

Forget “Be fruitful and multiply”. Today it’s “Be fruitless and subtract” – or else

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HGTV’s popular “Fixer Upper” stars, Chip and Joanna Gaines, recently announced the forthcoming birth of their fifth child, which provoked a social-media [scolding](#) for contributing to the bane of overpopulation.

In an [opinion piece](#) on CBC.ca defending the backlash, Kristen Pyszczyk interprets the Gaines’ decision as a teaching moment for a reminder that, while family size is “a very personal choice,” it is also a choice “that affects everyone who inhabits our planet.” And thus, “it’s actually a conversation we need to have in order to challenge our uncritical acceptance of the life- fulfillment- through- procreation story.”

Is it really? Oh yes, according to Pyszczyk, and it is not enough for people simply to “react” to the Gaines’ worrying expansion of their family, “we need to go much further.” Because, according to “an [article](#) [the author] read in *New York Magazine*,” we are “living through a mass extinction,” so bringing more than one or two children into the world is an environmental crime.

If Pyszczyk, who is clearly a neophyte in the world of climate- change predictions, had taken the trouble to inquire a bit further, she might have discovered the article’s doomsday scenario was regarded with [scepticism](#) by many highly accredited scientists.

But even if it were credible, I am less concerned here with the science than with Pyszczyk’s response to the Gaines’ specific situation. I mean, I could understand Pyszczyk’s chagrin that the Gaines do not share her anguish or fear of mass extinction. I could understand her taking the anecdote as leverage for promotion of smaller families in general. But no, her notion for starting a “conversation” is to punish the Gaines for disrespecting Gaia.

Thankfully, Pyszczyk does not advocate for Joanna undergoing a Mao- style forced abortion. No need, because “shame is a powerful tool for changing behaviour.” So have at them, world, she implies. Twitter swarm them *pour encourager les autres*. Hell hath no fury like the authoritarian left when its theories are ignored.

I have news for Pyszczyk. Not having any children is a decision that, when taken in critical numbers, has a dramatic negative effect as well. Ask the Japanese, whose plummeting [birth rates](#) are causing “economic and social woes never seen before.”

Of course, as an ardent feminist (“feminist” is the first word she chooses to describe herself in her “about the author” section), Pyszczyk would be shocked and scandalized by any call for a public conversation around a woman’s choice to remain childless – or even if she were to announce her fifth abortion. So the hypocrisy in calling for a shaming campaign against those who are actually doing their part to keep Western national replacement rates stable is pretty contemptible.

Righteous depopulators like Pyszczyk are indifferent to the big picture. As it happens, the Gaines are not typical in the West in their wish for a large family, and neither their family, nor the relatively few other big families in America, will have a perceptible impact on the world, other than to offset the alarming rise of childlessness amongst those ideologues and their indoctrinated followers who see fertility as a zero- sum game in which women’s dignity and value to society decreases with every child she has.

As Pyszczyk says, “Women need to be presented with options for a fulfilling life that don’t involve *taking 20 years of their lives* to care for offspring (my emphasis).”

“Taking 20 years of their lives” is a telling phrase. This (presumably childless) writer clearly believes mothering children is time stolen from the opportunity to self- realize as a woman, that it is pure sacrifice rather than, as it is for most women I know, and certainly for me, the central life experience that lends purpose and meaning to every other occupation.

Moreover, Joanna Gaines, supposedly Pyszczyk’s poster woman for her thesis that children impede a woman’s career, undermines the time- stolen theory. She does not seem to experience motherhood as an impediment to professional self- realization. Quite the contrary. She looks like a woman who is having it all.

The future for the developed and developing world is grim. By 2018 65- year- olds will outnumber those under five– a historic first– and by 2050, the median age– now 28– will be over 40.

Autocratic governments can make people have fewer children, but they can’t make people have more. Singapore tried. While modernizing in the 1960s after gaining independence from the British, Singapore’s newly- minted Family Planning and Population Board launched a billboard campaign, messaging “Stop at Two” and “Small Families Brighter Future.” Abortion and sterilization were encouraged at the government’s expense. Maternity leave was denied after two children.

It worked. Singapore reached its fertility rate target of 2.1 in 1976, a 53% plunge over a decade. But it didn’t stop declining as women’s education rates went up. A reverse strategy was implemented. Abortion wasn’t banned, but pre- op counselling was now required for women with three or fewer children. The billboard and media messaging was changed to “Have Three or More Children if you Can.” But no dice. Singapore’s fertility rate in 1960 was 5.45. Today it is 1.1.

I would advise Pyszczyk to rein in her credulity, and expand her knowledge on population alarmism. In 1968, popular scientist Paul Ehrlich published *The Population Bomb* (which he wrote with his wife Anne, who remained uncredited for a time), in which he — they — predicted the world would come to an end in the 1970s, when the planet’s population reached five billion, food would inevitably run out and we would all starve to death.

The world’s population is now at seven billion and leveling off, with global hunger rates rarely a function of food scarcity, and more often a function of bad politics. Women’s fecundity decreases in accordance with their education and cultural equality levels. When their status and opportunities rise, women have fewer children voluntarily, with no need for Soviet- style shaming rituals.

If Pyszczyk really wants to encourage downward population levels, she should be advocating for women’s rights in politically and religiously authoritarian countries.

And she should apologize to the Gaines for her irresponsible, mean- spirited and inciteful public invitation to shame them for a decision that is nobody’s business but their own.

