

# DOGS' DESIGNER DEFECT BABY

## Disabled by choice

By ANDY GELLER

If you have the right doctor and the right lab, you can have a baby with the right "designer disability."

That's right — you can create a baby with a birth defect.

For years, the medical world has been abuzz with talk of creating perfect designer babies through prenatal testing.

Now, some doctors are doing the opposite — making babies with made-to-order genetic defects, according to *The Associated Press*.

The procedure is an ethical minefield, but parents with disabilities like deafness or dwarfism say it just means making babies like themselves.

A recent Johns Hopkins survey of 137 American clinics that offer embryo screening found that four of them have done the procedure, which costs \$15,000.

One of the nation's leading experts in reproductive medicine, Dr. Jamie Grifo of New York University, believes parents should be able to decide whether or not to have the procedure.

"Parents should certainly have a say in how they should be able to make decisions about how to conduct their reproductive lives, rather than

leaving it up to some regulator or legislator," he said.

The procedure, part of a technique called preimplantation genetic diagnosis is done after eggs and sperm are mixed in a lab dish.

Before the embryo is implanted in the womb, a cell is removed to allow doctors to examine it for a genetic defect. In the past, such an embryo would be discarded.

But now, if the embryo contains a gene for, say, dwarfism or deafness, it is implanted in the womb.

Grifo does not believe the practice is widespread. "I'm the expert, and I've never had anyone ask for me to do it," he said.

The phrase "designer disability" was coined after two deaf lesbian psychotherapists used sperm from a deaf family friend to have two deaf children.

Cara Reynolds of Collingswood, N.J., considered having the procedure so she could have a dwarf baby.

In part, she felt she ought to be able to decide



### SHORT ORDER:

Gibson and Cara Reynolds, of New Jersey, had wanted to undergo embryo screening to have a dwarf baby.

whether she could have a child that looks like her and her husband, Gibson, also a dwarf.

"You cannot tell me that I cannot have a child who's going to look like me. It's just unbelievably presumptuous, and they're playing

God," she said.

But her decision was also based on the fact that the couple's newborn daughter died last year from a dwarfism-related disease called homozygous achondroplasia.

Dwarf couples have a 25 percent chance of having babies afflicted with the lethal condition.

"I'm looking to avoid a fatal condition in my next child," she said. "This is

not a light decision. My child died in my husband's arms, and I don't want that to happen again."

But Reynolds ultimately decided against the procedure because her insurance didn't cover it and her age, 39, limited her chances for success. She now plans to adopt a dwarf baby.

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