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## Sharon duchesneau and candy mccullough

Monday, 8 April, 2002, 10:11 GMT 11:11 UK Couple 'choose' to have a deaf child The couple already had one deaf child a lesbian couple in the US have sparked strong criticism for deliberately choosing to have a deaf child. Sharon Duchesneau and Candy McCullough, who have both been deaf since birth, have been rejected by a number of sperm banks that have reached out to looking for donors suffering from congenital deafness. The couple, who had been together for eight years, then approached a family friend who was completely deaf, and had five generations of deafness in his family. He donated sperm that was used to impregnate Sharon Duchesneau. Baby Gauvin McCullough is now four-months-old, and has a slight amount of hearing in one ear. The couple said it will allow him to decide when he is older if he wants to wear a hearing aid. The man has already donated sperm to his five-year-old daughter Johanna, who is profoundly deaf and can only communicate through sign language. Bonding women, both in their 30s, are part of a growing movement in the U.S. that sees deafness as a cultural identity, not as a disability. Many are opposed to the operation to correct deafness. While she was pregnant, Ms Duchesneau said, it would be nice to have a deaf child who is the same as us. I think it would be a great experience. You know, if we can have that chance, why don't we take her? To hear a child would be a blessing. A deaf child would be a special blessing. The women, from Bethesda, Maryland, are both mental health therapists and Deaf therapists. They told The Washington Post they believed they would better parent on a deaf child because it would be better to lead them. They say their choice is no different from choosing what gender a child would be. Mrs McCullough added: 'Some people look at it as 'Oh my god, you shouldn't have a child who has a disability'. But, you know, black people have harder lives. Why shouldn't people be able to go ahead and choose a black donor if that's what they want? They should be able to do that. They may feel connected to this culture, still associated with this culture. Responding Stephen Rooney, spokesman for the British Deaf Association, told BBC News Online: The real issue is not whether people are trying to propose to deaf children, but how society currently denies Deaf children to have the same rights, obligations, opportunities and quality of life as everyone. However, the pair's decision drew sharp criticism. Peter Garrett, director of research for LIFE, told BBC News Online: This is another example of reproductive technology running riot. Preparing the child of the faculty of natural is unethical behavior. He said the principle could be extended to deliberately having a child who was blind or dwarf. We say no to cancel the choice of child because he is deaf and not deliberately chose to have a deaf child. But Dr. Nicholson, editor of the Bulletin of Medical Ethics, said: 'This is an inevitable outcome of the decision that we allow people to have a choice as to what kind of child they are going to produce. Dr Vivienne Nathanson, head of science and ethics at the British Medical Association, said: There are two sides. In general, it's a good or bad thing.??? I think most people would say it was a bad thing. But in this individual case, I think it's on the verge of concern for 'slippery slope' designer kids. Nancy Rarus, a member of staff at the U.S. National Association for the Deaf said, I can't understand why anyone would want to have a disabled child in the world. deafnessincomprehensionIncome lesbian couple in the U.S. deliberately tried to create a deaf child. Sharon Duchesneau and Candy McCullough hoped their baby, conceived with the help of a sperm donor, would be deaf like the rest of the family. Their daughter, five-year-old Jehanne, is also deaf and was conceived with the same donor. News of a couple who choose to have a deaf child has only been revealed with the birth of their son Gauvin.1-4To increase their chance of a deaf child a woman was looking for a Deaf sperm donor from a sperm bank, but I was told that congenital deafness is exactly the kind of condition that disqualifies would-be donors. Instead of rejecting the idea that they found their own sperm donor by asking a deaf friend who comes from a family with five generations of deafness.1A woman, both mental health experts, insist they would still love their child if it were heard: Hearing a child would be a blessing. A deaf child would be a special blessing.1 Like many others in the Deaf community, the couple doesn't look deaf as a disability. Deafness is seen as a cultural identity and a sophisticated sign language that allows them to fully communicate with other signatories as a defining and unifying feature of their culture.1Thin women are born deaf and want their children to share their culture. Each of them suffered from being raised to work primarily in the listening world. Ms Duchesneau experienced numbing isolation at school without being in favour of sign language or exposure to other deaf people. She grew up feeling like she was flawed. Ms McCullough, a child of deaf parents, was raised using sign language and attended a high school hearing with an interpreter. She also suffered isolation: No teenage conversation can survive the intrusion of a third-party interpretation.1A woman later attended Gallaudet, the world's only liberal arts university for the deaf. Gallaudet also cultivates live deaf intelligence. Ms. Duchesneau took a sign lesson and describes her time at university and becoming part of the Deaf community as the best time. . . . People understood me. I didn't have to. Itself. . . . It was a positive thing to be deaf at Gallaudet.1 A deaf lesbian couple who was looking for a sperm donor with a family history of deafness to make a child hoping to be deaf attracted a lot of criticism. They have been criticised for deliberately creating a deaf child, denying