THE CLOCK IS TICKING


Jenna Healey
Yale University

Infertility in History, Science, and Culture
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University of Edinburgh
"...the generation that managed to gleefully separate sex and procreation finds to its sorrow that the two cannot always be reunited."

"Baby Fever", LIFE Magazine, June 1987
AN EPIDEMIC OF INFERTILITY?

- Claims that the incidence of infertility had increased dramatically since the 1950s
- Estimates that 1 in 5 married couples, or 10 million Americans, were now infertile
WHY DID INFERTILITY APPEAR TO BE INCREASING?

• Size of the baby boom cohort: a higher absolute number of infertile people (while the proportion remained the same)

• Higher visibility of infertility and reproductive technologies in the media

• Larger proportion of patients seeking out treatment for infertility
Turning maybe's into babies.

Infertility has become a national epidemic. For over 20% of all couples, having children is an "iffy" proposition.

But today, new advances in microsurgery, fertility research, embryo transplants and surrogate mothering are giving hope to thousands of childless couples.

This week, in a special 3-part report, Health Editor Steve Gendel takes a close look at the latest scientific miracle - childbirth.

BEGINNS TONIGHT AT 6:00

We still treat news as if it matters.
OUTLINE

I. A Brief History of Infertility Epidemics
II. Age of Infertility
III. The Biological Clock
A BRIEF HISTORY OF INFERTILITY EPIDEMICS
EDUCATION AND STERILITY

Edward H. Clarke, 
Sex in Education 
1873
RACE SUICIDE

A DISTURBING POSSIBILITY

STORK: "Well, if folks prefer Teddy Bears I s'pose I'll have to meet the demand"

(July 9, 1907)

President
Theodore Roosevelt
POSTWAR BABY BUST?

“Nature has all too often become tired of being turned away, and the Gate of Life is closed.”

Thurman B. Rice, Modern Home Medical Adviser, 1944
EN D O M E T R I O S I S

Dr. Joseph V. Meigs

Have Children Before 26 to Beat Sterility, Says Harvard Doctor

Boston Globe, October 21 1948

"...a social phenomenon foreshadowing the decline in our civilization."
now
doctors
know
why
she
can't
have
children
THE AGE OF INFERTILITY
Anguished Search to Cure Infertility

Medical advances offer new hope, but infertility afflicts more couples than ever.

By Bone Kleiman

They arrive one by one at the back door, making through the night, afraid to be recognized by the neighbors. A woman answers and they enter, awkwardly taking their places on the brown couch, cradling their overcoats to their laps like armor. One lights a cigarette. Another twists the end of her hair.

These are not women in whose laps men come easily. There is a feeling they have learned to keep to themselves. But here they are: strangers to each other, they have come to this home on Great Neck, L.I., to share their most personal anguish, an urgency they have disclosed to few. Their need to speak is inarticulate.

"It's the idea that you don't have the option," a woman in a respirator says. "It hurts me.

"It's that feeling of helplessness. I chose my husband. I chose where I went to live. But now I can't choose. I'm not control.

"The feeling of paralysis," the woman with the cigarette says, "it terrible. I can't go on with my life because it's my heart of hopes. I think it will happen. I really do. I think if I just wait a little longer, the whole thing will blow away."

These women in their 30's alternate between nervous laughter and tears. Panning toward a box of Kleenex, they speak of guilt, failure, disgrace of illness, they speak of guilt, failure and failure. They they cried. They question their femininity and recover the expressions of their future. These women are incapable of having children.

While most of the world worries about preventing unwanted births, millions of other people are struggling with the opposite problem: bearing the children they want. In this country alone, an estimated 10 million married men and women between the ages of 15 and 45 experience difficulty either in conceiving a child or in carrying a pregnancy to term — a number that experts say is growing.

Although there have always been couples unable to have children, today's life styles and mood have aggravated infertility in new proportions. The tendency for women to postpone childbearing into their 30's, when fertility generally decreases, the epidemic rise in so-called disease, as well as — ironically — current methods of birth control have all contributed to a sharp rise in infertility. These decades ago, one out of 10 couples was believed to have difficulties bearing children, today, experts estimate, that figure is one out of six — an increase that reflects not only increased physiological problems but also the greater willingness of infertile couples to seek medical help.

"Infertility is a problem of modern society," says Dr. Alan P. Goldfarb, a (Continued on Page 5).

Bone Kleiman is a reporter for The New York Times.
THE TRENDS OF DELAYED CHILD BIRTH
FEMALE FECUNDITY AS A FUNCTION OF AGE

Results of Artificial Insemination in 2193 Nulliparous Women with Azoospermic Husbands

Fédération CECOS,* D. Schwartz, Ph.D., and M. J. Mayaux, B.A.

