Introduction

- About 10% of couples in the United States have experienced some form of infertility. For many, discovering that they have fertility problems can be an emotionally devastating experience.¹
- Before the development of in vitro fertilization, infertility was incredibly difficult to treat. With the successful development by Sir Robert Edwards, a world of opportunity was created for these people.

“The most important thing in life is having a child. Nothing is more special than a child.”
- Sir Robert Edwards

In Vitro Fertilization

- In vitro fertilization (IVF) is the practice of joining sperm with egg outside the body, in a laboratory setting.²
- Previously to Edwards starting his research, other scientists had determined that “test tube” fertilization was possible with the egg and sperm of rabbits.³
- Together, Robert Edwards and his colleague, gynecologist Patrick Steptoe, were able to turn IVF from experimental procedure to practical medicine, in turn helping millions of couples have their own biological children.⁴

Controversy

- Robert Edwards has oft been described as a selfless man who simply wanted to help couples with fertility issues. In fact, his former research partner was quoted saying “Dr. Edwards’s motivation…was not fame or fortune but rather helping infertile women.”⁵
- Unfortunately, Edwards’ motives may not have been this altruistic. Edwards was a longstanding member of the Eugenics Society in Britain, consistently holding leadership roles until at least 1997.
- IVF itself is not a procedure that ascribes to eugenics. However, manipulation of human conception outside of the womb is an essential tool for modern eugenicist goals.
- Edwards acknowledged this in 1999 when he said, “Soon it will be a sin of parents to have a child that carries the heavy burden of genetic disease. We are entering a world where we have to consider the quality of our children.”⁹

Louise Brown

- On July 25th, 1978, Louise Joy Brown, the first “test tube baby” was born. Her mother, suffering from years of infertility due to blocked fallopian tubes,⁶
- Brown’s birth was a media phenomenon, a medical miracle spanning worldwide excitement and raising ethical debates.

Conclusion

- The development of in vitro fertilization has led to the birth of millions of children to families who otherwise would have been unable to produce biologic children of their own. It provides the ability for not only men and women with fertility to have children, but also single mothers and fathers, as well LGBT+ couples.
- With the use of CRISPR technology, IVF can be used to possibly correct for genetic disorders, as with the removal of HIV in recent Chinese twins.
- Currently, we do not possess the knowledge to complete any meaningful genetic engineering. However, as knowledge continues to gather, more regulations may need to be considered in light of possible ethical complications.

References