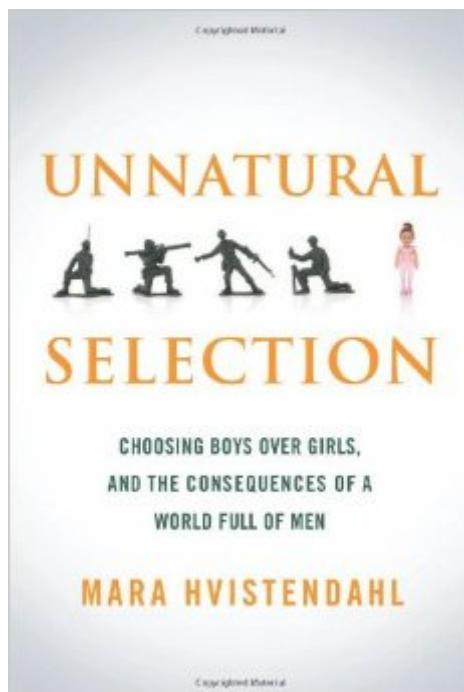


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Unnatural Selection: Choosing Boys Over Girls, And The Consequences Of A World Full Of Men



Synopsis

Finalist for the Pulitzer PrizeFinalist for the Los Angeles Times Book PrizeA Wall Street Journal Best Book of 2011A Slate Best Book of 2011A Discover Magazine Best Book of 2011Lianyungang, a booming port city, has China's most extreme gender ratio for children under four: 163 boys for every 100 girls. These numbers don't seem terribly grim, but in ten years, the skewed sex ratio will pose a colossal challenge. By the time those children reach adulthood, their generation will have twenty-four million more men than women. The prognosis for China's neighbors is no less bleak: Asia now has 163 million females "missing" from its population. Gender imbalance reaches far beyond Asia, affecting Georgia, Eastern Europe, and cities in the U.S. where there are significant immigrant populations. The world, therefore, is becoming increasingly male, and this mismatch is likely to create profound social upheaval. Historically, eras in which there have been an excess of men have produced periods of violent conflict and instability. Mara Hvistendahl has written a stunning, impeccably-researched book that does not flinch from examining not only the consequences of the misbegotten policies of sex selection but Western complicity with them.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The book was often one sided and superficial. I have no doubt that sex selection, male or female, is unethical and fraught with negative consequences, as partially outlined by Hvistendahl. I agree that it should be outlawed internationally, and that better enforcement of existing laws is essential. However, clearly there is more to reversing this phenomenon than simply making it illegal and

punishing those involved. We need to address the reasons that boys are preferred in the first place. Hvistendahl did not offer a clear explanation for why parents prefer boys to girls in societies around the world and what we can do to increase the value of women. To me, that is the obvious solution. The research was often lacking. I was left with more questions than answers. For example, I wonder what the fate would be of millions of unwanted children (girls). For the women who were sold into arranged marriages, what was their alternative? What would their lives have been like otherwise? Some idea of the other side would have been helpful. I also wonder how much truth there is to the statement that "After years of penalties for out-of-quota births, incentivized sterilizations, and forced abortions, Korean women had finally given in and stopped having children." That seems like an overly simplified explanation for a much more complex social phenomenon. Births rates have fallen to similar levels in many countries without those forces at play. The birth rate in the Ukraine currently is 1.12 children per woman and in Greece 1.25 children per woman; these countries are historically and culturally different from each other and from South Korea.

Mara Hvistendahl makes an interesting point. It is evident that easy availability of abortion clinics (Marie Stopes) and of ultra-sound diagnostic tests has helped make it easier for Indians to get rid of unborn daughters with less fuss and qualms than before. Secondly, the Government's vigorous promotion of a two-child family norm and its wide-spread social acceptance would tempt many into 'ensuring' they had a son while sticking to the two-child norm. Kishore Mahbubani (Can Asians Think?) has also pointed to the influence that Aid agencies and rich nations exercised over population control in Asian nations. This appears to be true - for India at least. However, the preference for sons over daughters appears to be an ancient one, and widely reflected in Hindu literature and mythology. King Pandu, in Mahabharat, asks only for sons and ends up with five. His elder brother, Dhritarashtra has 100 sons, and only one daughter. King Dashrath has four children in old age - all sons. King Sagar has 60,001 children - all male. Ultrasound technology probably means that what was once sought as a divine boon is now available over the counter, for a few thousand rupees. The shortage of women in ancient India may also be corroborated by the practice of bride-price, which was later condemned as uncivilized behaviour, amounting to sale of daughters. Secondly, mid-wives in India had a versatile tool-kit for killing off unwanted children (whether illegitimate sons or merely female). This indigenous technology certainly did not come from the West. However, it worked only when the child was born. To counter this, the smritis (codes of conduct) recommended social ostracism for those who aborted a foetus.

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