



Debate Session
“Should couples have the right to choose the sex of their children?”
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Should couples have the right to select the sex of their children? NO

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Slide 1: Title page

Good evening every one and thank you Mr Chairman.

Slide 2. Shavaz Fort, around 1000 A.D.

On the 1st of July, I was visiting my parents in my home village, Shavaz, a village with around 1000 years of history. While there, I was working on my debate paper. My mother, a 70 year old with 3 children - one daughter and two sons - asked "What are you working on"? As I was interested in her views about the subject, I explained to her that I am writing about this topic. At first, I was surprised about her liberal view when she said, '*if the technology exists, it would be a good idea to select the sex of the child*'. She gave some reasons for this. In our discussion, however, my mother strongly argued that '*parents should NOT have the right to select the sex of their children, as this is against God's will*'. From this simple and informal conversation, I realized the complexity of the issue and noticed how difficult it would be to speak on either side of this debate.

Slide 3. Historical perspectives on sex preference

Let's look at the historical perspectives on sex preference. Preference for boy children and the neglect of girl children is a well-known and documented fact in history. Girl infanticide is evident in Pre-Islamic Arab societies. China and India are two other prime examples. Bias towards boy children can be found in Chinese history and literature. A folk song from Uttar Pradesh says: 'Next birth don't give me a daughter, Give me Hell instead'.

The issue of prejudice against girl children is even prevalent in some contemporary societies.

Slide 4. Implications of sex preference

Sex preference can lead to sex imbalance, and marriage squeeze and also to unsafe abortion. Let's look at them one by one.

Slides 5. Sex ratio at birth by birth order in China, 1982-88

As all demographers know, in China, South Korea and India where sex selection has been practiced on a wide scale, it has had very undesirable results. As the table shows, sex ratios at birth for the second, third, fourth and higher order of children in China has been exceptionally high and alarming.

Slide 6. Marriage squeeze

Marriage squeeze is another consequence of sex preference. According to Gillis (1995) 'the reduced number of girls relative to boys in China will have society-wide effects in the future.' This problem could be solved in two ways. Men will be forced to find spouses from

other societies which will have its own consequences; or it will lead to celibacy; again this will have its own problems.

Slide 7. Unsafe Abortion and mother's health

When a couple aborts the unwanted foetus, abortion can have consequences for mothers' life. Sex-selection not only ends in abortion but also when a child of an unwanted sex is born, infanticide will be the resulting problem. As the Human Development Report in South Asia 2000, reported, "more than 3000 cases of female infanticide were recorded in six districts of Tamilnadu in 1995. Approximately fifty million women are "missing" in the Indian population. Estimates of the number of female foetuses being destroyed every year in India vary from two to five million.

Slide 8. Sex selection: An expression of sexism

Berkowitz and Snyder noted that 'sex selection forces parents to figure sex into the calculus of a child's worth, to place a value on sex. By making a choice, parents must essentially prefer one sex over another. Pre-conceptive sex selection represents sexism in its purest form, as prior to conception before parents can possibly know anything about their child, a child's worth is based in large part upon its sex.

Slide 9. Does the end justify the means?

No, I contend that the ends do not justify the means. There are various means of achieving sex selection. Let's start with abortion.

1. Abortion is one of the main means. Abortion is generally undesirable; potentially damaging to the mother's health; unacceptable to some religious groups; & controversial in many countries. Given these, the end does not justify the means.
2. Cloning is another means. Do I really have to argue against cloning? Who would agree with cloning of human beings? Producing human beings in a pure mechanical way! Creating the same thing over and over again! It is a horrendous prospect.
3. Gene technology is another means, but it is likely to be an expensive and highly invasive process in the foreseeable future. This means that we will only be providing the right of sex selection to the rich. That means that it is inequitable.

Slide 10. Slippery-slope argument

Some argued that sex selection will pave the way for other kinds of non-medical trait selection. It is feared that gene technology will open the door for selection on all kinds of characteristics such as hair colour, eye colour, athletic ability, height, and even behavioural characteristics. It is the first step to 'designer children'.

Slide 11. Designed by: Pierre Cardin! Photo

Slide 12. Psychological impacts of sex selection on children

Let's consider the psychological impacts on a child who knows that he/she was only born because her mother aborted a child of the opposite sex. What kind of attitude would such a child have towards gender?

Where girl children are not preferred, boy children will not have sisters, and vice versa. Sex selection would greatly limit the variety of sibling sets in which children grow up. This absence of diversity is likely to be unhealthy for children's development.

Slide 13. Whose right is concerned?

We need to ask whose rights prevail, those of the child, those of the parent or those of the community? There is a general feeling that sex selection for non-medical reasons is primarily for the benefit of the parents rather than the child.

Furthermore, how do we know that if we have a boy (or girl), the world would be better as a whole in the future?

Slide 14. Sex selection = Absence of world's greatest people!

If sex selection had been available in the past, many of the world's greatest people may never have been born. Let's look at the followings list:

- Marie Curie: The last of five children, three girls and two boys
- Pierre Curie: 2nd son of the family
- Pope John Paul II: 2nd son of the family
- Mahatma Gandhi: the last of six children
- Alexander Graham Bell: from a family with two other sons

And even some members of the panel might not here today.

Slide 15. Is sex selection a fundamental right?

Supporters of the preconception sex-selection would see this as a fundamental right for women. At face value the argument has merit.

However, this line of reasoning is problematic, because it presumes that the right to pre-select sex is in fact a fundamental right.

Many advocates of women's rights argue that what is at issue is the female child's fundamental right: the right to exist and be born in the first place. Pre-conception sex selection violates this fundamental right, just as much as do the killing of newborn a baby girl or aborting a female foetus.

Slide 16. What are we trying to achieve?

Finally, one has to ask, why do we want to select the sex of a child? What are we trying to achieve? This level of control over childbearing is likely to lead to very low fertility. Parents may get what they want, but will society get what it wants? Why should we pander to the taste of the spoilt?

Slide 17. Conclusion

To conclude, I believe that this right can, under certain circumstances, be given to parents for medical reasons, but not for non-medical reasons as this will raise serious moral, legal and social issues.