

People

Sarah Jessica Parker

Why I Quit Sex

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Parker with baby James



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CAN IT LAST?



Matt LeBlanc
IT'S A GIRL!



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The ability to pick a baby's gender leaves many parents thrilled with the outcome—and some experts worried about ethics

Tommy and Dana Paschal married in 1982 and were soon blessed with three baby boys. They were a happy, healthy family—even though, from time to time, Dana felt a little something, or someone, was missing. “I don’t think she ever stopped wanting a girl,” says her mother, Pauline Ferguson. “She was just afraid to try again.”

Then, in August 2000, Dana picked up a magazine while strolling through her local Kmart. Inside was an article about a medical breakthrough that would allow couples to choose the sex of their babies. “I called [my husband] and said, ‘I think I know how we can get our girl,’” says Dana, 36, a homemaker from Pleasant Garden, N.C. Her family scrapped plans for a cruise to the Bahamas, opting instead to try having a daughter through an experimental sperm-sorting procedure, in which Tommy’s sperm were sorted in a way that allowed specialists to remove those with female chromosomes. Dana was then artificially inseminated and, after two attempts, became pregnant. On Oct. 12, 2001, Dana, Tommy, now 38, and the boys—T.G., 18, Kevin, 16, and Michael, 12—welcomed Heather Rene Paschal. “We got exactly what we wanted,” says Dana, who paid \$5,300 for the procedures.

Not so long ago, of course, no amount of cash could have bought the opportunity to decide the sex of your child. Even



Boy? Girl? You



The Quinteros

"We were desperate for a boy," says Claudia Quintero (with husband Jose, and, clockwise from bottom, daughters Jade, 5, Ginara, 16, and Jaleih, 14, and son, Joseph, 2, at their farm in Miami. "My husband wanted a little boy he could take to play baseball. I wanted a boy in the house."

Choose



The Wagons

The first time Nina Wagener tried preimplantation genetic diagnosis, the four male embryos had Down syndrome. A second attempt produced 4-month-old Jared and his twin sister, Jordan. "If you really want to have a baby, you go to great lengths," says Nina (holding Jared) with husband Ron—holding Jordan—and daughters, from left, Bianca, 17, Tessa, 12, and Caitlin, 9). The couple paid a total of \$32,000 for the medical procedures.



The Paschals

As part of a new tradition, every Valentine's Day Dana Paschal plans to give daughter Heather, 2, a red rose for each year of the girl's life. "She gets all the attention," says Dana (with husband Tommy and their sons, from left, Kevin, 16, Michael, 12, and T.G., 18, at home in N.C.).

today many Americans object to what they see as parents playing God. But in the past few years—quietly at first and now through services touted on the Web—a growing number of fertility experts around the country have begun offering clients the ultimate form of family planning. "Personally, I think sperm sorting is a great idea," says Sonja Kristiansen, 41, a Houston fertility specialist who has helped two dozen couples choose the sex of their kids using the technology known as MicroSort. "In many couples, the mom wants a girl she can dress up and Dad wants a boy to carry on the family name. I already have two boys, but if I were to get pregnant again, I'd have a girl."

Since clinical trials of this procedure began in 1994, it has produced about 500 pregnancies and 420 babies, according to the Genetics and IVF Institute, based in Fairfax, Va., which holds the MicroSort patent. Some couples, like Nina and Rob Wagener of Ventura, Calif., have opted for preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), a more complex and expensive method—it averages \$15,000 per attempt—in which doctors screen a fertilized embryo for its sex and genetic disorders, before implanting it in the mother. In 2003 the Wagons, parents to three girls from Nina's previous marriage, read about PGD on the Internet and decided to try for a boy. Doctors implanted a total of three embryos, and Nina eventually delivered twins last Nov. 7—Jared and his sister Jordan. "I'm still in shock," says Nina. "It's just so wonderful to be able to say Jared is here."

Like the Wagons, many couples see the new technology as an invaluable tool either for so-called "family balancing" or for guarding against sex-specific diseases. But some in the medical community advise caution. A number of doctors who offer gender selection refuse to perform it for first-time parents or those who don't need reproductive assistance. Others are concerned that if unused embryos aren't frozen or donated, they're discarded. And antiselection critics say manipu-



The Krugs

Seven-month-old Abby (with her parents, Cliff and Kathy) may be outnumbered by her brothers (Danny, 6, left, and Brien, 3), but she's got an ally in Mom. Says Kathy: "I also had two older brothers. I'll be able to get her through that."

lating sex sets a chilling precedent that could one day lead to a generation of "designer kids." "Children are not products you can buy like pets," says Boston University bioethics professor George Annas. "Why not select for eye color, height and strength? This is treating children like commodities."

Aware of possible moral objections, Kathy and Cliff Krug, a couple from Fairfax Station, Va., debated for six months before finally deciding to use sex selection in the wake of a pair of devastating events: Four years ago, Brien, the younger of the pair's two sons, was born with hemophilia, a hereditary disease that predominantly afflicts males. A third son, their doctor told them, would carry a 50 percent chance of having the disease. Then, two years later, Kathy's 62-year-old mother died of breast cancer. "I felt like it would be great to have this little girl to replace my mom," she says.

Both the Krugs are observant Cath-

olics. They prayed for guidance but eventually decided not to consult their priest before joining a clinical trial for sperm sorting in October 2002. Kathy began taking a fertility drug and used a home predictor kit to determine when she was ovulating. When that day arrived, she and Cliff, who works for their family-owned moving business, hurriedly drove to the Genetics and IVF Institute near their home, where Cliff's sperm were sorted, then tested and artificially inseminated into Kathy. Even after she became pregnant, though, the waiting wasn't entirely over, says Kathy, because the MicroSort method has a 91 percent success rate for female births (as opposed to 76 percent for boys). "We waited 20 weeks to have a sonogram," she says. "The technician was quiet and I thought, 'Oh no.' But she turned and said, 'It's a girl,' and we were so excited." The Krug's daughter Abigail Anne was born July 10, 2003. "Now I've got my partner in crime," says Kathy.

Despite the moral qualms of many, gender selection is almost certain to grow, say some experts. "The vast majority of patients are average suburban parents who have two or three children of one gender and say they want another of the opposite sex," says Norbert Gleicher, who performs PGD at offices in New York and Illinois. "What is wrong with that?" Nothing, say Jose and Claudia Quintero of Miami, who have three daughters and, thanks to sperm sorting, a bouncing toddler named Joseph. "We thought about everything—our kids, our religion, what we would tell our baby. We came to the conclusion that it was worth it," says Claudia. "And it was. He's a miracle."

By **Bob Meadows**, **Michaelle Ballard** in Pleasant Garden, **Giovanna Brey** in Chicago, **Melody Simmons** in Fairfax Station, **Wendy Grossman** in Houston, **Sandra Marquez** in Los Angeles, **Jennifer Longley** in New York City and **Kristin Harmel** in Orlando