

Committee on Women Population and the Environment Takes a Look at the Age of Reproductive Technology

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Reproductive technology like contraception has allowed women to control their lives since its inception. Today, there are new reproductive technologies offered to women who choose to conceive in non-traditional ways, which includes artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization. But history dictates that innovative reproductive technologies and its testing procedures prove detrimental to women of color.

In the U.S., approximately 2.4 million women use prenatal screening to examine the health of their baby. Initially, the procedure was created to identify severe abnormalities and disorders. Now, countries like India, China, and Taiwan use ultrasounds to determine the sex of the child. If it is a girl, many couples abort the fetus. In addition, clinics are also offering amniocentesis for sex selection, which leads to the abortion of female fetuses too.

Prenatal screenings, as well as new reproductive technologies like gamete donation and germline genetic intervention, are free-for-all technologies without government regulations. "My overall concern is this field of technology is not regulated or self-regulated," says Rajani Bhatia of CWPE. "Scientists are able to conduct research based on their discretion. There are virtually no guidelines." Additionally, activists like Bhatia are concerned that trait selection will create a means for genetic discrimination.

If wealthy individuals choose to select certain traits to create a "normal" child, then those children born without those traits might possibly be considered abnormal. It is safe to say that, if given the choice, few parent would create a child that is deaf, blind or have any other disabilities. But is it ethical to consider disabled fetuses abnormal and those scientifically created with perfect vision and/or preferable weight normal? "IGM (Inheritable Genetic Modification) is a way for parents to screen what is undesirable. But consumers are led to believe that you can't produce a child with genetic deficiencies. Where do you draw the line?"

In order to "perfect" these procedures, masses of tests will be needed. Bhatia worries that women of color will become guinea pigs. "Scientists need a lot of eggs in order to do testing because it's all very experimental. And this country has a history of running unnecessary and experimental tests on women of color without telling them. Where else are they going to get the eggs?"