

We Want He, Not She

The Debilitating Son Preference that Leads to Gender Inequality (A
Multi-Generational Perspective)

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| We Want He, Not She..... | 1 |
| The Debilitating Son Preference that Leads to Gender Inequality (A Multi-Generational Perspective)..... | 1 |
| Introduction..... | 3 |
| Log..... | 4 |
| Chapter 1: Is Gender Even Real? Why do We Make such a Big Fuss Out of It?..... | 6 |
| Chapter 2: Where Are All The Women?..... | 10 |
| Chapter 3: Girls Online..... | 14 |
| Conclusion..... | 18 |
| Annotated Reference List..... | 19 |
| Primary Research: Interviews..... | 19 |
| Content Analysis: Social media platforms - Instagram, TikTok, Facebook. (2020-2024 content, collected May 2024)..... | 21 |
| Personal Reflection - Completed 01/03/2024..... | 22 |
| Secondary Research..... | 23 |

Introduction

The focus of my research is to evaluate the negative effects of the debilitating son preference around the world. I have summarised my hypothesis which is that the social phenomenon of gender reveal parties perpetuates sexism and encourages son preference within families. This misogyny infiltrates the seemingly harmless gender reveal parties. Families harbour such prejudice to an extreme degree which damages each individual who grows up carrying misogynistic beliefs in preferring sons over daughters, continuing the generational cycle. I chose the topic of gender reveal parties reflecting gender inequality as a way to examine the context and experience of childhood depending on your gender. The topic of gender reveals and gender inequality contributes to a better understanding of Society and Culture by developing social and cultural literacy by observing and asking questions about social structures of life, as well as having a sense of social responsibility by having concerns about the social and emotional welfare of children posted online by their parents. The cross-cultural component of my PIP is the generational differences between Generation X (1965-1980)¹ and Generation Z (1997-2012)² in perspectives on the values of daughters or sons. My mother is in Generation X and I am in Generation Z so that is why I picked my cross-cultural component to be Gen X in comparison to Gen Z. I used both primary and secondary research, with my primary research methods including content analysis, interviews, and a personal reflection. I analyse the continuity in gender reveals and debilitating son preferences but also the changes in family values that are beginning to regard daughters with equal respect to sons.

¹ Primary Research: Interview A, B & C

² Primary Research: Interview D

Log

I had an interest in societal son preferences when I saw such patriarchal dynamics on display within multiple families who favour their sons and prioritise sons instead of their daughters. My parents believe my older brother is much smarter, more capable, and wiser than me. Yet age can also be a factor in unfair treatment, as many societies around the world believe the eldest should always be male if possible. This topic is relevant to me as I have been invited by a cousin to a gender reveal party and have seen the gender roles prevalent in such social events. Once I delved into the topic of gender inequality from childbirth I was surprised at how controversial and deeply emotional it all was. Selecting questions for the interviews was quite challenging as it had to be specific to each person, and I was careful not to write questions that could come off as 'offensive' relating to cross-cultural aspects of the PIP.

An aspect of the PIP that was challenging was choosing primary research methods that would be the most efficient and yield the best results. My three primary methods were interviews, content analysis and personal reflection. The interviews conducted with four people from various backgrounds allowed me to understand the nuance and experience of people across the world from different ethnicities in a qualitative way. The quantitative aspect of my PIP was the online content analysis for posts on Instagram and TikTok. I counted the views and likes, as well as I analysed the top comments on each post. I noted the connection and relationship to controversial posts about gender reveal parties and the amount of toxic comments enabled in the posts. Then my personal reflection prepared me to commit to a thorough examination of my internal thoughts and feelings in regards to gender inequality across both Western and non-Western nations.

In completing this PIP, I have grown immensely in my capacity to empathise with different societies and cultures, as well as considering the impact of technology as

well as continuity. I have also learnt to become sensitive to major national and global issues such as poverty, child abuse and conflict.

Originally, my cross-cultural aspect was going to be a focus on China and India, but realising I had no willing participants who had personally experienced intense son preference and witnessed female infanticide, I changed the cross-cultural aspect to generational differences in perspectives with Generation X and Generation Z. Overall, my evolving steps of processes in regards to the PIP was a highly valuable experience to further my research skills and achieve comprehension for the topic of gender inequality and the social phenomenon of gender reveal parties. The PIP process was beneficial for me to increase my social and cultural literacy. I was able to engage with ideas that I had not had a sufficient opportunity to interact with before researching for my PIP.

Chapter 1: Is Gender Even Real? Why Do We Make such a Big Fuss Out of It?

The social construction of gender has manifested in many ways throughout Western culture. In the modern turn of events, the phenomenon of a gender reveal party to celebrate a couple's daughter or son often means a display of inadvertent misogyny, gender inequality and stereotypes.³ Ideas like 'girls can only like pink', and 'boys can only like blue and are always strong.' Being constantly set as expectations by parents, particularly fathers and their agendas brought on by previous generational societal expectations, can damage the identity of both women and men who grow up in households that prioritise sons over daughters. The damage of gender inequality runs deep within our society over thousands of years. Still, attitudes and parents have changed in the last couple of years in a positive turn of events.

