

Should parents be  
allowed to choose  
sex?



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Sex-selection is the attempt to achieve a desired sex by controlling the gender of the offspring. The selection can be accomplished through pre- and post-implantation of an embryo, as well as at birth. Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) and Microsort technique are two new technological methods used to achieve the embryonic sex selection. Prenatal sex discernment, a blood test to test the fetal DNA after the seventh week of pregnancy, is performed after implantation. Microsort technique is the process where the sperm is sorted to increase the chance the egg is fertilized by a sperm which carrying the desired chromosome. A more precise and accurate, but also more expensive and invasive technique is PGD, a method where the embryos are created and analysed outside the female body or in test tubes before implanted into the female's womb. The genetic disorders at the embryonic stage are screened using PGD. Unfortunately, many American clinics offer PGD as a way to choose their baby's gender by implanting only the fertilized eggs of desired gender into the mother's uterus. Unfortunately, sex selection is illegal in most parts of the world. Several countries like Canada, Australia and also the United Kingdom all have banned the use of PGD for sex selection for nonmedical purposes. In other words, PGD is only justified if a couple has the family history including any sex-linked genetic disorder.

Sex selection has raised a lot of arguments whether parents should allow to choose the gender of their future child or not. Before that, what is the factors causing gender selection? Most of the parents are hoping and praying for a baby of a particular gender. First, Male offspring is desired due to the cultural factors. There are a variety of factors causing males more economically and

socially valuable than females. For example the property inheritance and the family name of the male heirs, and the workforce can contribute more to the income of once family. 1 Women, on the other hand, require the expensive dowries and leave the family upon marriage which are unproductive investment. Since there are many arguments in gender selection, there also rise up the controversy regarding to the abortion or the female infanticide. Although sex-selective infanticide and sex-selective child abandonment is illegal in most parts of the world, they still exist in some countries. The development of ultrasound scanners which can use to determine the sex of unborn children in womb led to the sex-selective abortion, especially in China and India. 2 Due to the cultural factors and also the single-child policy in the 1980s and 1990s, male is the only child that ensured or determined by most of the families. In 2000, 120 boys were born in every 100 Chinese girls. 3 Similarly in India, the illegal ultrasound scanning and also the sex selective abortion of female fetus are widespread. 4 The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) study indicated that “ there are 112 boys for every 100 girls born in Albania, while the figures stand at 110 and 109 boys per 100 girls in Kosovo and Montenegro, respectively”. 5 Besides, the president of

1 Miller, B. D. (1997). *The Endangered se: Neglect of female children in rural North India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2 Greenhalgh, S. (2008). *Just one child: Science and policy in Deng’s China*. University of California Press.

3 *The Economist* (2011, April 7). Add sugar and spice.

4 Lakshimi, R. (2013). Study: Sex-selective Practises May Be Common in Families of Indian Doctors. The Washington Post.

5 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

the population Research Institute, Steve Mosher also provided some important information on sex-selection abortions in the United States through an article at National Review. 6 Dr. Sunita Puri who wanted to find the reason on why many immigrant Indian women in the United States were so eager to know the gender of unborn children and went through abortion if they found out it was not the gender they wanted. Surprisingly, 89% of the women conceiving girls wanted for abortion and nearly half had aborted girls before. 7 Sex selection has raised a lot of arguments whether parents should allow to choose the gender of their future child. Another root problem led to the famous gender selection is from the couples with one or more particular gender of children, in which they has an intensified to have another gender of the child. There was a case of a Scottish couple, Mr and Mrs Masterton who had four sons and lost their only daughter in an accident. They were preparing to challenge the HFE Authority in judicial review due to its refusal in granting the fertility clinic the licence to select the right gender on their embryo to have a girl. 8

