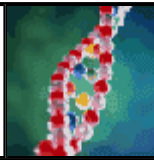


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GeneWatch

Volume 14 Number 1
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Don't Leave Out Lesbian and Gay Families

by Deborah Wald, Esq.

Lesbians and gay men have a unique relationship to reproductive technology (loosely defined, for purposes of this article, as the use of any means other than sexual intercourse to introduce sperm into a woman's uterus for purposes of procreation) due to our inherent inability to procreate without some form of intervention. Unlike heterosexual couples, for whom the use of reproductive technologies generally is a response to a failure of the natural procreative process, lesbians and gay men have to start with some type of externalization of reproduction, since we are unable to procreate within the exclusive context of our intimate relationships. This makes us more dependent on reproductive technologies than our heterosexual counterparts. Yet we are largely ignored or overlooked in the debates on the legal and ethical implications of these technologies, and of their increased use in our society.

Lesbians and gay men have been using some degree of reproductive assistance for as long as we have been having babies. Whether it is the "homegrown" variety of a lesbian couple finding a male friend, obtaining sperm from him directly, and inseminating with that sperm -- a method that requires no medical involvement -- or the most medically involved procedure whereby the eggs are harvested from one member of a lesbian couple, in vitro fertilized with donor sperm, and then implanted into the other member of the couple's uterus, causing a pregnancy where one mother is the genetic mother while the other mother is the gestational mother, almost every lesbian couple wanting to birth a child employs some level of reproductive technology. For gay men, this is even more the case, since they lack the uterus necessary to allow them to gestate a baby without outside assistance. Further, the denial of adoptions to lesbians and gay men in some states (and the universal unwillingness of the international adoption community to allow adoptions by lesbian and gay couples) forces some lesbians and gay men who might otherwise forgo medical interventions in favor of adoptions into the reproductive technology arena as their only hope for becoming parents.

Given this situation, it is imperative that the debate about the appropriate uses of reproductive technologies not leave out the role these technologies play in the lesbian and gay community. Yet very rarely are lesbian and gay families considered when the uses -- and especially limitations on the uses -- of reproductive technologies are discussed, except for the occasional effort to exclude us altogether.

**Poetry Watch: To A New
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By Anne Heutte

**Announcement: Teitel
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**Further Resources: Towards
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ABOUT GENEWATCH

GeneWatch is America's first and only magazine dedicated to monitoring biotechnology's social, ethical and environmental consequences. Since 1983, **GeneWatch** has covered a broad spectrum of issues, from genetically engineered foods to biological weapons, genetic privacy and discrimination, reproductive technologies, and human cloning.

The centerpiece of the current **GeneWatch** is **Marcy Darnovsky's analysis of new sex selection technologies**. We also present the first version of CRG's growing list of security breaches and accidents at federal biodefense laboratories; an update by Sujatha Byravan and Sheldon Krinsky of a planned federal biodefense lab in Boston; Phil Bereano's much-needed clarification of how international regulatory systems will interact; and an overview of Chinese biotechnology by Nancy Chen.

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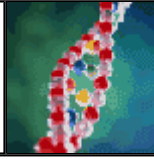
For example, the idea of limiting access to reproductive technologies to married couples—an idea frequently discussed in many contexts and actually adopted in some countries and, in the United States, by some health insurance providers-- is inherently discriminatory towards lesbians and gay men, who remain unable to marry regardless of the longevity and exclusivity of our relationships. Yet the proposal to limit access to technologies based on marriage is rarely attacked on these grounds, instead being challenged because it discriminates against single women.

My point is this: Enemies of the lesbian and gay community almost never forget us; but when it comes to reproductive issues, our usual allies often forget that we exist. The ethical and legal implications of reproductive technologies need to be addressed and debated. But please, make sure that these debates don't leave out lesbian and gay families.

Deborah Wald is a San Francisco attorney who works closely with the National Center for Lesbian Rights on lesbian and gay parenting issues. She was named an "attorney of the year" last year by California Lawyer magazine for her pioneering work on behalf of lesbian parents. She is a graduate of Northeastern University School of Law in Boston, Massachusetts.

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