The social phenomenon of a gender reveal party started in early 2008 with a woman named Jenna Karvundis.⁴ She had made a cake which when cut was filled with pink icing, symbolising that she was having a girl. This was a relatively simple and easy concept to understand and which she would think would make relatives and friends alike approve. This simple social gathering to celebrate was liked by many on Karvundis's online blog and her post soon went viral, trending around America. Who didn't love a good old celebration? And who didn't love babbling babies? But soon these gender-reveal parties erupted and became a huge trend globally.⁵ And it was soon shown that gender-reveal celebrations went from cakes to balloons to pinatas to explosions and could eruptively get out of hand. In 2021, a Californian couple was accused of more than thirty different criminal charges after starting a 9,300-hectare fire by using a pyrotechnic device to try and reveal the gender of their baby. The

³ Primary Research Method: Content Analysis

⁴ J. Karvundis & M. Langmuir, (2020), The Guardian, 'I started the 'Gender Reveal Party' trend and I regretted it.'

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/jun/29/jenna-karvundis-i-started-gender-reveal-party-trend-regret#:~:text=And%20I%20regret%20it,-This%20article%20is&text=In%202008%2C%20while%20pregnant,and%20her%20post%20went%20viral.>

⁵ L. King-Miller, (2019), Vox, 'Gender reveal parties have been so widely embraced- and reviled,' <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2019/7/31/20708816/gender-reveal-party-social-media-game-pink-blue-fire>

Eldorado Fire⁶ destroyed twenty buildings, including homes, and ended the life of a firefighter. Another tragedy struck in the U.S. when a family accidentally built a gender-reveal pipe bomb that exploded and the shrapnel struck an elderly woman, instantly killing her. Undoubtedly, the social phenomenon of gender reveal parties is highly impactful on the cultural notion of how we construct gender, but also very deadly.

Gender reveal parties are a symbol of the restrictions placed by the patriarchy. That gender reveals only promotes the gender binary and a narrow perspective of viewing the world through a lens of conservatism. Ideas like blue is for boys and pink is for girls, with no in-between. Parents place different and unequal standards because of the baby's sex even before the child is born. Gender reveal parties promote a gender bias from parental attitude which can be prevalent throughout a child's life and affect them in negative ways, a study from Birmingham City University found⁷. "If we impose rigid ideas of masculinity and femininity on children, we limit their potential and cause real harm later in life." Neuroscientist Cordelia Fine, in her book 'The Delusions of Gender'⁸, affirms that the 'majority of gender differences are not biologically determined but created by social constructs in our environment.' It is in the crucial years of childhood when progressive education is a critical transformative factor that parents should teach while their child is growing up. If a parent teaches conservative and traditional gender stereotypes to children, they will surely bring children up in a gender-discriminatory environment that will negatively affect them. By 18 to 24 months, a child develops the ability to assign gendered labels to people, and by the age of three, a child can identify themselves with a particular gender.⁹ The cliché, patriarchal themes of a typical gender reveal party reaffirm that

⁶ G. Canon, (2021), *The Guardian*, 'Californian Couple whose gender-reveal party sparked a wildfire charged with 30 crimes', <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/feb/12/california-gender-reveal-party-wildfire-guilty#:~:text=Refugio%20Jimenez%20Jr%20and%20his,the%20dry%20grass%20on%20fire.> Accessed 25/07/2024

⁷ E. Pemberton, Birmingham City University, (2023), 'Gender Stereotypes in Childhood: What's the Harm?' <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/education-and-social-work/research/cspace-blog/gender-stereotypes-in-childhood-whats-the-harm> Accessed 26/04/2024

⁸ T. Apter, *The Guardian*, (2010), 'Delusions of Gender: The Real Science Behind Sex Differences by Cordelia Fine', <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/oct/11/delusions-gender-sex-cordelia-fine> accessed 25/07/2024

⁹ Mayo Health Clinic, (2020) 'Children and Gender Identity: Supporting Your Child' <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/childrens-health/in-depth/children-and-gender-identity/art-20266811> Accessed 24/07/2024

conservative parents will teach their kids that “Girls should wear pink and dresses,” or “Boys are strong!” and that parents also teach, whether consciously or subconsciously, there are two distinct gender categories that should never cross or merge. This ultimately damages a child’s freedom of expression, as the child may fear the repercussions from parents and adults of not conforming to gender ideals, resulting in the absence of positivity for themselves.¹⁰

