

Should couples wanting a biologically-related child keep trying?

Abstract

When couples try over time again and again to have a first biologically-related child and they remain unsuccessful, this may be among the most painful ordeals a couple can experience. This paper will discuss some of the most important competing pros and cons that couples should consider when they face this question. If couples can perceive the pressures they may face, this may help them prepare for them. Some of these concerns may, however, lie outside these partners conscious awareness. This article will therefore highlight stresses especially likely to remain hidden. This discussion will include losses such as their going into debt, how loved ones may seek to persuade them to stop trying, and how they may themselves place too much decision-making weight on logic rather than their feelings. even seek to shame them to move them to do this. These partners may use their own mirroring logic to convince themselves that they have no choice but to go this same way. The possibilities that one or both partners' emotions after not trying may cloud their subsequent lives or prevent their relationship from recovering will, on the other hand, also be considered. The main point of this article is for such couples to if facing this decision, not underestimate its likely most serious possible ramifications that may go far beyond merely what they decide. This paper will also review key approaches that partners should consider if they decide not to try again or they try but then this last effort again fails.

Keywords: biologically-related child, couples, partners, debt, moral, feelings, retrospective, regret, meaning, grief, acceptance

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Should couples wanting a biologically-related child keep trying?

When couples try over time again and again to have a first biologically-related child and they remain unsuccessful, this may be among the most painful ordeals a couple can experience.^{1,2} They may have to undergo seemingly endless tests, for example, and may go into ever increasing debt.¹ These stresses may destroy such couples' relationships, though these may have been healthy and most fulfilling before this.

This paper will discuss, then, some of the most important competing considerations that couples should weigh each time they decide whether or not to keep trying to have a biologically-related child or even to try just one last time. I will do this in two sections. First, I will discuss three pressures that may make the decision to go ahead more difficult. Second, I will discuss some ways in which couples may be able to cope with these stresses. This decision is, of course, unique, and it is one that poses different considerations each time they confront it. Every time they revisit this question, for instance, each partner is older. Thus, the risks to their wanted child may be progressively increased.^{3,4} This decision always, then, is in this regard new and one that they have never confronted exactly before.

If couples can perceive the pressures they face, this may help them to prepare for them and later deal with them. Some of these extra obstacles may, however, lie outside their conscious awareness. In this article, I will attempt therefore to highlight especially hidden stresses that may most interfere with these couples making the best choice as to whether they should continue or give up trying that they can.

Three pressures that may make the decision to go ahead more difficult

Relatives and close friends

If efforts to have a biologically-related child have continued to fail and relatives and close friends know that these loved ones want to keep trying, these other parties may have a strong view that this couple should stop then and share this with them. These parties also may feel driven to express their view adamantly, because they feel these loved one's pain. These parties may make several arguments to support this. Each may have a sound basis, still stronger when they all are taken together. Three arguments may be particularly difficult to resist and refute. The first involves money; the others, morality. One takes on the couple's moral judgement if they will try one more time. The second involves each of these partner's moral character.

Let us consider each of these now in turn. These efforts to have a biologically-related child may be expensive, even with insurance. Thus, if a couple is not wealthy and especially if they are going into debt, the above parties may increase their efforts to persuade these couples to stop trying. These parties' expressing this opinion may increase if and as this couple's debt continues to increase.

These parties may then add to this, layers of moral guilt. They may initially share a rationale commonly voiced by others.⁵ These parties may "You know, you can always adopt. Children now not with their parents need you, and you, in turn, can be just as happy with a child you adopt as with a child biologically-related to you."

These parties may, then, go beyond this and at least imply that the moral character of one or both partners is not what it should be

if they will not stop and adopt. These parties may suggest that this couple's not choosing to adopt at this time is biased against children who through no fault of their own have no parents or parents able to care for them.⁶ These parties may even then shame these couples further by adding to this that they think that they are going to try again because they are narcissistic, wanting so much their child to have their same genes.