There are some points and its corresponding argument in whether the parents should allow to choose their future child's gender. First, the incidence of infanticide can be prevent through gender selection. Some of the cultural places still have high incidence although that it is important of having at least one of the particular gender of the child. So, we can prevent

the trauma and stress of not having a desired gender of the child which might have negative cultural connotations. The advance of technology doesn't enable us to find which gender the child is. Thus, some couples will be disappointed, then, they abort it and try to conceive again. So, wouldn't it be perfect for the person to choose instead of aborting it until they get the right one? Furthermore, the abandon of children is the most common consequence of the gender selection. <sup>9</sup> Some of the parents are willing to throw away their children or hating them because of the undesirable gender. In the past, infanticide was seen the only solution if the infants did not have the desired gender that the parents want. But, now, with the advanced medical technology, many parents are going to have an ultrasound scan to determine the sex of the baby. As the ultrasound test and abortion became more available, the trend toward more boys than girls accelerated steadily after 1986". <sup>10</sup> A former medical director from the country's largest abortion provider had mentioned that it was common for the women to decide to terminate their pregnancies because of the gender of the baby. <sup>11</sup> Besides, the Dr Vincent Argent had a same opinion and he believed that some of the doctor felt it is reasonable and had arranged the terminations relating to the gender of the foetus. <sup>12</sup> The performance of the abortions for the purpose of sex selection is widespread, especially those in South and East Asia like China and India. In India, parents are often willing to pay for an abortion if

<sup>6</sup> Mosher, S. W. (2011). Sex-selective Abortions Come Home. National Review Online.

<sup>7</sup> Puri, S., Adams, V., Ivey, S., and Nachtigall, R. D. (2011). " There is such a thing as too many daughters. But not too many sons": A qualitative study of <https://assignbuster.com/should-parents-be-allowed-to-choose-sex/>

son preference and fetal sex selection among Indian immigrants in the United States. *Social Science & Medicine*, 72(7): 1169-1176.

8 London: HFEA, 2003; [www.hfea.gov.uk/docs/final\\_sex\\_selection\\_main\\_report.pdf](http://www.hfea.gov.uk/docs/final_sex_selection_main_report.pdf)

9 Jha et al. (2006). Low female[corrected]-to-male [corrected] sex ratio of children born in India: national survey of 1.1 million households. *Lancet*, 367: 211-218.

10 Lafraniere, S. (2009). Chinese bias for baby boys creates a gap of 32 million. *The New York Times*.

11 Newell, C. and Watt, H. (2012). Sex-selection abortions are “widespread”. *Telegraph*.

12 Newell, C and Watt, H. (2012). Paragraph 2.

it is a girl. Although sex selection test and abortion have been banned for 15 years in India, the figures still state that there are 750,000 girls are aborted each year. 13 From an article, Harsh reality of India's unwanted girls, some Indians believe it is much better that a girl is killed before born rather after.

14 Although they know it is a sin to abort, they still turn themselves as a blind eye to let the growing incidence of gender selection. Well, the counterpoint of this is the population of course might become imbalanced if most people just choose a particular gender. These imbalances are harmful because it will interrupt or damage the gene population. The imbalance is expected to steadily worsen among people of childbearing age over the next two decades and could trigger a slew of social problems.... “If you've got

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highly sexed young men, there is a concern that they will all get together and, with high levels of testosterone, there may be a real risk, that they will go out and commit crimes” says coauthor Therese Hesketh. 15 An investigative research published in the British Medical Journal, attributed “the imbalance almost completely due to the decision of couples to terminate female fetuses. About a million female fetuses are terminated and 10 in thousands of girls are missing. 16 Most of the Chinese families in China preferred sons which directly increased the rate of female fetus abortion due to the one-child policy. This policy not only increased the abortion rate, but it also led to a gender imbalance. A study has found that there are currently 32 million more boys than girls under the age 20. 17 A similar situation is happening in India too. The data shown that 914 girls are aborted in every 1000 boys in India. 18 The termination of female fetuses is not occurred because the parents do not want and love their daughters, but due to the social reasons making them prefer sons. 19