The parents who post their extravagant and often problematic gender reveals online on social media platforms like TikTok or Instagram are often bombarded with mixed comments or even backlash from left-leaning internet users and praise from right-leaning internet users. But both parties mainly target the mother of the child. Often these women are the ones running the social media accounts, and get the blame for following the problematic trend of a gender reveal party. This trend of criticising mothers or mothers-to-be for accusations of neglect or even abuse for implementing harsh gender biases onto their children highlights the influence of the barely concealed patriarchy that blames women, especially mothers. Women and mothers are often scapegoats for family issues and are blamed when those who most likely cause them are the abusiveness and ignorance of the male father.¹¹ A commenter on TikTok states, “My father cried when I was born because I was a girl and that messed me up. You [the mother] should be ashamed of yourself.” The fathers at gender reveal parties often react negatively to pink confetti, their body language suggesting that they are reluctant to raise a girl. This negative reaction can escalate into breaking and destroying objects, stabbing tables, swearing profusely, and mentally breaking down. Globally and within Australia, there is an epidemic of absent or abusive fathers which brings a fully permanent, and significant amount of psychological and emotional damage to the children. Societally, it is expected of the mother to be responsible for the children, not the father. The Australian Institute of Families Study Survey in 2014¹² states that mothers are granted custody the majority of the time with 46%. In contrast, fathers are only granted custody the majority of the time with a mere 3%. Mothers are even blamed both offline and online for the toxic

¹⁰ E. Grinberg, (2018) *CNN*, ‘This is What Happens when Gender Roles are Forced On Kids’,

¹¹ (2022), *Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare*, ‘Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Summary Report’ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Personal Safety Survey

¹² Unknown, (2015) *Australian Family Lawyers*, ‘What are the Mothers Versus Fathers Custody Statistics in Australia?’

behaviour of both their children and their spouse. Societally, humanity must agree that both the roles of the father and mother are equally important in raising a child and without one, there would be a plethora of consequences and effects.

There has been an increasing amount of social activist movements regarding the social standards surrounding the concepts of gender inequality and biases, including spreading awareness about the problematic nature of gender reveals themselves. Modern feminism believes that couples should aim for a unisex upbringing, rather than redundantly focusing on its gender. Social movements like fourth-wave feminism are calling for more present and open-minded fathers who are in touch with their emotions, which is in a traditional sense not encouraged. The common sentiment is that “Boys and men can’t have feelings or else they’ll be weak,” Not only mentally but also physically weak. Feminism is calling on fathers to share the responsibilities of household chores and become an equal primary caregiver to their children. To prevent a toxic environment where a child is not able to identify freely due to gender discrimination, both the mother and most especially the father should be open-minded and self-aware of how their conservative and restrictive parenting may negatively affect their kids. Not only feminism but also the event of the COVID-19 lockdown has influenced more fathers to spend quality time with their children. 61%¹³ of Dads reported spending more time helping their children with homework. The COVID-19 Lockdown initiated a conversation about the unequal treatment of girls in comparison to their brothers in the home setting, as well as how fathers can respond better to taking care of their children, relieving some of the stress and blame that mothers face by themselves.

¹³ J. Baxter, M. Budinski, M. Carroll & K. Hand, (September 2020), *Australian Institute of Family Studies*, ‘Life During COVID-19: Dads Spend More Quality Time with Kids’, <https://aifs.gov.au/research/research-reports/life-during-covid-19-dads-spend-more-quality-time-kids> Accessed 23/07/2024

Chapter 2: Where Are All The Women?

The desperation of a family's desire for a son is a global phenomenon, not just tied to the West. Although the West believes it is ultimately separate from distant foreign cultures of the globe, patriarchal standards against women remain dominant in almost every culture on the planet. The collective hatred against women is so pervasive and controlling over society and families that the phenomenon of female infanticide and abortion of female fetuses has become a horrific epidemic in the 20th century and into the 21st century as well.¹⁴ This continued trend of disowning daughters and cold-blooded femicide leads to a deeply unbalanced gender ratio, leaving 'leftover men' in countries like China and India, the men of these nations believing the cause of the issue and the blame falls on women themselves. This misconstrued mindset ultimately leads to a damaging and repeating cycle of misogyny felt most in developing countries that are affected the most by deadly cultural expectations towards gender.¹⁵

The medical concept of abortion is fraught with political controversy both throughout the West and the Eastern Sphere. One of the online comments in reaction to a gender reveal party states that "Would rather have an abortion than raise a child with a man who hates females." But abortion on the grounds of gender, mostly female, is a topic not widely known. About 70% of all abortions performed in Delhi, India, are terminated due to the foetus being female.¹⁶ Although sex-selective abortion was officially banned in India in 1994, readily available private and illegal clinics still offer these services to Indian women. Culturally, 40%¹⁷ of Indians believe it is 'completely acceptable or somewhat acceptable' to "get a checkup using modern methods to

¹⁴ *British Broadcasting Channel (BBC)*, (2014) 'Ethics- Female Infanticide' https://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/abortion/medical/selective_1.shtml#:~:text=Sex%20selective%20infanticide,parental%20care, Accessed 26/07/2024

¹⁵ Primary Research: Interview C

¹⁶ Z. Imam, (1994) National Institute of Health, '*India bans female feticide.*' <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/7920120/>, Accessed 2/08/2024

¹⁷ *Pew Research Centre*, (2022) 'How Indians View Gender Roles in Families and Society: Son Preference and Abortion' para. 3 <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/03/02/how-indians-view-gender-roles-in-families-and-society/> Accessed 25/07/2024

