

CONSCIOUS AND COMPETENT EUGENICS

By Rod Matthews

Eugenics has been defined as the practice of improving the genetic make-up of a population.ⁱ It is the label given to a very broad range of tools used by both individuals and groups of like-minded individuals (for example organisations, governments and religions) to improve the human race. Eugenic tools are used both consciously and unconsciously and include the following:

- chemical
- biological
- surgical
- social
- economic
- government policy
- markets
- procedural
- parenting.

Each of these eugenic tools comes with its own set of ethical issues, and of course the area of eugenics itself is a minefield of ethical issues, some of which are listed below:

- What do we gain/what do we lose in the change?
- Is the change an improvement? If so, by whose standards?
- Is the change necessary? If so, under whose orders?
- What is the cost and how do you justify that cost to the individuals who will have to pay it?
- How do we avoid creating a new underclass of genetically poor?
- How do we mitigate the unintended consequences?

My position on eugenics was consolidated when I watched a video called *A Girl Like Me*.ⁱⁱ

This video shows a re-run of the famous 1954 experiment by Dr Kenneth Clark, where

African-American children chose a Caucasian doll over an African doll, the suggestion being that we receive eugenic messages from our environment whether we are conscious of them or not, and that these messages have an effect on who we are and how we operate in our society.

It would be considered negligent to allow a builder who was not a conscious or competent user of his/her tools onto a building site, and I believe the same argument can be broadly applied to the issue of eugenics. We are already sending messages, creating policy and selling products that have eugenic properties. It would be negligent of us to not educate ourselves in the use of these tools so that we are able to use them consciously and competently.

To do this, however, we must first pull apart the term eugenics and examine the range of tools available to us, and then have an educated discussion about each tool.

ⁱ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugenics>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17fEy0q6yqc>

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