Second, the parents should have their own freedom of choice. Why shouldn't the parents to decide their own child's gender, given that no harm is done to others in their decision? The article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that: “ Men and Women of full age... have the right to marry and to found a family”. 20 With this right, it should understand and cover the right in making decision on how one family should be built up. Besides, why should a family having a large number of one gender be expropriated of the chance to have a different gender of a child if the technology exists? As the director of the Fertility Institute states: “ these are grown-up people

expressing their reproductive choices... are really happy when they get what they want". 21

13 Prasad, A. (2007). Harsh Reality of India's unwanted girls. BBC News.

14 Prasad, A (2007). Part 2: Dowry burden.

15 Strickland, E. (2009). Sex-selective Abortions in China have produced 32 Million extra boys. The Discover.

16 Leung, M. (2011). A structural model of sex selective abortion: the effect of one-child policy on sex ratio imbalance in china. University of Minnesota and Washington University in St Louis, p. 1-49.

17 Zhu, P. W. X., Lu, P. L., and Hesketh, T. (2009). China's excess males, sex selective abortion, and one child policy from 2005 national intercensus survey. BMJ, 338.

18 Lakshimi, R. (2013)

19 The Economist. (2011)

20 U. N General Assembly. (1948, December 10). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Retrieves from United Nations.

21 Stein, R. (2004). A Boy for You, a Girl for Me: Technology Allows Choice. The Washington Post.

Well, there is the argument where the freedom of choice is important but it should not be conferred at the unconditional love for one's children.

According to the Georgetown professor, the sex selection is a " threat to the

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main value of parenthood that usually expressed by the commitment to unconditional love".<sup>22</sup> As Harvard professor Michael Sandel notes, "consider the father who wants a boy in hopes of having as a son the athlete he had never been. Suppose the son isn't interested in sports... what sorts of expectations will burden a child who has designed with certain purposes in mind?"<sup>23</sup> So, the children should be loved whoever they are, not because they are who we wanted. For that reason, parents should be encouraged to love their children equally regardless of gender, and the freedom of choice should not be allowed in this regard.

Third, the other argument point regarding to the sex selection should be allowed is with sex-specific, the genetic diseases can be prevented. Some family are carriers of the known sex-specific diseases, it is obviously by gender determination can ensure that the disease will avoid from passing to the next generation or their child. Nearly most of the sex-linked diseases are either more serious among one gender or more common in one gender. For example, haemophilia, HIV, colour blindness, and muscular dystrophy are more common to a male suffering from one X chromosome.<sup>24</sup> While, the disease of the immune system is most commonly affected by women.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the Microsoft technique used in sorting the sperm carrying the Y and double X chromosome to determine the gender as well as determining the genetic disorder is carried out. This technique is not harmful to the human genes. Statistical data has shown that over 1200 babies have been born using this advance technology.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, 100% accuracy is not happened for all technology in determining the genetic disease that carries on. Therefore, the medical costs should be considered together with

medical benefits. Pre-implantation genetic diagnosis involved the embryo development outside the womb and then tested for gender. Only the desired gender is implanted in the womb and how about those are not of the desired gender? All the undesired embryo is destroyed. Over a dozen of embryos or human life has been created with the purpose of destroyed, it's also a kind of abortion. The data shown that by using the gender selection technologies, the accuracy rate for choosing a girl is 93% and 82% go to the boys which inevitably most of the selections go for males. 27 Thus, most of the couples are so keen to have a child with particular gender and unwilling to take the risk of having one of other gender. Although the Microsort technique is harmless to the parents, some scientists like Lord Winston expressed the fear that the technique will damage the sperm and genetic mutation might be more likely to occur.