'balance' the number of girls and boys in the family."¹⁸ The biased preference for males in the family leads to an ironically unbalanced gender ratio throughout the population. The most recent Indian census states that there are 942 girls for 1,000 boys. This dilemma is faced not only by India but other developing countries such as China which gives it the nickname of the nation of "missing women". Close to around 400,000 births of female babies do not occur due to sex-selective abortions, post-natal discrimination and male preference.¹⁹ The need for a son in the family also is a huge issue in China where the effects of the One Child Policy, a law only allowing families to have one child, are still felt today. The Chinese government implemented legislation of population control for the perceived general health in 1980. Due to the deep-rooted misogyny and patriarchal standards within China, families would prefer to have one son over one daughter. The Chinese traditional cultural norms encouraged low-income families to abandon their daughters or even resort to homicide. The cultural logic of this crime states that eventually, the daughter will transfer her emotional and economic loyalties to her husband's family, which leaves no secure future economic stability for her parents as they get old.

The reason why couples want a son for a multitude of reasons- each deeply rooted in thousands of years of global preference for wanting a boy over a girl. Many developing nations that do not have wealth or good healthcare systems have negative biases against women. Former U.S. President Barack Obama said, "You can judge a nation, and how successful it will be, based on how it treats its women and girls."²⁰ Former First Lady Michelle Obama also comments that "The measure of any society is how it treats its women and girls."²¹ Since the dawn of civilisation men

¹⁸ Pew Research Centre, (2022) *'How Indians View Gender Roles in Families and Society: Son Preference and Abortion'*
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/03/02/how-indians-view-gender-roles-in-families-and-society/> accessed 24/07/2024

¹⁹ J. Kingsland, Medical News Today (2021) *'Sex Selective Abortions Could Lead to 4.7m 'missing' female births'*
<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/preference-for-sons-could-lead-to-4-7-m-missing-female-births> accessed 2/08/2024

²⁰ B. Obama, *National Archives*, (2014) *Council of Women and Girls*,
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/22/remarks-president-and-vice-president-event-council-women-and-girls> Accessed 23/07/2024

²¹ M. Obama, *National Archives*, (2016) *US Election Speech*,
<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/7978773-the-measure-of-any-society-is-how-it-treats-its> Accessed 23/07/2024

have declared themselves as better and superior than women. Women and mothers have therefore convinced themselves that this is true, leading to the better treatment of sons in general over girls. A question that is often asked in families is, 'Who will look after the parents in their older years?'²² Since the daughter is transferred to another family, many cultures around the world require the son to take care and take control of their family and inherit their assets, and also look after the parents in their senior years. Sons will carry the family legacy and lineage, which in many cultures is extremely important. The legacy of the family name will be continued, and if a son cannot be produced, this often means that the family line will end. Many cultures, including Western cultures, consider this to be a great shame and will do anything to prevent this from happening. There is also a common belief that sons will be more successful and capable than daughters in their lifetime.²³ These prejudiced beliefs negatively affect a woman's ability to become educated and receive opportunities in life as well as impact girls' and women's physical and mental health. Some families do not believe that women deserve the resources given to them, such as feeding them and giving shelter to them, especially in times of hardships such as famines or natural disasters.

The son preference that is more prevalent in countries like India and China is facing a shortage of women to continue family legacies that were so sought after. This phenomenon is called the problem of 'leftover men'.²⁴ In 2020, there were a reported 30 million Chinese men who were described as 'leftover' and had no spouse. The gender ratio for single people in China is 136:100.²⁵ Chinese men facing these issues usually live in rural areas or towns that are mainly a migrant worker population, where families do not usually play a significant role and it is more likely that populations are made up of one person living alone. As the Chinese media

²² Interview B, Primary Research

²³ M. Krist, *Ethology, Ecology & Evolution*: July Issue, (2010) 'Should Mothers in Poor Condition Invest More in a Daughter or a Son?' <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08927014.2006.9522711> Accessed 25/07/2024

²⁴ W. Sun, *The Guardian*, (2017) 'My Parents Say Hurry Up and Find a Girl: China's Millions of Lonely Leftover Men', <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/sep/28/my-parents-say-hurry-up-and-find-a-girl-chinas-millions-of-lonely-leftover-men> accessed 24/07/2024

²⁵ W. Sun, *The Guardian*, (2017) 'My Parents Say Hurry Up and Find a Girl: China's Millions of Lonely Leftover Men' <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/sep/28/my-parents-say-hurry-up-and-find-a-girl-chinas-millions-of-lonely-leftover-men> accessed 24/07/2024

regularly speaks out about this, Chinese women are aware of their considered 'rarity' and are now raising their standards higher, to choose the most suitable partner. Chinese women can turn down men for any reason and have a wide range of choices. As Chinese men choose a single life, parents are brokenhearted by the discontinuation of the family lineage. It is a repeating process and cycle that when parents choose sons over daughters, they are contributing to a major issue that will see their sons not being able to marry as a result of the skewed gender imbalance. It is unfortunately ironic considering how hypocritical and ironic the effects of the patriarchy are.²⁶

