

## Viewpoint: Patenting human embryo gene editing? Two rival universities push the ethical and legal debate

Two prominent groups of scientists, and two major American universities, are trying to patent methods for editing human embryos, with reproductive use clearly intended. Really. Right now.

Heritable genome editing – that is, altering the genes and traits of future children and generations – is prohibited in [70 countries](#) and wildly controversial everywhere. But these people and institutions are laying the groundwork to capitalize on a future they apparently hope to make happen.

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[A team led by Dietrich Egli at Columbia University filed] on December 10, 2020, for a patent on “[Gene Editing to Correct Aneuploidies and Frame Shift Mutations](#),” which was published on April 4, 2021. From the [description](#) :

Aneuploidies due to abnormal chromosome segregation in female meiosis are some of the most frequent problems in human reproduction, resulting in effects such as miscarriage and Down syndrome.

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The clear implication is that the patented process is intended for the assisted reproduction industry and its customers, who would of course pay for the privilege of using it. And it is specifically targeted at Down syndrome, by far the most common condition caused by chromosomal variance – and thus the most lucrative prospective market for fertility entrepreneurs.

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