

**M**y only daughter is six. As I write this, she's playing schools with an array of cuddly animals lined up in front of her. In her love of make believe and role playing, she's just like every other little girl. And just like every other mum, I could devote pages to telling you how much she means to me. Kind, funny little Emily has been a joy ever since she was placed in my arms, a miraculous bundle of life.

But no, according to writer and broadcaster Cristina Odone, Emily and I are not like other mums and daughters. For Emily is one of the 70,000 babies to have been born in this country through in-vitro fertilisation, or IVF. This makes her, says Ms Odone, "a purchase".

If you are a parent – Cristina Odone is, by the way – take a minute to imagine your reaction if someone told you your child was a purchase, if they said: "When a child is a purchase, what kind of emotional legacy will he or she inherit... To know your parents could realise their dream only because they had a combination of cash and luck is to make you feel like a piece of particularly sought-after real estate, no different from a penthouse in Notting Hill or a villa in St Tropez."

When I first read that in a newspaper I felt sick. A purchase? The words reverberated in my head. How dare someone call my daughter a purchase? I phoned a friend, a "natural" mum. Was I over-reacting? When I read her the passage, she thought it was appalling, outrageous and irresponsible. "What if an IVF child reads it?" she said. Quite. Ms Odone addresses not me, the parent, but Emily, the child. I am sorry to personalise this debate, but it is intensely personal to me. I did not "buy" Emily. I gave birth to her. I sobbed as the midwife placed her on my chest. I breast fed her for nine months. I held her hand as we walked to school on her first day and choked back tears as she, slightly nervously but never so proudly, waved goodbye. She is my all, my everything, my daughter.

When we discovered that we were unlikely ever to have a baby naturally, my husband and I made the hard, considered decision to try IVF. After about four years, I conceived using my egg and my husband's sperm. I have never considered Emily to be different from children born naturally. Cristina Odone isn't the only commentator to include insensitive remarks that are bound to offend in a supposedly thoughtful piece on the complexities of IVF. Instead of concentrating on

specific cases – such as that of Diane Blood who fought for the right to bear her dead husband's child using his frozen sperm – intelligent women, whose position in the media grants them inflated powers, make unthinking generalisations.

Professor Ian Craft, a pioneer of IVF and director of the London Fertility Centre, says, "Privileged people who are fortunate enough to have their own children seem to wish others less fortunate than themselves not to."

These female commentators (and mothers) always pronounce, as though it were a revelation, that children are not a right. I couldn't agree more. We IVF parents are better placed than most to know that children are not a right.

IVF doesn't always result in a baby. Neither does sex. Both methods of conception involve that element of luck of which Cristina Odone spoke in such derogatory terms. But IVF children are always planned and wanted.

The unlikely opinion of writer, broadcaster and mother-of-two Jenni Murray is to do as infertile couples have done for hundreds of years and accept my lot. "Such people often redirected their energies towards contributing to society in other useful ways. Now, everyone...feels they have a right to a child, regardless of the unborn infant's future." Apart from its patronising tone, her

statement, which appeared in a newspaper two years ago, is simply not true. I didn't try IVF (which now accounts for one per cent of UK births) because I thought I had a right to a child, but because medical advances allowed me to try what previous generations could not. Would Jenni Murray have me turn my back on antibiotics?

Dr Jacqueline Laing has an impressive CV and often pops up in the press when IVF cases make the news. This is what she had to say about the Diane Blood case. "The child's interests in being conceived through old-fashioned sex by a live father are simply ignored. This devalues sex in the life-giving process. Sex should be (even if it isn't always) an expression of love, producing children who grow up in an environment in which their parents are committed to each other and have expressed that in a physical way."

Am I really to believe that Emily's interests have been ignored because she was not conceived through an act of sex? I phoned Dr Laing. She said: "IVF involves the commodification of human life and introduces an asexual and alienating dimension into the reproduction process."

When I asked Diane Blood for her reaction, she said the legal battle she had faced was proof money alone could not buy the right to try for her children. "They were born out of justice and a

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strong love that compelled me to fight for what my late husband and I wanted," she said. "Remarks can be very hurtful. It is futile to answer back in a couple of sentences. That's why I wrote a book – it took me 124,000 words."

I would ask commentators to think about the effect their words have, not only on the one in six couples with fertility problems and the 45,000 couples who seek fertility treatment each year – but on IVF children who had no say in their birth.

In her piece on Diane Blood, Dr Laing says: "Human beings have an intrinsic dignity that products do not. It is time to wake up to this fact." As an IVF mother, I have never lost sight of it. The irony is that if Emily ever has cause to consider herself a purchase, it will be because of articles written by women such as Cristina Odone and Jacqueline Laing. ●

*Flesh and Blood* by Diane Blood is published by Mainstream Press, priced £16.99 (see Express Bookshop, Crossword page). Useful contacts: Infertility Network UK ([www.infertilitynetworkuk.com](http://www.infertilitynetworkuk.com)); British Infertility Counselling Association ([www.bica.net](http://www.bica.net)); Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority ([www.hfea.gov.uk](http://www.hfea.gov.uk))



Newborn Emily (left) Her mother, Pippa Kelly, says, "We IVF parents are better placed than most to know that children are not a right." Emily as a toddler (above). "Kind, funny little Emily has been a joy ever since she was placed in my arms, a miraculous bundle of life"