



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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## **The discussion of sex selection has two distinctive features:**

1. The first is a focus on the common good. The argument is that in countries with strong sex bias, the sex imbalance will have serious consequences. Hence, sex selection should not be allowed.

As a result of this macro lens, however the opposition to sex selection tends to weaken in countries where there is no sex bias and at most preference for a balanced family.

In this context of no sex bias, it is felt that satisfying couples wishes does not hurt anyone, so why deny them the right to sex selection.

2. The second feature, usually associated with feminists and supporters of reproductive health paradigm, is a feeling that denying the right to choose sex will infringe on the gains achieved with great deal of difficulties in the reproductive health approach.

The principles of reproductive choice, individual perspectives seem on the face of it to incorporate sex selection.

My argument challenges these two features. I would like to make two points:

1. My opposition to sex selection is one of principle. As a matter of fact I would take the position that sex selection should be more opposed in a context of no sex bias.

2. The liberation premise and the adoption of a human right perspective should not automatically leads us to accept sex selection.

Embracing a reproductive health paradigm is in no way inconsistent with rejection of the right to choose the sex of one's offspring

So why do I oppose the right of sex selection as a principle not on the basis of common good.

1. The individual right to sex balance is not a right granted by nature that we are proposing to take away. It is simply an intrusion on nature that would have a large number of negative repercussions and very little positive ones.

We are not infringing on anyone's right if that right does not already exist.

No one has the right to tamper with nature. Convention on human rights and biomedicine never included sex selection.

2. Granting the right to sex selection is simply awakening a dormant monster.

A society that does not have a sex preference or is simply only after the very innocent family balance would soon be coerced to become a sexist society.

The state is not the only coercive force we should watch, the market and consumerism have demonstrated their ability to convince us that enhancement of appearances is a must and they will succeed in convincing us that life will not be perfect without the perfect balance.

A coercive market will create a need when none existed before.

If you were silly enough to get two boys, your only way to happiness is to get another two girls.

Surely, there is something disturbing about a Sunday morning spent in having a face lift, a botox injection and a blue pill for a boy or a pink pill for a girl.

3. A slippery road to high tech consumer eugenics. It is not an isolated right.

It is a part of a larger package of blue eyed, genius kids.

It is with great humility that I beg to differ with Nobel Laureate James Watson who promotes redesigning genes of our babies with statements such as:

*“People say it would be terrible if we made all girls pretty, I think it would be great”*

I beg to differ:

*Diversity is a blessing*

A pretty soul is what we should be seeking not

*A pretty face*

Furthermore, this slippery road would lead to:

*Genetic castes and human sub-species*

4. Sex selection will undermine children well being by treating them as a commodity and subjecting them to excessive parental expectations.

Children are a gift whether they are XX or XY.

A girl is a blessing, a boy is blessing.

Two girls are a blessing and when they grow up they will meet two boys

*What a balance!*

5. What a waste of resource and intellectual talents. Money and minds should be spent to cater for real needs not to pursue a worthless dream. Science should address needs not invent new ones.

6. What guarantees that such a practice is safe and does not have unforeseen long term side effects.

7. What about skewed sex ratios. The fact that not all couples will opt for the magic pill in itself may lead to sex imbalance. (no random assignment of sex selectors)

8. Finally, the idea of legitimizing a right in one context and not accepting it in another is ludicrous. It is double standard; either it is a right or not.

Nothing is wrong in wishing for a boy or a girl but everything is wrong in a context that prioritizes these wishes and transforms them into protected liberties labeled as human rights.

## Now to the context of sex bias

In addition to the serious negative consequences (we have witnessed sex ratios of 120 in India and China and even of 156 in localities of China at a time when the technique was invasive and unethical – selective abortion – how about when the technique is a simple pill)

Let me clarify the difference between a RH paradigm and the right to choose sex:

1. The right to choose was never an unlimited right it was always conditioned on being informed and responsible. Also reproductive choice was never independent from its nature, substance and consequences.

In the reproductive health paradigm we never said that a couple has the right to have 20 children regardless of the consequences of that right on their health, their children health and their society.

What we said is that we can not coerce them to use contraception but we should create societal/ individual conditions to allow them an informed / responsible choice.

We recognized that the context the couple lived in created a need not a right.

Similarly, a woman with 6 girls and no boys living in a context of sex bias would have a need, we may accept her need for sex selection (exactly like we accepted the need for sex selection for avoiding hereditary medical problems).

This is a need not a right.

2. RH was also sought because of its close link to women empowerment.

Sex selection is detrimental to women. It is sex violence at its worst and is simply gendercide.

Now to alleviation of the sufferings of the women and the reduction of the total fertility rate. Who says so?

- Why do families with one boy and a girl continue to have large numbers of children?
- If the wife can guarantee to her husband that she will have a boy. Both him and his mother will continue to coerce her to have more.

The point I was making

- We need to have sense to appreciate value of human soul regardless of its biological composition.
- The wisdom not to waste our intelligence in the quest of a dream not worth pursuing.
- Moral responsibility not to tamper with nature in absence of a legitimate need.