

# Genetics And Justice: The Impact Of Sex Selection In Asian Pacific American (APA) Communities



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# Outline



- Context
  - New and emerging genetic and reproductive technologies
  - Human rights and reproductive justice perspectives
  
- Sex selection
  - Technologies
  - Marketing
  - Concerns and challenges
  - Policies
  - Call to action

Context:  
New and emerging  
technologies and practices



- Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART)
- Selection technologies: often used with ART
- Embryonic stem cell research: different types
- Inheritable genetic modification: designer babies
- Geneticization of health disparities

# Human rights and reproductive justice perspectives



## Technologies are:

- Developing without critical dialogue – no organized social justice, women's health, or reproductive rights perspective
- Impacting all of our communities – across race, class, sexual orientation, geography
- Market driven – commercialization of science & health
- Developing in a social, political, economic and ideological context of inequality and discrimination
- Part of a search for technological fixes for social & environmental problems

# Asian Women Uniquely Situated



- **Consumers of technologies**
  - Pressures for children and family formation
  - Pressures for perfection and competition
- **Target of marketing and practices**
  - Sex selection
  - Demand for Asian women's eggs for fertility treatments
- **International intersections**
  - Reproductive tourism
  - Economic development/markets in Asia

# I. Sex Selection Technologies



## I. Pre-pregnancy methods (used with in vitro fertilization):

- Sperm Sorting
- Preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD)

# Sperm Sorting



## Ad for Microsort® in *NY Times* and in-flight magazines

The Microsort® Gender-Selection Program at GIVF

### Do You Want To Choose the Gender Of Your Next Baby?



If you want to choose — or need to choose — whether your next baby is a girl or a boy, you may qualify for the MicroSort® gender selection procedure at the Genetics & IVF Institute (GIVF).

Prospective parents come from all over the world to GIVF in suburban Washington, DC. They choose this exclusive *scientifically-based* sperm sorting gender selection procedure, currently in an FDA clinical trial, for several important reasons:

- For prevention of genetic diseases
- For family balancing
- Results so far show 90% success rate for achieving girls and 75% for boys.
- FREE MicroSort for qualifying patients who use Donor Egg or Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis at GIVF
- For sensitive, personal attention from a caring staff of professionals, dedicated to the success of your family.

Couples also choose the Genetics & IVF Institute because we are the world's largest integrated provider of infertility and genetic services. Our expertise in the diagnosis and treatment of complex genetic and reproductive disorders is second to none.

To learn more about the Genetics & IVF Institute, and how the MicroSort® technology may help you select the gender of your next child — please visit us at:

[www.givf.com](http://www.givf.com)

or call us at

**1-800-277-6607**

Now available in New York and other metropolitan areas through collaborating physicians. Call for details.

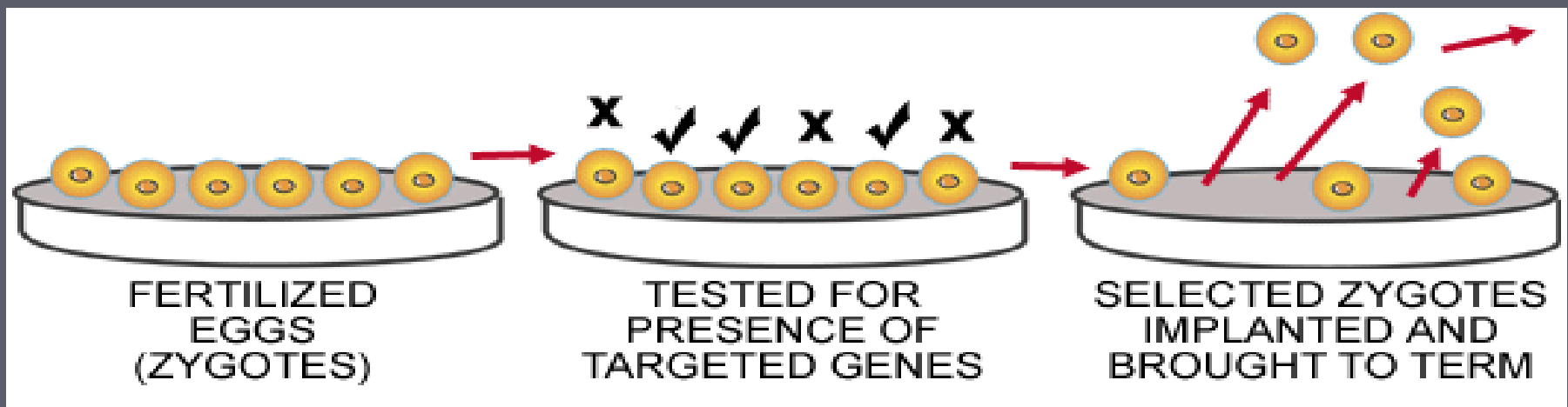
Caution: This procedure uses an investigational device limited by federal law to investigational use.

