
**A Review of Jennifer Lahl, *Eggsploitation* (DVD)
The Center for Bioethics and Culture, 2013.**

David Schrock

Associate Editor

Journal for Biblical Manhood & Womanhood

Senior Pastor

Calvary Baptist Church

Seymour, Indiana

Over the last few years, The Center for Bioethics and Culture (CBC) has released a trio of vitally important documentary videos addressing egg donation, surrogate pregnancy, and sperm donation. *Eggsploitation* was the first of those videos. It won the Best Documentary award at the 2011 California Independent Film Festival, and it is a video that Christians should watch in order to know about the risks involved in egg donation.

Summary

Jennifer Lahl, President of the CBC, begins the documentary with these stark words:

Young women around the world are solicited by a largely unregulated global, multi-billion dollar industry to help people have babies. What is this industry after? Their fertility. Their good genes. Their eggs.

In the forty-minute video, Lahl narrates the history of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) and the way it has negatively impacted many women. In the video, the process of egg donation is explained with the successive steps of stopping the woman's natural cycle, restarting her cycle to synchronize with the recipient's cycle, super-ovulating the ovaries (such that a woman might produce anywhere between thirty and sixty eggs in one cycle, instead of one or two), releasing the eggs by means of a hormonal injection, and extracting the eggs by means of a surgical procedure with general anesthesia.

Throughout this information, viewers are given a variety of statistics. For instance, the first

“test tube baby,” Louise Brown, was born on July 25, 1978. The IVF industry took off in the 1980s and by 2010, 100,000 IVF cycles were performed with non-donors. Since less than twenty percent result in the birth of a baby, donors (like the women interviewed by Lahl) are solicited, because donor eggs improve the odds a child will result. They accounted for 17,000 cycles in 2010.

Of these collected eggs, many of them fail to be fertilized. These numbers show the number of women affected, but it is the dollar figures that show how powerful this medical industry is. Each year, the industry in the United States alone makes over 6.5 billion dollars.

Lahl stresses that this economic consideration is one of the two greatest ethical concerns about the practice of donating eggs. By treating eggs as dollar figures, women are commodified. They are being exploited by means of financial inducement to risk their health, fertility, and even their lives. Advertised as a way to help another woman have a baby, young women—typically college-educated with good health and good genes—are offered tens of thousands of dollars to donate their eggs. With the medical complications that women have faced in egg donation, this monetary sum invites them to endanger themselves in order to gain a financial reward.

This leads to the second concern. To date, no medical research has been published in a peer-reviewed journal on the long-term effects of egg donation. Therefore, women considering egg donation cannot be given enough information about the potential problems that egg donors may face.

While some state legislators have inquired into the medical practices regarding egg donation, other states (like New York) use tax-payer dollars to fund compensation for egg donors to donate their eggs for scientific research like embryonic stem cell research and human cloning.

For these ethical and legal reasons, Jennifer Lahl and the CBC produced *Eggsploitation* in 2011 with updates in 2013. In the title, they have coined a neologism to expose the way vendors inviting women to sell their eggs aim to “plunder, pillage, rob, despoil, fleece, and strip ruthlessly a young woman of her eggs, by means of fraud, coercion, or deception, to be used selfishly for another’s gain, with a total lack of regard for the well-being of the donor.”

It could be argued that the choice of language in this definition is a bit over the top, but not when the stories of the women are told. In all, six women were interviewed—two of whom suffered a stroke as a result of super-ovulation, two experienced OHSS (ovarian hyper-stimulation syndrome), one lost an ovary, and one nearly bled to death. In each case, the women recounted their traumatic experience with egg donation, and the physical effects that came later. After hearing the stories of their suffering, it is most difficult not to conclude that research and regulations on this industry are needed.

Evaluation

In its effort to engender support against the widespread use of egg donors, *Eggsploitation* hits its mark. The medical testimony and the personal stories from the women in the video will make any young woman think twice before considering this practice. However, for Christians our primary concern cannot be limited to legislation. For those who hold a Christian worldview about procreation, we must understand that “eggsploitation” is another example of sin compounding the effects of the fall.

In Genesis 3, God said to the woman, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.” Tragically, one of the most painful manifestations of that curse is infertility, what the Bible calls barrenness. Count-

less are the tears of women who have been unable to have children.

In ancient times, women literally hired out slaves in order to have offspring. This is what Sarai did with Hagar (Genesis 16). Hagar’s womb was put into service for the sake of Sarai and Abram. The immediate effect of this action brought resentment, heartache, and pain into Abram’s home. In the long run, it created competition between Abram’s children. One kind of suffering brought on another.

Today, egg donation also brings further suffering. In response to the hardship of barrenness, modern-day Hagars are invited to use their wombs to furnish the eggs necessary for creating a new life. However, the effects are not nearly as sanguine as the solicitations suggest. The women who sell their eggs are put in great jeopardy, without the guarantee that the collection or fertilization of the egg will produce life. Sometimes it does, but in many other cases it does not. All in all, the whole system preys on one class of women (typically young and financially at risk) in order to serve another class of women (those looking for donor eggs with good genes).

Though the modern procedures are far removed from the days of Genesis, the impulses that lead women to look for modern-day Hagars are not. They remind us that the creation of life, like every other aspect of life, is under threat from the evil one. And that in this case, as is evidenced through this documentary, the serpent is preying on young, vulnerable women. It is a reminder that the image of God is still under threat from the seed of the serpent, and that Christians have an obligation to cherish and protect women.

Conclusion

In the end, this is a video that every young woman should see. But it is not just for young women. Pastors, youth leaders, college ministers, and women’s ministry directors should be aware of this video and the industry that it describes. Those in Christian ministry, especially around college campuses, need to be aware of the way that the world is preying on women. Men need to watch this video, because we need to protect our sisters

and our daughters, so that one day they might be able to be mothers in their own right. And Christians who are thinking about using donated eggs, must know the fraudulent and dangerous ways that women are being exploited in order to harvest their eggs.

In the end, *Eggsploitation* is a must-see documentary. It succinctly explains a medical procedure that is available to anyone today, but one that many do not know about. It should give us pause to think about what is for sale, and what isn't. Children are a precious gift from God, but indeed they are a gift, not a commodity that we can ethically create by means of tempting women to endanger themselves to produce offspring for someone else.