

## Do sperm banks ‘work in eugenics?’

**The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.**

On December 29th, 2015, the *Guardian* [reported](#) that the London Sperm Bank is being investigated for discriminating against people with disabilities. The bank had turned away a man with dyslexia; it had published a 2010 pamphlet with a long list of disqualifying “neurological diseases,” including dyslexia, autism, ADHD, and other conditions.

Vanessa Smith—described as a “quality manager at the JD Healthcare Group,” the bank’s parent organization—defended the bank. Backpedaling without budging an inch, she said that the pamphlet had been withdrawn and policies would be reviewed. Still, little seems likely to change. According to Smith, “We are looking for someone who is medically clear of infectious diseases and genetic issues that may possibly be passed on to any resulting child.” She also claimed, “We definitely don’t work in eugenics.” She may mean something like, “In the popular mind, ‘eugenics’ is associated with Nazis, an association we wish to avoid.” But to shape future children, based on a policy that describes human variation as disease, is by definition eugenic. The bank’s currency is genes, and it wants good ones.

Smith’s grouping of “infectious diseases” with “genetic issues” is significant. Both are disqualifiers: in the view of the London Sperm Bank, they make the sperm unsuitable to produce a future human being. My interest is in the neutral, euphemistic vagueness of the phrase *genetic issues*, and the way it tends to pathologize human variation.

**Read full, original post:** Genetic Issues at the London Sperm Bank