hearing aids to their child and raising a child in a gay household. In an effort to have a deaf child, women see themselves as no different from parents trying to have a girl. Girls can be discriminated against just as much as deaf people and black people have harder lives, claims one of them. Compared to a minority group.1 At four months of age, hearing tests confirm that Gauvin is quite deaf, though not as profoundly deaf as his sister. It appears that Gauvin's right ear has some hearing loss and a hearing aid is suggested. The doctor says that if they want to take advantage, they should do it now: Right now it's an ear that could be helped to give him a head start on spoken English. Most parents would try a hearing aid in the hope that the child might hear something or that it would help with lip reading, but Gauvin's parents will allow him to have one at the moment. They say that if he wants a hearing aid later, they let him have one.1 There was some compassion and support for women's decision to raise a deaf child. Brian Rope, head of the Deafness Forum Australia said: I understand where they come from. . . . A lot of deaf parents would like to have a deaf child, but most of them will take what they get. 2 Zina Emmerson, who, like her husband and three of her four children, is profoundly deaf, said: 'For me, I would leave it so naturally. I was happy either way (with my kids). As long as they were healthy. But I understand why they did it. It's so easy to communicate with your own children in your language.5Mwise though, the lesbian couple's actions have attracted criticism. I can't understand why anyone would want to have a disabled child in the world6 said Nancy Rarus, of the National Association of the Deaf. Deaf people don't have as many options, he says.1Ken Connor, president of the Family Research Council, a profamily organization, also criticizes a deliberate attempt to create a deaf child. Deliberately giving a child a disability, in addition to all the disadvantages that come as a result of being raised in a gay household, is incredibly selfish, he argues.4Page 2 A personal note to a deaf, lesbian couple who deliberately conceived a deaf son so they could have a child just like us: Are you crazy or what? I shouldn't talk like this at this age of sensitivity, but my numbness doesn't match the unwavering ruthlessness of this couple. Someone has to tell Sharon Duchesneau and Candy Think about what you are doing to a life that is not yours. Think about the consequences when you say that it is no different from the parents choosing the sex of the child. Who am I to give a speech? Half-deaf old man, that's who. Someone whose left ear is nothing more than an ornament, made by an operation that went awry. And someone who wonders about the rest of the hearing then in the right ear has dropped by a quarter. It's not like my left ear is completely silent - there's that constant ringing, just like the noise the plane's jet engine makes while taxiing. No, it's not as bad as complete deafness; I can do interviews, a Mozart concert, my granddaughter's laughter and other blessings using a hearing aid, provided I'm in the right place. It's hard in restaurants and parties. In British films like Gosford Park, in which all the actors say: Fum, fmmm, fum, forget it. I will make the most of it, because today's victimization of dicta requires you to stand before you can criticize. Of course, that's nonsense. You should not be deaf or have significant hearing damage handed down by the judgment of the shocking cruelty of this couple. Anyone who does lick common sense has to say the obvious: Choosing to have a deaf child is a shameful abuse. When you do this to a child, you have to hear the truth. To lose your hearing is to lose a precious gift. The politically correct cant that bubbles up from the Deaf - spelled with the capital D-- the community says otherwise. Yes, deaf can lead enriched lives and the deaf are most welcome to act as if deafness is a blessing. But deafness is not an option that a parent has the right to make for a child. No more than I would have the right to choose, if possible, my hearing condition for my child, based on the incorrect assumption that it would tighten and solidify my spine for life's difficulties. No more blind people have the right to incite blindness on their children. Or paralyzing. Or a dwarf. Or any of the endless list of other challenges that diminish god-given right of each person to realize their full potential. If Duchesneau and McCullough are good at brainwashing this child, they're likely to express gratitude for the decision they made for him. But he will never be able to deny the terrible truth that they chose him-- for their own satisfaction. Just as McCullough happily wrote in the children's book of her first deaf child, a girl named Jehanne: The first auditory test... no answer to 95 decibels - deaf! Things aren't so certain for a new baby boy, Gauvin. Now four months old, a moderate amount of hearing has been detected in one ear. Too bad, I'm sure, because now a couple may have to decide whether they need to give Gauvin some help, such as hearing aids. They have faced that prospect, according to March 31 Story. Do you think the child can hear that? Candy asked Sharon shortly after his birth. He says, I don't know. I can say that I hope the child is deaf, but to say that I felt he was deaf, no. Candy: I just thought the baby was deaf. I say, as if the child is deaf. If the child hears it, I'll be shocked. Sharon: You should be ready. I was preparing with Jehanne. It could happen. Hearing a child would force us to get out there and find out what's out there for hearing the kids. Maybe that would be nice. Candy looks at her, stunned, the Post story said. It's not that it's my preference, says Sharon. But I'm trying to think of something positive. So am I. But there is nothing positive about such selfishness. -----E-mail: dbyrne@interaccess.com dbyrne@interaccess.com

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