Is the gender imbalance ratio getting better so everyone can benefit? The UN states that although from the 1960s there had been more males than females, by 2050 the worldwide sex ratio is expected to even out.²⁷ The nuclear family structure of a mother and father, with an older son and a younger daughter has been slowly disappearing as social movements of the 20th and 21st centuries create new standards and dissolve old ones in regard to what an idyllic family unit should look like by using the term 'blended families'. The normalisation of son preference is now being shunned due to modern feminist notions of promoting equality for both men and women. In Western nations, this dissolution of nuclear family standards allows for a different perspective of what a family is. Many families have only daughters,²⁸ or only sons and see no difference or which is subjectively considered better or worse. There is hope that developing countries also adopt this sense of gender equality and rather desire a healthy child no matter its gender. The differences and similarities between Western nations versus developing countries regarding family structure and gender preferences, although prevalent in Western nations like the UK, Australia, and the United States, are extremely dominant in countries such as India and China to the extent where female infanticide is almost normalised in a culture that loathes women and upholds the patriarchy by oppressing females, even before birth. This marginalisation has dire consequences for the future of the world in its forms of low birth rates, leftover men and female infanticide and missing women.

²⁶ Primary Research Method: Personal Reflection

²⁷ United Nations World Population Prospects, (2022) 'Global Sex Ratio Expected to Move Toward Balance by 2050'

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/08/31/global-population-skews-male-but-un-projects-parity-between-sexes-by-2050/> accessed 23/07/2024

²⁸ Primary Research: Interview D

Chapter 3: Girls Online

Social media escalates the growing trend of preferring boys to girls, which further perpetuates misogyny globally. Girls are the most vulnerable members of society, even in developed nations. This is why girls being on social media, specifically toxic areas of social media platforms, is deeply harmful to female self-esteem and internal confidence for women and girls growing up in toxic environments deeply rooted in misogyny. Critical internet safety skills must be learnt for all ages and genders, to squash the social phenomenon of gender reveals and uploading the results to the internet as a 'public humiliation ritual'.²⁹ Parents from each generation should learn safety and internet etiquette to keep their children safe from users on the internet who may manipulate the content that is uploaded. Parents should learn not to film themselves or their children for content. This can leave the children vulnerable, especially uploading gender disappointment from gender reveals which can be reviewed by those same children in the future, causing issues in the future. There should be laws in place regarding children on the internet.

Society has continuously failed women since birth. If women are not valued even before they are born, will they be valued after? The answer is no. As girls grow up with the internet, the answer is increasingly becoming clear that society does not value women and girls. If parents are disappointed in their baby's female gender, how will those girls feel when they grow up knowing their birth was a disappointment? This realisation affects women in so many ways and has been made worse after the creation of social media. 62.35%³⁰ of women have said they have experienced abuse on Twitter and other social media platforms. Girls and women are significantly more likely to experience sexual and gender-based abuse

²⁹ Primary Research: Content Analysis

³⁰ Amnesty International, (2018) *'Toxic Twitter: Violence and Abuse Against Women Online'* para. 3 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-1-1/> accessed 27/08/2024

on social media.³¹ Women are the target of gender-based violence both online and offline. This is very alarming as 2 out of 3 girls spend more than one hour on social media every day, according to the Dove Self-Esteem Project.³² If girls' lives revolve around social media, then the prospect of gender-based abuse on social media is daunting and impactful. Young women and girls are being severely impacted by the social media trend of gender reveals and other online trends that are misogynistic towards girls and women.

To prevent gender-based violence from occurring online, individuals using social media should be taught the rules of internet safety. Individuals who are uploading their children online should learn to keep their personal and private information secret and not show their address or their current location to users to protect their children. Gender reveal parties that are uploaded online go against all current user safety protocols- personal information is revealed such as an address, what a person or their family looks like which is easily identifiable, first and last names and age. Criminals can abuse this personal exposure online and steal private data. Therefore it is in the best interests of everyone that gender reveals aren't uploaded to the internet on social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and X (Formerly known as Twitter). Gender reveal trends have become terrifyingly dangerous as cases resulting in death become increasingly apparent for the social phenomenon of gender reveal parties. A user comments on TikTok, "I think people should really stop doing these gender reveals..."³³ garnering 2,334 likes in agreement. The American and Australian governments should enact legislation to ban dangerous internet trends for the safety of children and adults. The Online Safety Act 2021 is a new reformed legislation from 2015 that makes Australia's existing laws about online safety more expansive and specific to protect minors and individuals on the internet. This also includes mechanisms to remove severely abusive and harmful content. It broadens the cyber-bullying scheme and specifies what must happen in response to reports.