THE decrease in the fecundity of women who have passed a certain age is generally acknowledged, but supporting data on natural reproduction are scarce. (We use the term “fecundity” in the sense of “capacity for procreation”; “fertility” denotes actual

INFERTILITY AND AGE

Infertility: The Risk Increases With Age

BYE-BYE, MS. AMERICAN PIE
Panic is sweeping a generation of women getting too old to have children
BY CHRISTINE MOORE

The fertility myth: Conception not as easy as most think
CAUTION

YOU ARE NOW ENTERING THE AGE OF INFERTILITY

Right now, you're not interested in having a baby; you've got all you can do to establish a career and develop a lasting relationship with one man. But if you're like most young women, you assume you will be able to conceive a child when you want to. That is no longer a safe assumption to make.

An estimated ten million people in the United States are now infertile—meaning, according to the definition doctors use, that they have tried unsuccessfully for a year or more to conceive a child. Visits to fertility experts have doubled.

By Laura Flynn McCarthy
PROFILING OLDER COUPLES

In Pursuit of Pregnancy

By Joan Liehmanna-Smith

These three:

• Roy Cooper, a 41-year-old cinematographer and his wife, Mai Li, 31, a sportswear buyer
• Anthony Spanelli, 39, a computer programmer and his wife, Sue, 39, a psychologist
• Eric Feldman, 36, an orthopedic surgeon, and his 31-year-old wife, Lisa, a secretary
VD AND INFERTILITY

• Large increases in infertility among 20 to 24 year olds

Disease control experts warn of VD-linked sterility epidemic

Sexually transmitted ills raise risk of female sterility

VD causing infertility among women
THE BIOLOGICAL CLOCK
A generation of women "up against the clock..."
THE EVOLUTION OF A METAPHOR

Late 1970 to Early 1980s
- The decision whether to have a child or remain childless
- The risk of childbearing after 35

Late 1980s
- Planning for pregnancy before time ran out
- The risk of unanticipated age related infertility
THE PREVENTION OF INFERTILITY

A REPORT ON A PROPOSED METHOD TO PREVENT INFERTILITY:
SELF-IDENTIFICATION OF RISK FOR INFERTILITY

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SAFEGUARDING FUTURE FERTILITY

"To some extent, induction of anxiety cannot be avoided and can be helpful in the sense that anxiety becomes the force that moves people to follow through with their suggested behavior regarding their fertility."
Advancing age decreases your ability to have children.

While women and their partners must be the ones to decide the best time when (and if) to have children, women in their twenties and early thirties are most likely to conceive. Infertility is a disease affecting 6.1 million people in the United States.
CONCLUSION
Research Refutes Perceived ‘Infertility Epidemic’

Study Suggests Social, Not Physical Causes Are Affecting Women’s Ability to Have Children

Los Angeles Times

Despite a widespread perception that infertility is rapidly increasing in the United States, the rate actually has remained stable in recent years and among married couples has declined, government researchers reported yesterday.

In 1988, 4.9 million American women between the ages of 15 and 44 had “an impaired ability” to have children, according to a study by the National Center for Health Statistics. That represents 8.4 percent of women in that age group—the same percentage as in 1982.

The mistaken perception that America is experiencing an “epidemic of infertility” could reflect demographic and social changes affecting some groups of women more than others, the study suggested.

For example, the number of childless women between the ages of 25 and 44 with impaired ability to ability to conceive and the ability to carry a pregnancy to term.

The study said that about 2.2 million women who had never had children had impaired fecundity in 1988, along with 2.7 million women who had given birth at least once. In 1982, the figures were 1.9 million and 2.6 million respectively, the study said.

Among married couples, the overall rate of infertility decreased from 11.2 percent in 1965 to 8.5 percent in 1982 and to 7.9 percent in 1988, the study said.

About 2.3 million married women between the ages of 15 and 44 were infertile in 1988, or slightly fewer than one in 12, the study said. These figures were not significantly different from the findings in 1982, the study said.

“The number of women suffering from infertility has increased, but the population base has also increased. The incidence of infertility has not,” said Joyce Zeitz, a spokeswoman for the American Fertility Society.

The study results were based on a series of surveys conducted periodically by the National Center for Health Statistics, a branch of the Department of Health and Human Services. The 1988 survey involved personal interviews with 8,450 women.

“In some popular descriptions of infertility, it has been suggested that there are nine or 10 million infertile couples, that one in six couples is infertile, that infertility is increasing rapidly, or that there is an ‘epidemic’ of infertility in the United States,” the report said. “The findings of this report indicate that these perceptions are inaccurate.”
THANK YOU

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• Yale University Program in the History of Science and Medicine

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