Partners' seeking to help each other

Relatives and close friends aren't, of course, the only persons that may feel these partners' pain. Each partner will feel the pain of the other, and as the couple continue to not have a successful pregnancy, one partner, likely, will want to keep going more than the other. This may cause a difficult split. The input of relatives and close friends just considered may then increase this split and the disharmony this splitting brings about.⁷

If this occurs, both partners may seek to retain their own emotional tranquility and want in addition to support their partner and help them too to relieve their increasing stress. Their foremost challenge both as a couple and individually may be to recognize the above input from others for what it is and, more importantly, for what it is not. It is in this regard an effort of these others to care. It is not, however, necessarily a best guide as to what they should do. Only this couple know themselves best. It is only they who can best make this decision, and, as it is, it is rife with uncertainty.⁸

Means of resolving new disputes as they arise have been developed. These include, for example, looking at conflicts from all possible perspectives, seeing deeper values underlying what they want and wants beneath desired actions, and exploring how their emotions may be coloring this decision.⁹⁻¹¹ As they discuss their disagreements together, which hopefully they will do frequently, there are new risks to their relationship that may arise. When discussing the weight due different relatives' views, for example, partners may disparage a relative in an effort to place this relative's views into a more limited perspective. To the partner who is related, this may chafe. This partner may register that what the other has said is on target but resent their partner's saying this against their relative none-the-less.

This is, however, only a first example of how these couples' relationship may become newly conflicted. Risks exist in even their best-intentioned efforts to help each other. Here, two examples will hopefully sufficiently convey the nature of these risks so that partners can anticipate them better in advance and avoid them.

Partners may not share their differing views to avoid conflict. Unfortunately, this well-intentioned effort may make matters worse.² This effort may backfire because these partners are denying their own wants and these may be more critical and heartfelt to them than they recognize. Having not shared them, these unmet wants may resurface in any number of ways later. These ways may be outside these partners' awareness. They may, for instance, unknowingly distance themselves from their partner. This distancing may further lead to resentment, and arguments they find themselves having in response to what they believe is something else may in fact be due to partners having wants that they have failed to share. If, however, neither partner can see this, they cannot together or individually seek a better resolution.¹²

A second risk is one partner's seeking to meet the needs of the other by being overly protective. This may cause harm to the relationship because the protected partner may feel degraded by their partner's having underestimated them.² These protected partners may feel quite able to protect themselves, but feel demeaned by their partner's

not knowing or believing this, but, rather, believing that they are less competent than they are. Thus, these partners' well-intentioned endeavors to help their partners in this way may backfire.

Finally, here, how each partner seeks to resolve their and their partner's unmet needs and wants may differ.⁷ They may, for example, have different presuppositions regarding the tasks they should first pursue and give priority when a problem arises. Examples that illustrate this difference are understanding, on one hand, and acting to resolve problems, on the other. There are stereotyped views here regarding how women and men tend to differ in regard to these preferred ways of responding. Women, it is said, want more to be understood and to talk, men, to remain more silent. Whether or not this stereotype is at all true, the partner wanting more to speak may feel abandoned and enraged that the other, at this time, isn't amply there for them.

The couple may, as a more specific example, choose to go away for a brief holiday-like trip to enjoy rest and respite together, and this may have worked to benefit them both in this way in the past. They may find at this time then, however, to their dismay and surprise, that this experience together, as opposed to being how it has been, is fraught with anger. Let us suppose, for example, using for this purpose the above stereotype, that the man here is mostly silent, obsessed with concerns regaining their pending birthing decision and unstoppable, intrusive, anticipatory grief as he imagines that this may again fail. She, let us say, wanting to talk as she fears and grieves, finds his response and him unbearably distant and unresponsive. She sees this as his not caring, though he, for the first time in his life, is preoccupied by an uncertainty that he can't resolve. She may infer further from this that he perhaps hasn't cared all along but that she has somehow just missed this. This conclusion is, of course, dire for the prospects of their ongoing relationship.