³¹Amnesty International, (2018), *'Toxic Twitter: Violence and Abuse Against Women Online'* para. 6 [https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-1-1/accessed 25/07/2024](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-1-1/accessed%2025/07/2024)

³² Dove Beauty, (2023) *'Toxic Beauty Standards on Social Media: The Statistics'* <https://www.dove.com/us/en/stories/campaigns/social-media-and-body-image.html#:~:text=A%20new%20report%20by%20the,makes%20them%20feel%20less%20beautiful>. accessed 25/07/2024

³³Primary Research: Content Analysis

Parents should also learn about internet safety and how to protect their children online. 50% of Australian parents don't know what to do to keep their kids safe on the internet. And just 3% of parents are concerned about online grooming.³⁴ The legal definition of child abuse should be expanded to include technological abuse on social media or manipulation through the devices of social media. This is included in section 91 of the Crimes Act 1900 in Australian Law. It is inherently problematic and can impact families by garnering inappropriate attention, views and comments targeting families and their children on the internet. Family influencers such as the Ace Family and the Labrant family on YouTube and Instagram normalise exploiting children and transforming their children into a brand for content and generating personal profit. An extreme case such as the popular YouTube channel 'DaddyOFive' run by the father Martin was convicted of two counts of child neglect in 2017 over his extreme pranks such as waterboarding targeted towards his children which were uploaded to YouTube. The evidence was all online. These dangerous online stunts negatively impact children who are 'farmed' for content and utilised for monetary value. It is seen as a grey zone in managing the influence of famous families on social media. It is often these family influencers that perpetuate gender stereotypes and continue the gender reveal party trends for views and likes online. Child-based influencers are gaining commercial power and the topics of such channel videos are becoming increasingly more exploitative and questionable. American politician Richard Blumenthal hopes national lawmakers will begin paying attention to the multibillion-dollar unregulated influencing industry, especially when children are involved. "Child labour in the online influencer industry seems fraught with problems," he said in a statement to The Post. "Involving kids in influencing raises serious risks of exploitation — the potential sacrifice of privacy, excessive hours, and lack of fair compensation. They may be providing online content without adequate, or any, protection and oversight."³⁵ One of the children who have grown up non-consensually documented is Cam Barrett, now 24 years old, reflecting on everything her mother put her through online. The childhood trauma permanently

³⁴ Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE), (2024), '*Closing the Net: Policing the Borderless Crime of Online Child Sexual Exploitation*.' <https://www.accce.gov.au/closingthenet> accessed 24/07/2024

³⁵ T. Coleman, (2024) The Week, '*The Not-So-Hidden Dark Side of Child Influencers*' <https://theweek.com/culture-life/personal-technology/child-influencers-Instagram> accessed 1/08/2024

posted onto the internet haunts Barrett as she spreads awareness on her independent TikTok account which garners 163,000 followers as she is an outspoken advocate for the rights of child influencers.

There are many consequences and side effects of becoming a child celebrity online. Child influencers recall that they were bullied in school once peers found personal information online. "Growing up is about establishing your own identity. Not to be pushed into roles you don't want to claim." A previous child influencer, 18-year-old non-binary Chris Mccarty claims.³⁶ Young girls who are forced into the 'kid-fluencer' lifestyle from a young age when they cannot choose are also being forced into inappropriate gender roles that demean or degrade them.³⁷ "Shopping for dresses" or being taught to act 'flirty' in front of the camera to get more views for the channel. Young girls are put into inappropriate outfits such as crop tops or short shorts so viewers will pay more for exclusive content. The Australian not-for-profit organisation Collective Shout campaigns against the exploitation of young girls and women online, started in 2010 by a small group of women. Recent activities of the organisation include taking down and campaigning against companies such as H&M and Shein advertising inappropriate clothes or children's toys in August 2023. Collective Shout also campaigns against sexualising underage girls in advertisements and also reports and shuts down social media accounts exploiting minors with a predatory following. The culture of child internet influencers normalises the sexualisation of young girls and the exploitation of girls and women. This furthers the gender inequality felt in modern society amplified by the rise of the internet in the late 2000s.

³⁶ F. Karimi, (2024), CNN News, *'The First Social Media Babies Are Adults Now. Some are Pushing for Laws to Protect Kids from their Parents' Oversharing'*
<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/05/29/us/social-media-children-influencers-cec/index.html> accessed 24/07/2024

³⁷ C. Hildebrandt, J. Longbottom & D. Karagic, ABC News, (2024) *'The Fan Site Authorities Say is Profiting From the Exploitation and Sexualisation of Children'*
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-05-20/kidfluencers-children-brand-army-social-media-four-corners/103820492> accessed 2/08/2024

Conclusion

From negative reactions of gender disappointment from parents who realise their child is a girl,³⁸ to the illegal dumping of female babies resulting in female infanticide and destructive forest fires caused by gender reveals, the debilitating son preference leads to the defilement of the dignity of women and girls worldwide. The evolution and the waves of feminism help young women and girls to prosper in a world where they are set back and murdered for being female. Mothers and fathers are learning to turn their backs on the traditional values of the patriarchy and learning to value daughters as equals to their sons. The rights of children, especially the rights of girls around the world are better than ever before. The humanity and consciousness of children are being recognised as essential as parents recognise Generation Alpha will be the future. The fear of the degeneracy of the internet rewinding the clock on the triumphs of feminism is unfortunately still and will continue to be a reality. Meaning families, communities and the macro world must continue to be vigilant in protecting women and girls from gender-based violence and discrimination.

