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# Forced Sterilization of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities: Protection or Dehumanization?

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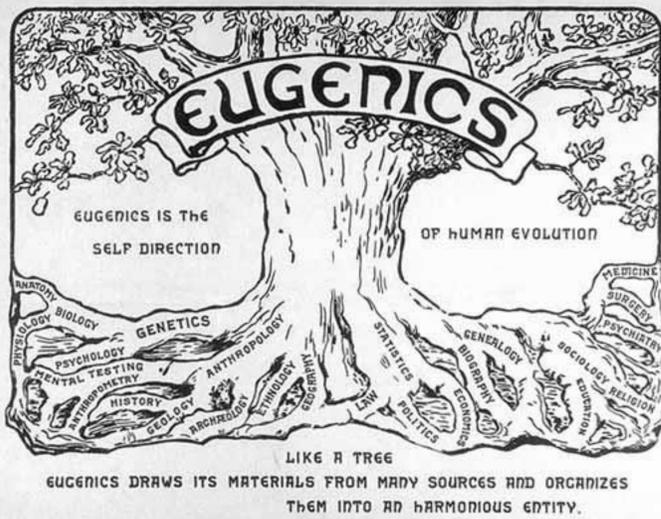
# Forced Sterilization of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities: Protection or Dehumanization?

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## Background

In the United States, the initial sterilization of individuals with developmental disabilities stemmed from an ignorance about mental health and the capabilities of those with developmental disabilities. Currently, the goal of the sterilization of individuals with developmental disabilities is for their protection, while forced sterilization is no longer legal in the United States, it continues to be practiced; mainly with minors. Forced sterilization of individuals with developmental disabilities is unethical on the basis of the intrinsic worth and dignity of all people. Forced sterilization of individuals with developmental disabilities objectifies the individual and denies their dignity. It infringes on their autonomy and leads to an erosion of human rights; such as those protected in the United States Declaration of Independence.



**1776-1880** Poorly designed research connected mental deficiency to criminal behavior and sexual promiscuity.

**1880-1940** Eugenics Movement

**1940** Nazi eugenic sterilization during the time of WWII acted as a mirror to magnify America's own Eugenic behavior

**1950** A group of parents began the Association of Retarded Children (ARC). ARC brought about lobbying for professional training programs, parent education, and research funding.

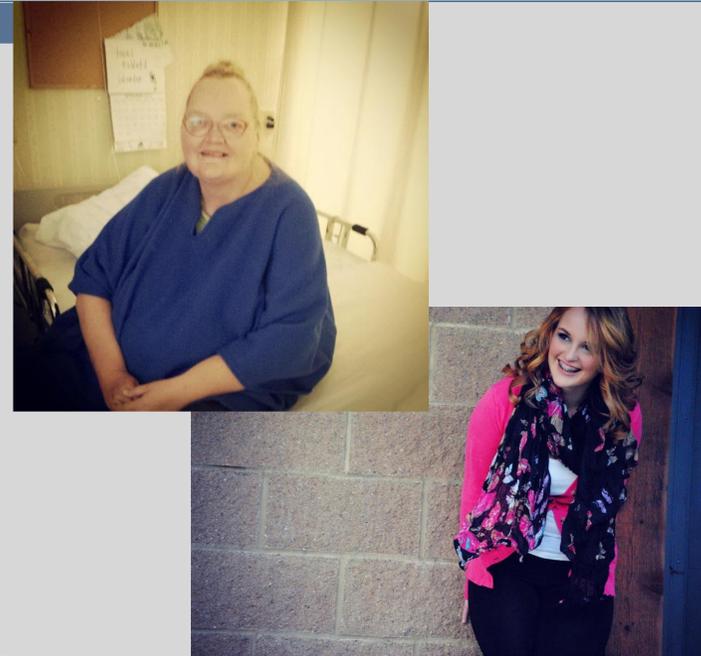
**1960** Civil rights activism

**1970** Sexual revolution

**1980** The last legal forced sterilization was performed in Oregon.

## Trina's Story

Tina (pictured on the left) is mentally disabled and has bipolar schizophrenia. Tina lived with her mom, until she passed away when Tina was in her 30's. At that point, Tina moved into her own apartment. In her time living in the apartment, Tina was raped by a 17 year old boy who did not have any developmental disabilities. From the rape, Tina became pregnant with Trina (pictured on the right). The fight for sterilization today is to protect against incidences such as these. Tina has intrinsic worth as a human. She has the same right to choose to have or not to participate in sexual activities and have children. Tina deserves the dignity of risk. Individuals without developmental disabilities are not sterilized because there is a chance they may be raped. Tina should not be sterilized unless she chooses to be.



## Valid Concerns

**Menstrual Cycle:** Some individuals have a great fear of the bleeding which takes place during their menstrual cycle. Many others refuse to wear pads and struggle with cleanliness.

**Possibility of Pregnancy :** Many parents of children with developmental disabilities fear that their child may become pregnant either by willful sexual behavior or rape. They fear their child will be unable to care for the child.

**Possibility of Sexual Abuse :** Some parents, also, fear their child being sexually abused or taken advantage of.

## Sound Familiar?

National Institute of Health spoke of their plans to set up a centralized genetic testing registry in 2001. NIH's website made the following statements:

"Carriers of recessive hereditary defects should be warned against or prohibited from having children."

"Parents have a duty to abort if a severe birth defect is detected."

"Parents should feel guilty if they continue to reproduce kids with cystic fibrosis."



## Protection or Dehumanization ?

**Objectified and Denied Dignity:** When forced sterilizations are performed the individual is no longer seen as a person with emotions, desires, and thoughts, but rather an object. When someone has been made to be nothing more than an object they are completely stripped of their dignity.

**Autonomy Taken Away:** When someone is told that they are going to have a hysterectomy or other various medical procedures and it is for their good, they no longer have the right to make their own choices. They no longer have their autonomy.

## Where's the Line?

Where human life is valued and given dignity, people are given basic civil rights. The removal of basic civil rights leads to the withering of a society. However, societies flourish where the same basic civil rights are given and protected for all populations and all people. If humanity decides that the population of individuals with developmental disabilities does not have the right to participate in sexual activities or have children, then the actions of the society reveal that the society does not value all people as equally worthy of dignity and therefore worthy of basic civil rights.

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