

The (grand)mother of all identity crises



ADAM GAUMONT

While debate has raged in the US of late regarding stem-cell research, a far more potent debate has taken form on the other side of the Pacific. It's recently been revealed that a Japanese woman in her 50s has given birth to her own grandchild sometime last year. That's right: not her child, her *grandchild*.

It seems that granny acted as a surrogate mother for her daughter, the genetic mother of the child. This case is likely to breed a lot of opposition in Japan, whose outdated birth laws are due for change. That's because in the eyes of the law in land of the rising sun, it's the birth mother—and not, in the case of discrepancy, the genetic egg-donor—that's considered the mother of the newborn son or daughter.

I, for one, cannot conceive of a more baffling conundrum for the Japanese government in this case, and can only hope that they don't harbour any resentment towards other nations who may attempt to implant their own scientists and researchers.

Had this taken place in neighbouring China's far more fertile grounds, this woman could perhaps be accused of trying to cheat that country's recently introduced rural birth control program, whereby parents over 60 who have only one child (or two girls) are to receive the equivalent of

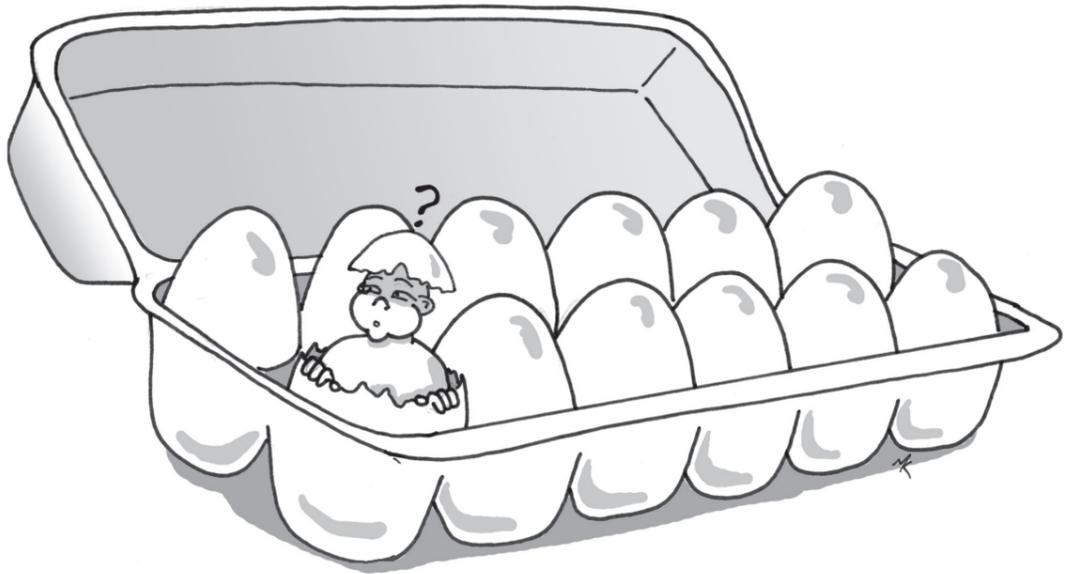
\$76CDN. However, Japan has no such laws limiting birth rates, leaving its infamously aged citizenry to serve as host bodies at will.

However, such cases aren't unheard of: a brief and undoubtedly reliable Google search reveals that similar news has been delivered from regions as diverse as Greece, South Africa and Texas—and, one may cautiously presume, rural Kentucky. Indeed, this phenomenon must simply be accepted as part and parcel to the marriage of modern technology and science.

Far more troubling in such cases is the identity crisis that these poor youngsters will undoubtedly face. For if such a baby is the grandmother's grandchild, then is it the grandmother's daughter as well? And if it's the mother's mother's child, then does that make it the mother's niece or nephew instead?

Things get a bit more confusing when one considers the child's next-of-kin. For instance, if its genetic mother had previously given birth to her own children, are the former the brothers and sisters of the child in question? Or, as his or her grandmother's grandkids, are they its cousins?

Another thing to consider is where dad and grandpa get left in all this. Clearly, the child's genetic father is its dad—but as its grandmother's son-in-law, is pops not its uncle-in-law too? But he can't be in-law, because he's the genetic sire, after all. And if grandma is the birth mother, then grandpa's husband makes grandpa papa too. Then again, perhaps it's as Grandpa Simpson so wisely said: "A little bit of column A and a little bit



MIKEKENDRICK

THE THEORY OF RELATIVITY? Not even Einstein's genius can help you when you end up as your own cousin.

of column B."

Finally, and most importantly, whom does the child call mother? Its birth mother, or genetic mother? Clearly, it can't call its genetic mother grandmother, but it can call its grandmother grandmother—and mother. Moreover, if its mother is its grandmother, then its grandmother's

daughter is its aunt, meaning it can call its genetic mother mother or aunt. That is, unless it has an existing aunt already—ie its genetic mother's sister, in which case mother will have to suffice. But then we're back to square one, where all this confusion stems from in the first place.

The crux of the matter, then, is that

surrogate motherhood is a breeding ground for identity crises such as these, and it's up to our governments to deliver us from such quagmires before they occur by providing us with the proper regulations, and censoring those who break them. If not, we'll all be left asking, "who's your mommy?"

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