³⁸ Primary Research: Content Analysis

Annotated Reference List

Primary Research: Interviews

Interview A - Generation X, 1. Parent (07/02/2024)

My first interview was with a Generation X parent. As a Gen X parent, when asked “My first question for you, who is a mother of two children, did you ever want to have a gender reveal party?” She replied, “No. We never even discussed it. I think because we were older parents and it seems to be a thing for the younger generation.” This revealed useful insight into generational differences in regard to gender reveal parties being a new social phenomenon starting in the early 2010s. Interviewee A also personally experienced gender inequality as her parents desperately wanted a son but instead got three girls, which provided valuable and nuanced details on what it must have been like to be the youngest of three girls in an era where daughters weren’t valued as much as sons.

Interview B - Generation X, 2. Principal (15/02/2024)

My second interview was with a Northern Sydney high school principal who was asked “Have you ever experienced or heard about the preference for sons over daughters? What are your opinions on the matter?” to which Interviewee B responded that his neighbours were delighted to hear that his second child was a boy, ‘as if his birth was filling a void at that stage.’ This highlights the pressure families feel in trying to maintain and achieve societal standards.

Interview C - Generation X, 3. Teacher (05/02/2024)

My third interview was with a teacher at that same high school. Her ethnic background included India which I have included in Chapter 2 of my PIP. "Have you experienced, or do you know the cultural demand for having boys to carry on the family line? What are your thoughts about this?" This array of questions allowed for nuanced responses and insight into international perspectives on how daughters and sons are valued differently. Her response to this question stated "Wanting a son for the purpose of property ownership and family name was common in India decades ago. It is still prevalent in certain pockets (mostly smaller towns and villages) and among certain groups; however, the law does not permit discrimination on the basis of gender for most things." She has only one daughter which she preferred over a son.

Interview D - Generation Z. Student Peer (22/02/2024)

Interview D was useful for understanding the complexity of generational misogyny within families. Family reactions and actions towards patriarchal expectations of children determine how harmonious a family can be in terms of both genders becoming equal. My interview included common questions different for each individual. Questions like "Did your parents ever want a son?", "Were your parents disappointed that they didn't have a son?" This array of questions allowed for nuanced responses and insight into international perspectives on how daughters and sons are valued differently. My hypothesis of deep gender prejudice was highlighted within these answers.

Interviewee D answered: "Yes, my parents did want a son, my mum especially. So when they fell pregnant with me (unexpectedly), they wanted to know the gender in advance of my birth so they could focus on their new baby and not my gender. So yes when they found out I was going to be a girl they were a bit disappointed (they also knew I would have to be their last child as my mother's body was severely

damaged from her first two births), however, they moved on fast and started to enjoy the idea of having three daughters. However, they still decided to keep the gender a secret between them until I was born. This meant that my mother faced a lot of external comments on how she probably wished it was a boy. Yes at first that was the idea, but she grew to be happy about it, and the fact that everyone hoped her baby would be a boy, because the thought of having another girl was so awful, it really affected my mum. She just wanted a healthy baby, and it wasn't up to others to determine what the baby 'should' be."

**Content Analysis: Social media platforms - Instagram, TikTok, Facebook.
(2020-2024 content, collected May 2024)**

The quantitative and qualitative methods of content analysis were extremely helpful in developing research for my PIP. I analysed different social media platforms including Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. The content analysis was focused on gender reveal parties which were posted on the internet for public consumption. One of the videos even garnered 51 million views. The content analysis is useful for gathering the macro world or the majority perspective on social phenomena like gender reveal parties. The quantitative unit of analysis was the recorded the number of views, likes, top comments, the description of reactions from the participants, and which country the video was posted in. The reliability and accuracy of the content analysis were quite low as it had its limitations with analysing apps like TikTok and Instagram which online content that appears is often misinformation. The qualitative aspect of the content analysis method was recording the top comments of the most popular gender reveal videos online. These top comments were extremely useful in measuring the scale of consequences that are caused by gender reveal parties. One user commented, "He's still going to have to explain to his next daughter why his first reaction to finding out about her was to be angry and upset." The primary method of content analysis was a core part of my Personal Interest Project (PIP) in how specifically Western societies react to the social phenomenon of gender reveal parties.

Personal Reflection - Completed 01/03/2024

The primary qualitative method of personal reflection was necessary to construct ideas on the impact of gender disparity within families. 'As I am the youngest out of two, I only have an older brother who through personal experience has recognised that my parents have desired both genders, preferably the son to be the eldest.' My personal reflection allowed me to effectively acknowledge how deep gender inequality and the patriarchy run in micro-aspects of my life and within my own family. My ultimate consideration of a compilation of my experiences being a woman, and for a short period of time identifying as a man, allowed me to see both sides of the same coin. At the same time, I tried to make myself aware of the inherent bias that comes with choosing a personal reflection as a primary method of research. The one-sided nature of a personal reflection is one of its biggest limitations.

