**Posthumous paternity**

The accomplishments of modern medicine enable both the posthumous harvesting of sperm, and the birth of a child with the foreknowledge that he or she will be a paternal orphan. Posthumous paternity (posthumous parenthood, “parenthood from the grave”) raises many questions in the domain of psychology: paternity, in particular (is this the deceased’s “biological will”), and parenthood, in general. It also raises questions regarding multi-generational relationships, ethics, law, and financial questions.

Questions regarding the deceased: Does posthumous harvesting of sperm negatively affect the deceased’s dignity? In the absence of a will—how can it be determined if posthumous paternity was what the deceased wanted? If the child was born to a single-parent mother who procured the sperm from the deceased’s parents, and they chose the woman who would become the mother of their grandchild, rather than the deceased parent who did not know her. It is possible that the mother’s motive for giving birth to the child was her desire to receive the deceased’s inheritance.

The disadvantages of giving birth to an orphaned child through posthumous paternity are many: disproportionate pressure put on the widow to have the child; the lack of a father figure during the child’s developmental years; over-involvement of bereaved grandparents to the point of conflicts between them and the mother; and the stipulation of the mother’s acceptance of their authority as a condition of their assistance in rearing the child. If the deceased parent died of a disease that may be genetically passed on to the child, the latter grows up with a problematic genetic profile.

If the grandparents function as parents, the child is raised as a memorial to the parent from whose sperm they were conceived, they are expected to prove themselves in areas significant to the grandparents, they are compared with the deceased father and raised by older, bereaved parents.

However, there are also advantages to a posthumous child: the birth of the child was desired and intentional; the mother, though she may be a single mother, receives a substantial amount of support from the parents of the deceased from whose sperm the child was conceived. Unlike a child conceived by means of sperm purchased in a sperm bank, the posthumous child knows their father’s identity, and is often socially commended if their father was killed in a war, or was a highly accomplished individual.

Unlike a child adopted in the framework of “closed adoption,” who only at age eighteen is given the opportunity to meet their biological mother (in most cases, not the father)—on condition that she agrees to reveal her identity and meet—and unlike a child born from the sperm of an anonymous donor, a posthumous child knows the parent’s identity. However, while an adopted child usually has two parents, a posthumous child is a paternal orphan.

Should society encourage the birth of posthumous children to single-parent mothers and to bereaved grandparents? Is the birth of their son’s posthumous child the right way to deal with grief?

The medical achievements regarding posthumous fertilization are far less advanced than the ethical and legal answers to these issues.