

Title: Is it ever morally permissible to select for deafness in one's child?

Abstract: [word count: 400]

As reproductive genetic technologies advance, families have more options to choose what sort of child they want to have. Using preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), for example, allows parents to evaluate several existing embryos before selecting which to implant via IVF. One of the traits PGD can identify is genetic deafness, and hearing embryos are now preferentially selected around the globe using this method. Importantly, some Deaf families desire a deaf child, and PGD-IVF is also an option for them.

Selection for genetic deafness, however, encounters widespread disapproval in the hearing community, including mainstream philosophy and bioethics. In this paper I first address the proposed moral harm(s) of selecting for deafness, which I collect into three main categories: (1) harming the child, (2) restricting the child's future life plans, and (3) introducing a harmful state of affairs. All the supposed moral harms of selecting for deafness, I attempt to show, in some way rely on assumptions about the inherent "badness" of being deaf (or its consequences). The source of these assumptions is often a medicalized model of disability (and deafness) as bad-difference, as a condition that makes an overall negative impact on one's well-being. To evaluate the moral permissibility of selecting for deafness, we must therefore discern the relevant impact of deafness on a future child's overall well-being. To avoid begging the question in this case, I propose we challenge the bad-difference view of disability.

Towards this goal, I next apply Elizabeth Barnes' (2009, 2016) value-neutral model of disability as mere-difference to the case of selecting for deafness. Under this model, to be deaf is to have a "minority body," and deafness is neutral with respect to overall well-being. Testimonies of disabled people are vital for dismantling societal stigma about disability; in bad-difference views such testimonies are too often subject to epistemic injustice. I draw on evidence from Deaf Studies and Disability Studies to build a better understanding of deafness, the Deaf community, and the circumstances relevant to reproductive selection that may obtain for some Deaf families. Selection for deafness, understood as biological mere-difference and valued for its cultural identity, need not necessitate any impermissible moral harms. I thus advocate that it is sometimes morally permissible to select for deafness in one's child.

Barnes, E. (2009). Disability, minority, and difference. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 26(4), 337-355.

Barnes, E. (2016). *The minority body: A theory of disability*. Oxford University Press.

Keywords: deafness, PGD, Elizabeth Barnes, value-neutral model of disability

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Author short biography: Jacqueline Mae Wallis is an MA student in Philosophy at the University of Bristol. Her research primarily engages with philosophy of the life sciences, and she has further interests in social justice and ethics. Previously, she worked as a biology research technician at the Fred Hutch Cancer Research Center in Seattle, WA, USA, where she was also an advocate for underrepresented and self-identified minority scientists at the center.