Secondary Research

Books

C. Fine, 'Delusions of Gender: The Real Science Behind Sex Differences', W.W Norton & Company, 2011, pg. 35-68.

Chapters 2 and 3 of the 'Delusions of Gender' by Cecilia Fine allowed me to understand how gender itself is socially structured and how the construction of gender is completely different to the biological reality of sex. How the false notion that men's and women's brains are wired differently is only backed up by pseudo-scientific biased research that should not be widely credited. Delusions of Gender criticises the patriarchy which has infiltrated scientific foundations between the facts of men and women.

Journals

Richardson, A. & N. Golden, 'Fawcett Research Shows Gender Stereotypes As A Child Causes Harm In Later Life', *Fawcett Society*, [journal] published: 7/03/2019

<https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk>

[/news/fawcett-research-exposure-gender-stereotypes-child-causes-harm-later-life](https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/fawcett-research-exposure-gender-stereotypes-child-causes-harm-later-life)

Accessed 26/07/2024

This article highlights the deep-rooted gender-based oppression that girls and women feel within their own families. The limitation of this journal article is that it is biased and the statistics used are from its research. Quotes used are also from the Chief Executive of the Fawcett Society, which is the publisher of this article.

Fabes, R. A., Martin, C. L., Hanish, L. D., Galligan, K., & Pahlke, E. (2015). Gender-Segregated Schooling: A Problem Disguised as a Solution. *Educational Policy*, 29(3), 431-447. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904813492382> accessed 26/07/2024

This journal article highlights the false assumptions that girls are not equal to boys in the school setting through misinformed and bigoted beliefs. The limitation of this article is that it makes no mention of gender reveal parties, only writing about the macro-sense of misogyny.

King, T. L., Scovelle, A. J., Meehl, A., Milner, A. J., & Priest, N. (2021). Gender stereotypes and biases in early childhood: A systematic review. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 46(2), 112-125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1836939121999849>

The systematic review of gender stereotypes and biases in early childhood from children as young as 12 months old to 12 years old. This is useful for my PIP as it delves into social role theory and how these are shared expectations of people in different social standings. It is reliable as a medical and scientific journal.

Zhang, L., & Eggum, N. D. (2023). Chinese Adolescents' Perceptions of Aggressive Peers: The Roles of Gender and Cultural Values. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 38(15-16), 9343-9368. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605231165751> accessed 26/07/2024

This journal article discusses how aggression is accredited more to boys in China than to girls, when girls do feel rage and aggression almost just as much as boys do, just very well hidden. The limitation of this article is that I could only read a small portion of the article as it was hidden behind a paywall.

Websites

E. Grinberg, 'This is What Happens When Gender Roles Are Forced On Kids', *CNN*

Health [website], Published: 3/11/2018 <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/20/health/geas-gender-stereotypes-study/index.html> accessed 26/07/2024

Displays the limitations felt when gender roles are forced onto children by their own parents. 'Family, friends and society influence impressions of what it means to be a boy or a girl. Placing rigid gender expectations on children from a young age.' A reliable and well-researched author, Emanuella Grinberg, describes the negative consequences of restricting a child's identity in regard to gender. The limitation of this CNN article is that it is based in America, although it can be applied to other Western countries.

E. Pemberton, 'Gender Stereotypes in Childhood: What's The Harm?' *Birmingham City, School of Education and Work*, [journal]
<https://www.bcu.ac.uk/education-and-social-work/research/cspace-blog/gender-stereotypes-in-childhood-whats-the-harm> accessed 25/07/2024

This online article highlights the future implications of gender stereotypes in childhood, leading to the lack of women in STEM in the future. This article also highlights those who refuse to conform and the struggles they face, leading to ostracisation and isolation.

J. Karvundis, 'I Started the Gender Reveal Party Trend. And I Regret It.' *The Guardian* [website], published: 29/06/2020
<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/jun/29/jenna-karvundis-i-started-gender-reveal-party-trend-regret> accessed 26/07/2024

This opinion article examines the interesting origins of gender reveal parties by the original inventor, Jenna Karvundis, which is an influential and persuasive piece on why gender reveal parties should be a thing of the past. Its limitation is that it does not include citations or statistics, making it not very reliable as a source.

'Why Gender Reveals Are Outdated and Need to Stop', *Gender Health Care Centre*, published by Gender GP, 12/11/2022
<https://www.gendergp.com/gender-reveal-parties-are-dumb/> accessed 24/07/2024

This article can come across as biased due to its proclaimed pro-transgender stance, yet it accurately details the consequences and terrible events that are tied to gender reveal parties in places like Mexico, America and Britain.

Status of Women Report Card 2024, *Australian Government*, Working for Women Advocacy, 2024 <https://genderequality.gov.au/status-women-report-cards/2024-report-card> accessed 25/07/2024

A governmental report that provides statistics and reliable and accurate information regarding the current status of women and girls in Australia in regard to misogyny and sexism.

King-Miller, L. 'Why Gender Reveal Parties Have Been So Widely Embraced- and Reviled', *Vox*, [website] 31/07/2019
<https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2019/7/31/20708816/gender-reveal-party-social-media-game-pink-blue-fire> Accessed 25/07/2024

This Vox article provides personal insight into why couples decide to celebrate their baby's gender. Its limitation is that it often uses colloquial language that isn't academic.