



Genetics: What's all the fuss?

A simple introduction to a
conversation with
Geraldine Smith

Venue: Costa Coffee,
Marine Road, Morecambe
July 13, 2008
6:30 onwards.

Graham Doel, July 2008

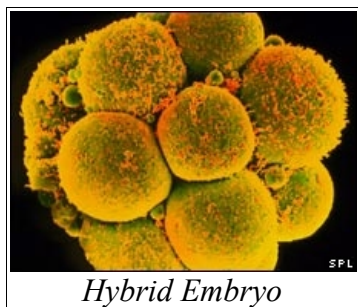
Genetics: What's all the fuss?

Recently there was some discussion about **Genetic Modification**, "**Father Figures**" and the creation of **babies to save the life** of someone else.. The proposed changes in the law involve many different ethical issues. The popular press have focused on the more sensational aspects, and on Gordon Brown's decisions over whether he should tell his M.P.'s how they should vote¹. It is possible that focusing on this human interest angle, left most of us ignorant of the real issues.

The new law has not been passed yet, but it is in its advanced stages². This discussion primer can not give a thorough analysis of the complexities of the debates, but it will introduce some key points of contention³. Hopefully it will inform our discussion with Geraldine Smith, our local M.P.



Geraldine Smith, M.P.



Should hybrid embryo's be made?

Scientists want to develop these cells so that they can watch how genetic defects, like Parkinson's disease, develop. There are different kinds of hybrid embryo's. The ones being talked about here are developed by⁴:

- Taking an animal egg and removing the majority of the DNA.
- Taking some human tissue (like skin) and removing the DNA.
- Inserting the Human DNA into the Animal Egg.
- The embryo's are allowed to grow to 200 cells and kept for 14 days before they are destroyed.

The Scientists would analyse ways for preventing and curing genetic defects. Opponents suggest that there are other ways of doing the same research. They also observe that the cells are so abnormal, that no conclusions could be drawn⁵.

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Are children born as a result of I.V.F. entitled to know their biological father?

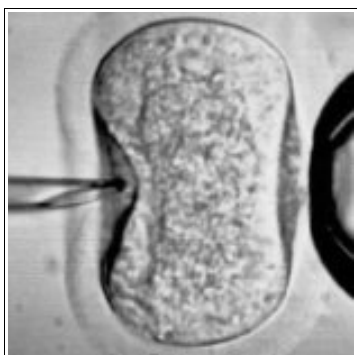
At the moment a child who has been conceived with the aid of I.V.F. can apply to discover who their biological parents are. The suggested changes in the law would mark a shift from knowing who your biological parents are, to knowing who your social parents are. This may mean, in some cases, men could be excluded from a child's life and records⁶.



Father and Child

The way that the current law is phrased means that some lesbian couples or single women may be refused I.V.F. treatment⁷. Changing the requirements from examining the child's "need for a father" to the child's need for "supportive parenting", is intended to prevent discrimination on the basis of singleness and sexual preference.

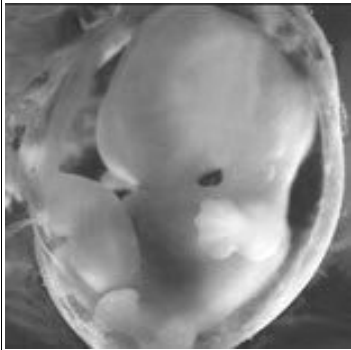
Lord Patten has argued that this approach ignores the research that suggests that Father Figures are beneficial to children as they grow up⁸. In a recent debate in Parliament Geraldine Smith said:



Under the Microscope

"... .. it is common sense just to take into consideration the need for a father, and if a child has not got a father to realise that it might be a good thing if there were a father figure - a male figure - in their life, because that is important. At the end of the day, this is not about discrimination; it is about the child."⁹

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Developing Foetus

Should embryo's be selected so they can become suitable donors?

The process of screening and selecting the genetic characteristics of a child has been allowed to provide suitable donor material for an older sibling. The current proposed changes in the law will allow the process to be widened to help not only siblings, but other members of a family.

- Human embryo's are fertilised with the express intention of being screened.
- Only one embryo that is a suitable donor is allowed to develop into a foetus and be born.
- The remaining fertilised embryo's are destroyed.

In the simplest of terms this means that where someone has an illness that could be cured by having a compatible donor, and no donor can be found, a baby could be created to be a compatible donor.

The concerns over selecting embryos in this way include the following things:

- How will the child be treated as it grows, and what other expectations might be placed upon it.
- The ethical difficulty of deciding which embryo's should live and which should die.
- The possibility that this legislation is the start of a slippery slope towards designer babies.

(For references check: <http://sunday-night.org.uk/>)

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Further Reading and References:

(1) Gordon Brown's Decision to let MP's make their own choices.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7312715.stm

<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/article953191.ece>

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/topstories/2008/02/27/three-catholic-cabinet-ministers-threaten-to-quit-over-crossing-human-embryos-with-animals-89520-20332824/>

(2) Progress through parliament.

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2007-08/humanfertilisationandembryology.html>

(3) Summary's of the issues involved.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7391975.stm>

http://www.churchsociety.org/issues_new/ethics/iss_ethics_embryologybill2008.asp

(4) How Hybrid Embryo's are made.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2007/may/17/genetics.health1>

<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/107966.php>

(5) Opposition to Hybrid Embryo's

<http://www.care.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=25577>

Page 1, Para 3.

(6) Biological Fathers being removed from Birth Certificates

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1025564/Lesbians-IVF-babies-denied-father-MPs-vote.html>

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(7) The possibility that Discrimination on the grounds of singleness or sexual preference is claimed by the BBC but not verified.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7391975.stm>

"Father Figure" Para 3.

Natalie Gamble cites several examples where treatment has been refused on the grounds of sexual preference.

<http://hfebill.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/pet-need-for-a-father-briefing-may-08.doc>

(8) Lord Patten Argues against the omission of Fathers.

http://www.spectator.co.uk/the-magazine/features/642966/part_2/not-even-science-fiction-foresaw-the-end-of-fathers.html

(9) Geraldine Smith debates the bill in Parliament.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080520/debtext/80520-0011.htm>