GENETICS & IVF INSTITUTE

# Pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD)



- Using in vitro fertilization, eggs are fertilized
- At day 3 (8 cells) a cell is extracted for testing
- Only selected embryos implanted
- No genes or embryos are modified



## II. Sex Selection Technologies



### II. Methods during pregnancy:

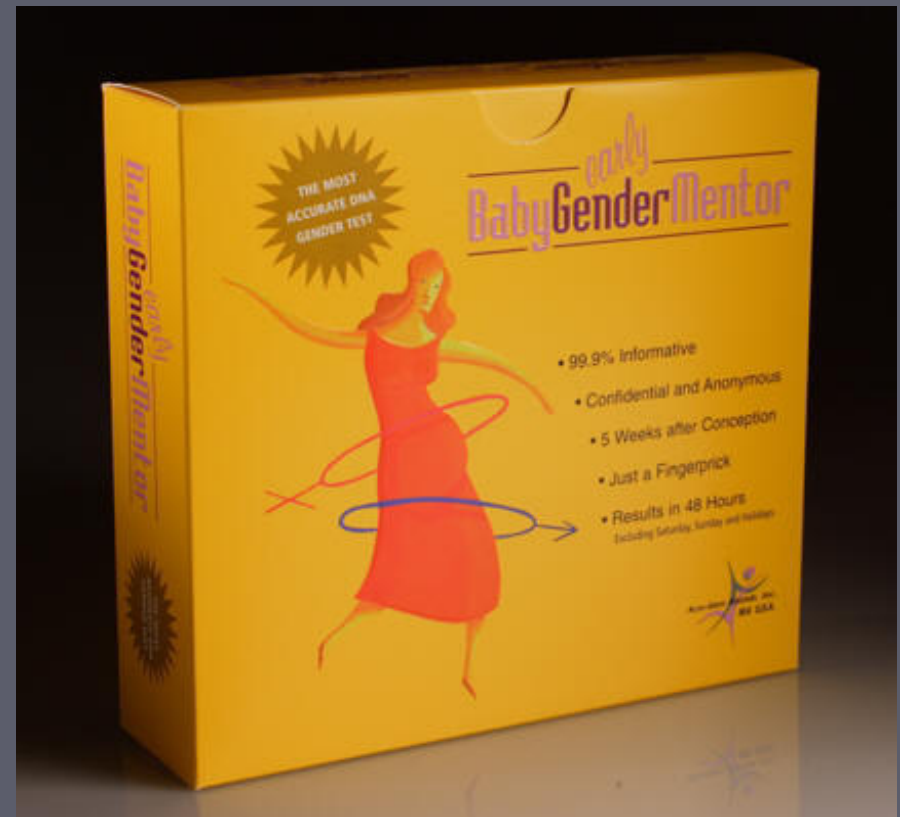
- Ultrasound
- At-home “gender determination kits”
  - Analyze mother’s blood to determine sex of baby

