

## New Forms of Sex Selection

Sex selection means choosing the sex of a future child, either before or after conception. In most of the world, it is used to promote the birth of baby boys, exacerbating discrimination against girls and women.

Prenatal screening followed by sex-selective abortion, still the primary means of ensuring sons, has caused highly lopsided sex ratios in countries such as India and China.

In the past several years, new technologies are providing other methods of sex selection, and are being openly promoted, advertised and marketed in the United States.

### NEW METHODS OF SEX SELECTION

- **Sperm sorting:** A patented procedure called MicroSort separates sperm bearing X and Y chromosomes. Only sperm with the desired chromosomes are used to fertilize the eggs.
- **Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD):** Embryos are created outside the body (a technique known as in vitro fertilization) and then tested to determine their sex. Only those of the desired sex are implanted.
- **Baby Gender Mentor:** Introduced in June 2005, this "home testing kit" claims to be able to determine the sex of a fetus from a few drops of a pregnant woman's blood as early as five weeks into the pregnancy.

### CONCERNS

**Sex discrimination:** The decision to have a child of one sex is often based on gender stereotypes. While there is nothing wrong with individual desires for a boy or a girl, the ethical sanctioning of sex-selective technologies by commercial firms and the medical establishment can endorse gender stereotyping and discrimination.

**Mistreatment, discrimination or violence against women and girls:** In some communities, including in the United States, girl children are sometimes seen as less valuable, and are neglected and denied opportunities. Some adult women are pressured to have boys through the use of sex-selective technologies, or by insisting on more children until a boy is born.

**Disability rights:** Many oppose the increasing use of prenatal screening to prevent the birth of infants who may be disabled. Disability de-selection is often used to justify sex selection based on the arguments that some conditions may be sex-linked, and that any form of disability should be eliminated.

**Normalizing the "selection" and "design" of children:** Accepting sex selection today can open the door to future technologies that allow the selection of traits such as eye and skin color, height, muscle mass, and perhaps even behavior and cognitive abilities.

### POLICY

The use and marketing of sex selection technologies are entirely unregulated in the United States. Although the ongoing attack on abortion rights complicates efforts to address even pre-pregnancy methods, a number of other countries—including Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom—prohibit sex selection for reasons of cultural or parental preference without affecting abortion rights. We need policies that can regulate the use of sex selection technologies and oppose the marketing of sex selection without diminishing the autonomy of individual women and families.

For more information, please visit our website at [www.geneticsandsociety.org](http://www.geneticsandsociety.org) or call us at (510) 625-0819.

