

Genetic diagnosis of embryos: clear explanation, not rhetoric needed

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In the area of genetic diagnosis of embryos, the choice of words matters as they can influence policies and perceptions, according to an analysis in CMAJ (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*).

Genetic testing of embryos combines [genetic testing](#) with [in vitro fertilization](#) and is widely available in clinical settings. However, words like "eugenics" and the "perfect child" help to polarize the debate and are influencing policies, such as limiting access to the procedure and to research.

"The fear of eugenics and the premise that parents will want children tailored to their whims underlies such measures," writes Dr. Bartha Maria Knoppers, Director, Centre of Genomics and Policy at McGill University and coauthors.

In Canada, the topic is timely as the Assisted Human Reproductive Act is slated to go to Parliamentary review in 2009. Preimplantation diagnosis is a practice that will be regulated under the Act.

The authors argue that the technique does not represent a eugenic threat, but rather how society may use it. "A society that would wish to rid itself of all embryos that did not satisfy certain criteria would resort to prenatal diagnosis, not genetic diagnosis of [embryos](#), since diagnosing fetuses is more feasible, less expensive and more cost effective."

Research shows that people who use this technique do so to avoid the

birth of children with severe, often fatal, diseases with which they themselves already have experience. "So far, no data confirm that parents want a perfect child as distinct from a child that is not afflicted with a serious disease, implying a more relative reasoning," write the authors.

While inflammatory language can raise awareness of issues, research and reflection are needed upon which to base policy and practice.

More information: <http://www.cmaj.ca/press/cmaj080658.pdf>

Source: [Canadian Medical Association Journal](#) ([news](#) : [web](#))

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