—→ Termination of pregnancy via abortion

# Baby Gender Mentor



- Tests maternal blood at 5 weeks to determine fetal sex
- Claims 99.9% accuracy
- Costs: \$275 for kit and DNA analysis
- Results given via internet 1-2 days later
- Consumer fraud case



## Sex selection in APA communities



*“I felt such pressure to have a boy. I can’t describe to you how afraid I was that my mother-in-law would have me deported if I did not have a son. So I went ahead to one of these centers and had it done. I do think this is going to lead to more abuse of women, because these technologies are now available. People will say, well, you can go and get this done and have a son. So why won’t you?”*

*~Aparna (name changed), age 28*

*~ Interviewed by Sunita Puri, UC Berkeley*

## Results of Sex Selection in India, China, and Korea



- India: 927 females to 1000 males (2001)
  - 766 females in some districts
  - 2 child norm
- Korea: 862 females to 1000 males (1990)
- China: 833 females to 1000 males (2004)
  - 1 child policy

# Marketing Of Sex Determination to South Asians in the U.S.



- “Desire a Son?” Advertisements in *India Abroad*, offering male-specific selection
- Advertisements in South Asian languages, specifically Punjabi
- Guarantees in advertisements that providers speak South Asian languages (such as Hindi and Punjabi)
- Use of images containing “South Asian-looking” people

# Ad for MicroSort in India Currents



## A BOY OR A GIRL

The choice is yours. Safe, effective, and confidential.  
**YOU CAN CHOOSE THE GENDER OF YOUR BABY**  
Using the Ericsson method of Sperm Separation and intra-uterine insemination.  
"75-80% OF COUPLES PARTICIPATING IN GENDER PRE-SELECTION HAVE A  
BABY OF THEIR CHOSEN GENDER."  
Call now for a free brochure or office consultation  
**SURESH R. NAYAK M.D. Inc.**  
Diplomate, American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology  
303 North 15<sup>th</sup> Street (Fifteenth and Julian) #D  
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# “Mainstream” Marketing Of Sex Determination in the U.S.



- **“Pink or Blue?” and “Family Fun”**
- **“Baby Gender Mentor: For the Woman Who Can’t Wait to Open Her Christmas Presents”:**  
*“Knowing the gender of your unborn baby helps prepare for your baby’s birth: you can decorate the nursery, choose your baby’s name, and make gender-specific purchases during your pregnancy.”*
- **“Family Balancing” and “Gender Variety”**

## Concerns about sex selection



- Reinforces gender essentialism
- Contributes to sex discrimination
- Commodification of children
- Slippery slope toward selection of other features; normalizes “selection” and “design” of children: what next?

## Concerns (cont.)



- Normalizes son preference and the “practice” of sex selection in South Asian communities
- Increases risk for pre- and post-partum abuse
- Strengthens patriarchal practices and power imbalance between men and women
- Increases risk for neglect and abuse of girls
- Elimination of increasing number of girls from APA communities

# Challenges



- Redefining meaning of “choice” with regard to sex selection
- Raising awareness about coercion around reproductive matters
- Preventing sex selection without threatening abortion rights
- Seeing sex selection practices within larger context of new reproductive and genetic technologies

## International Policies



Countries that permit sex selection only for “medical reasons” but prohibit it for “cultural reasons,” “family balancing” or any other purpose:

*Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Germany, India, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom*

## U.S. Policies



- No regulation of sex selection either pre-conception, pre-pregnancy, or during pregnancy
- American Society of Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) has voluntary “regulation” of PGD and Microsort

## Call to Action



- Use human rights and reproductive justice frameworks for advocacy agenda
- While protecting women's right to abortion, develop regulation for selection technologies
- Ban the marketing and promotion of sex selection technologies
- Work to end supply and demand for sex selection technologies
- Promote better community understanding of dynamics of male child preferences