

An Immodest Proposal?

Antonio recently received an email from his high school acquaintance, Jade, with a sensitive question. In the email, Jade shares her desire to have a child soon since she is almost forty. She says that she is single but also skeptical of in vitro fertilization (IVF) and artificial insemination (IUI), which she worries would be painful, expensive, and unreliable. So, she asks Antonio if he would help her conceive a child naturally through sex.

Jade explains that she contacted Antonio because she thinks he has excellent genes, which she hopes he could pass on to her child. She reassures him that she is financially capable of raising a child on her own and that he would not be expected to be responsible for the child in any way. She even offers to keep his name off the birth certificate and to sign an agreement waiving her right to receive child support from him. She concludes by thanking Antonio for his consideration and acknowledging that this is an unusual request.

Antonio feels torn by Jade's request. On the one hand, he doesn't feel comfortable fathering a child whom he may never get to know—let alone raise. He also doesn't feel comfortable having sex with a mere acquaintance with whom he hasn't spoken in over a decade. Moreover, he has strong religious beliefs which explicitly prohibit sex acts outside of marriage.

On the other hand, Antonio finds her request sincere, as he understands that becoming a parent by conceiving a child is a deeply meaningful experience for lots of people. He respects her desire to invest in the next generation by becoming a parent at a time when many societies' birth rates are plummeting. He believes Jade would take good care of the child they conceived and that the child wouldn't even have the chance to exist unless he chooses to help her. And he worries that turning her down would embarrass and discourage her, and possibly deprive her—and the world—of a child who is likely to be happy, healthy, and academically gifted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Regardless of his ultimate decision, how should Antonio feel in response to Jade's email?
2. How should we evaluate Jade's request in and of itself?
3. Should the fact that Antonio considers Jade a mere acquaintance make a meaningful difference to his consideration of her request? Why or why not?

