?