Neither is then amply in touch here with what is really going on, as underneath what they feel, both are fretting over what they should decide. Not knowing this, they are unable to express, share, and try to resolve this dilemma together. Behavioral researchers have sought, therefore, to find ways for couples encountering this particular problem and others like it to know better ways of avoiding and resolving this kind of conflict when this occurs.^{13,14} One example is how frequently each partner uses the word, "we", as opposed to the word, "I", when either is referring to a need that involves both of them.² Notwithstanding these sources of help, the turmoil and heartbreak couples may experience if they fail to conceive a biologically-related child may be tragic. This outcome may undermine their capacity to, even with their best efforts, continue to enjoy living with each other. They may experience what some partners have reported after they have had a child die.¹⁵ The mere presence of their partner may remind them of the child they have lost.¹⁶ This feeling may supersede all others.

Their resorting to logic alone

Since centuries ago, we have thought that we can best benefit ourselves by using reason to best decide what choices we should make. We more recently have found out, however, that our use of reasoning may not always be as certain to provide us best answers as to what we should do as we have believed. Our using our reasoning is no doubt still the best means of checking out what we are choosing to do. This may stop us from being, for example, overly impulsive. Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky have, however, for some time now alerted us to how our reasoning may lead us astray and actually add to our making decisions we see as wrong without our having any

awareness of this.¹⁷ They differentiated faster and slower responses we may have that work in the following way: Our fastest response to an event involves our immediately jumping to a felt conclusion. This occurs automatically and rapidly. We then use another part of our brain to reason, though we already know what we instantaneously came to believe.

The problem here is that the reasons we come up with may be skewed, and skewed without our knowing this. They are likely to disproportionately support what we already feel and not identify reasons, equally valid, that oppose this. Thus, returning to the problem considered before, as our fear of ever losing more and more money as we seek more to be able to have a biologically-related child, the logic that supports our not going into greater debt may loom and increase. Similarly, the logic our loved ones have provided us may also loom greater and thus seem more irrefutable, as that our highest moral standard would be to love other children, as ones we would adopt, though they aren't biologically related to us.

These above, now reason-supported arguments are not, though, necessarily dispositive of what we should do. We may also have feelings and wants that persist, won't let go, and over the short run, at least, can't diminish, like the man on the holiday-like trip we previously considered who could not stop his unstoppable, intrusive obsessions. Our changing or even lessening these wants may be for a time beyond our conscious control.

This predisposition may move some couples to want to keep trying or to try one time more again. It may be, however, that despite this being costly and increasing their debt, this is more than an obsession. This may be what they passionately, more than anything else, want to do. This may be more important than even the critical concerns we have considered. Therefore, here, we shall now unearth competing concerns that whether as rational or not, due to strong feelings, should also be on these decision-making couples' tables.

Some ways of coping with these stresses

Social and cultural pressures

The choice to try to have biologically-related children always exists, of course, in a social and cultural context. It is therefore important for couples making this decision to consider these contexts in advance, so that they again can hopefully reduce possible negative effects that could stress them. One of these potentially problematic influences may be societal expectations regarding the role men should play when their partner is pregnant.¹⁸ Some societies see this experience as involving only the pregnant woman.

These couples all may do better if they can seek to identify their society's chief beliefs in advance and then if there are foreseeable problems that could arise, they can then find ways to avoid them. This may mean, for instance, their seeking ways to surround themselves with people whom they know will support them.¹⁹

Responding to their feelings, not logic

There is as suggested above another outcome possibly worse than for these couples than not having the biologically-related child they want. This is to have their healthy, loving relationship with their partner end. This may occur unnecessarily if and when a couple give up continuing to try to have such a child when one or both partners want to keep trying. This unmet want may still be strong and embedded.

A brief look at a few other contexts in which strong feelings may exist and seem to rule may best illustrate the above possibility. I think here of loved ones fighting during a Thanksgiving dinner.

Their heated disagreements may be as the cliché goes over politics or religion.²⁰ A tragic, avoidable outcome may occur. People that love each other may not later speak to each other for years or even ever. We all know historic examples. Brothers, notoriously, fought against each other during our own civil war. Disagreements no less intense and catastrophic continue today.

We may all too readily then favor our own deeply held views rather than give priority to our most cherished relationships.^{21–23} If we ignore our partner's still heartfelt wants and beliefs as to continue to keep trying, even if logic would favor this, we may do so at our relationship's peril. This loss to the partner prematurely giving up may fester and form ever-increasingly another kind of wedge than the one that we have previously here considered. A comparison again, possibly instructive, is some couples' absolute limitation in finding a way to get over the loss of their child. Some feelings may be so powerful that they prevent the possibility of a couple's later, flourishing together.

