

**disability
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editorial

As complex as life and death

Once again the general media have got it completely wrong. Previously they've turned the whole welfare to work debate into an exposé on what a bunch of work-shy malingerers we disabled people are. Now they're using the passage of the human fertilisation and embryology bill (HFEB) through Parliament to express astonishment, indignation or rage at deaf couples wanting designer babies. This is a complete red herring which confuses and takes focus and attention away from the real issues.

It is possible to find deaf people who actively do want to have a deaf baby. But this is most often for cultural reasons rather than to perpetuate deafness as an empowering disabling state. Equally it's possible to find deaf people who are so shocked by that idea as to find it repugnant. It is probably somewhat easier to find people with a congenital impairment or condition who would welcome having a child who shared the impairment just as much and in just the same way as they would welcome, love and cherish a child who didn't.

And therein lies the real reason for the objections of deaf and other congenitally-disabled individuals and groups to one clause (14.4.9) in HFEB. That clause states that when embryos are being selected for IVF, if there is a choice between those carrying the possibility of inherited impairment and those with no such possibility, the ones carrying no risk will always, automatically and incontrovertibly be preferred. What this represents in principle is a value judgement: an embryo

“What it represents in practice is nothing short of eugenics”

carrying the possibility of an impairment is always, automatically and incontrovertibly less desirable than one which doesn't. What it represents in practice is nothing short of eugenics, or at least the thin end of a eugenics wedge. It's clearly a move to engineer out congenital impairment. What it also represents is the abolition of choice.