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[Controversial “designer baby” patent granted](#)

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The controversial nature of a patent granted to the Direct-to-Consumer Genetics company, 23andMe, that lays claim to a broad method for allowing parents to select for specific traits in their offspring—such as lack of specific genetic diseases or eye color—is discussed in a Commentary published this week in *Genetics in Medicine*. The authors suggest that public trust is central to the continuing success of human genetics research, and urge all those engaged in human genetics research to be as transparent as possible about research goals and patenting activity.

The method described in the patent, issued by the United States Patent Office on 24 September 2013, is based on a computerized comparison of the genotypic data from the egg and sperm providers. The method does not guarantee that the desired traits will be present in the child, rather it selects for an egg and sperm pairing that increases the likelihood of those selected traits being present as compared to other possibilities. The characteristics that prospective parents could choose from include both disease-related traits and non-disease related traits (including eye color, personality characteristics, and athleticism).

Sigrid Sterckx and colleagues argue that a computerized process for selecting a specific egg and sperm pair to achieve a baby with a “phenotype of interest” has broad implications, and should have been given more serious consideration by the US Patent and Trademark Office and 23andMe. The authors suggest that the implications of this patent were not fully considered during the approval process, and that the Patent Office Examiner did not appear to question whether this technique was appropriate subject matter for a patent.

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