Beware of retrospective regret

We can, too, we should recognize, always blame ourselves retrospectively falsely.^{24,25} We may have a capacity to second-guess ourselves which has no boundaries. After something bad happens, we may look back and say, "If only I had done this or that. Or not acted." After persons take their life, we may say, "If only I had called ten minutes earlier," or, "If only I had taken more time off work to be with my child as he or she was growing up."

We may be merciless in blaming ourselves. We may be at fault. But, too, we are not perfect. If then, we are with a partner who when we want to stop our partner wants to go on, there is an argument based on our partner's having this feeling that may, in and of itself, warrant our going this way, in spite of debt, in spite of moral beliefs, and in spite of logic. The decision not to defer may be one that we just too much may deeply regret.²⁶ Couples must then, if and when this question arises, stay as open with each other as they can be, not letting logic only decide. They should be open as well to seeking help since our going by one partner's feelings rather than giving both partner's feelings equal weight and going by feelings rather than logic may both go against what we usually do.²⁷ If, though, couples choose not to try again, they must seek as well and as strongly not to second-guess themselves.

Accept Grief's flow

Present wisdom regarding our bearing grief is to try to accept this pain and allow grief to come and go on its own schedule or, as is said, flow. This means bearing but not fighting this feeling as it comes through, painful though this is and may be. A word used here that may be offensive, however, is to "accept" this pain. Here, people feeling grief, as couples who have chosen not to try again or a last time may perceive those urging them to accept this grief as horrifically insensitive.

One provider says, "*Helping you reconnect with your values and helping you distance yourself from certain thoughts when they're not helpful, now that can come across the wrong way, I think, if you do it clumsily or too directly... Sometimes when people hear the word 'acceptance' it's like a red flag to a bull. Because they're in so much pain. So, I find I have to do a lot of prep work with people, in the beginning, to say... it's not about just a be-quiet-and-get-over-it type thing. It's something much more involved than that.*"²⁸

This exception and critical insight not only alerts us to the mixed meaning of accepting. It captures the profound depth of feeling this decision whether or not to try once more to have a biologically-related

child may bring about. If there is a primary point of this article, it is that couples should not take this life-changing decision and the repercussions it could have on partners' future together too lightly. Its ramifications may go far beyond merely what they decide.

Discern values that remain and then act

Partners deciding not to try should ask themselves what if anything they still believe in after this loss once both are ready, if, of course, this time comes about. This, it has been found, helps people after a loss move on.²⁷ Once they have done this, they, too should seek, if and once they can, to act in some way that implements this meaning.²⁷ Couples individually and together must, though, give themselves time to get to these places. This means going slowly and not trying to do too early what emotionally one can't. And the partner whose feeling lies deepest must prevail in this instance also. Feelings, as when to try and when, after failing, to look for what if any meaning still is and then to act may just have to prevail. Even though logic says otherwise.²⁹

Conclusion

When couples want to have a biologically-related child and try, but can't, this may be excruciating for them. They may get into arguments fueled by this stress without their being aware that their fear of this failing may be the source of their atypical anger at each other. They may suffer losses such as going into debt and loved ones may seek to persuade them to stop and even seek to shame them to move them to do this. These partners may use their own mirroring logic to convince them that they have no choice but to go this same way. This may, though, however strongly reasoned, be a mistake, but a mistake made for reasons difficult to see. One partner or both may never recover from not having tried, even if only one last time. And their relationship may not recover. This sought end may be at a time the only thing one or both want in their life. Its outcome will affect, of course, their entire lives and be life-long. Partners may, though not, recognize or anticipate this when they most need to. Both counter-intuitively placing decisive weight on just one partner's feelings as opposed to both, may be optimal in this instance and the only way their relationship can survive. Their both placing greatest weight on one or both partners' feelings may be worth it, notwithstanding its foreseeable, formidable price.

Disclaimer

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Conflict of interest

There is no Conflict of interest.

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