

Egg freezing is not the answer when it comes to equality at work

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When I first read that tech giants Apple and Facebook just announced they will now be paying for female employees to freeze their eggs, I was intrigued.

But when I looked a bit closer into the move, I was less than impressed.

Facebook already offers egg-freezing coverage in its employee health benefit plan, and Apple is set to begin coverage early next year. And while the move is an unprecedented one for two major companies that pretty much rule our lives, I can't help but wonder if it's sending the right message.

First of all, offering to pay for a woman to freeze her eggs does not translate into supporting her through a pregnancy. The process of freezing an egg, thawing an egg and then fertilizing that egg is incredibly, incredibly delicate, and it is still an emerging science with varying success rates. For women who want families, egg freezing is a major gamble. Granted, it's admirable that these companies would pay for the gamble, of course, as women might easily spend their life savings on the hoped-for dream of a family.

But on the other hand, egg freezing could send the complete wrong message to female employees as well as to other businesses that might follow in the companies' footsteps — that work comes first, family second, and while we wholeheartedly wish "leaning in" really could help you have it all, it won't, so here, go freeze your eggs, just in case.

I may be reading too much into it, of course, and I really do applaud the move for opening up more choices for women who may not be able to afford the process otherwise, but I do think the companies' action should be taken into the whole context of supportive family-work balance. For example, both companies also offer adoption and other fertility coverage, as well as a "baby bonus" for new parents. Knowing a company will financially back up a couple wanting to adopt just as much as a woman who wants to freeze her eggs for later so she can work harder now shows a dedication to supporting family instead of just a calculated business move to trick women into thinking they can have it all — later.

Because without supporting all ways to combine work and family — by breaking down those gender barriers, offering parents paternity and maternity leave that actually gives them time to recover instead of just walk without crying and by seeing mothers as equals in the workplace — that do-good offer of egg freezing is just another cold and empty promise.