22 Stein, R (2004). Page 4.

23 Stein, R (2004). Page 4.

24 Macnair, D. T. (2010). Fragile X syndrome. BBC Health.

25 Doe, J. (2000). Immune System Disorders. Time.

26 Genetics and IVF Institute. (2008). Microsort. Genetics and IVF Institute.

27 Genetics and IVF Institute. (2008).

However, one of the points against in sex selection is the pre-selection of sex uses costly medical care for frivolous purposes. The treatment required for gender pre-selection was initially designed to prevent the disease. But many

of the patients using the treatment which is capable of conceiving healthy children. A director from the Genesis Genetics Institute said that “ 70% of patients would not have needed IVF, in other words healthy and fertile couples are choosing this higher risk, sometimes painful and also expensive treatment when they could conceive a baby naturally”. 28 But, it still depends on the individuals to make decisions whether this treatment is worth or not. There is an evidence from parents who has gone through the treatment. They said that the sex selection of their children was not a frivolous or ridiculous purpose. Sharla Allen replied “ They are. They’re totally everything I could ever want... but why aren’t having two daughters that will be just as wonderful as they are?” when she was asked whether her three boys had still not been enough for her. 29 So, no-one is harmed in this treatment; thus, it should be the parent’s choice to have the treatment since they know the risks beforehand. On the other hand, the abortion rate can be reduced with this expensive medical technology. The abortion, especially sex selection, is illegal in most of the country. It’s same to India where most of the clinics doing illegal abortion were shut down. However, the reality is that sex-selective abortion is still happening behind the door. Thus, it is difficult to control and its not only restricted to the poor. 30 There is an evidence that happened to Pooja who married to a multi-millionaire industrialist and had 10 years old twin girls. When she pregnant another girl, his husband forced her to abort it even he was rich and afford to grow another daughter. She claimed that a girl would only take money with her to her-in-laws without bringing any wealth in. 31 Due to the this negative mindset, sex-selective abortion becomes even worse from year to year.

Another debate points against the gender selection is the children should not be designed or created to specifications. Children are not pets or toys. So, they are no meant to be designed to let their owner more convenient.

Harvard philosopher Michael Sandel argued that " it runs the risk of turning procreation and parenting into an extension of the consumer society and it is also one step forward in designing baby".<sup>32</sup> The selection of eye colour, hairy ears or hair colour soon will be requested by the parents if the gender selection is allowed. That is only the beginning. This is because we are encouraging the false ideas of perfection if we allowing sex selection.

Moreover, there has been no justification for supporting such indulgence at public expense. The gap will grow even bigger between poor and rich people, as the rich designer will want both their design and the appearance of their children to reflect their property or wealth. Let say, if a gay gene is discovered, would parents be allowed to eliminate embryos containing it? We should follow the idea that we appreciate on everything what we are given. Otherwise, the people will reject their own child more likely when they did not get whatever they want.

28 Gajilan, C. (2005). Gender selection a reality, but is it ethical? CNN Health.

29 Gajilan, C. (2005).

30 Lakshimi, R. (2013)

31 Prasad, A. (2007), Part 3: Tolerated Abortion.

32 Stein, R (2004). Page 1.

In contrast, parents have their own right to choose the gender to build up of their family if the technology is available. This can improve the chances of the child to fit into the dream of their family and they are more likely to get loved. Every individual can choose their own partners, and also have their freedom to choose the time of getting pregnant according to their age, wealth or prosperity. <sup>33</sup> Parents sacrifice so much for their children. They invest a huge amount of their wealth and years of their lives in growing up their children. So, Isn't fair that in return, they get to choose their child with the gender that they want? This is also an extension of the rights of reproductive field. But, according to the report of Nuffield Council on Bioethics, an attitude of natural humility, where the parents accept their children is an important feature of parental love. The love the parents owe their children and not dependent on the characteristics of a child. <sup>34</sup>

Besides, it is a wonder or surprise process in having a child. So, the childbirth should not interfere with human motives. Some people have an opinion that the time of conception is decided by God and do not attempt to play with God. Dr. Mark Hughes, who helped in pioneering the procedure, intended it in preventing the disease of the gender, unfortunately, is not a kind of disease which has no illness and no suffering. <sup>35</sup> Furthermore, many people view that there is no morally difference between the new technologies and the abortion where a potential life is taken away. In 2011, there are 196, 082 abortions in England and wales. <sup>36</sup> How many cases is the consequence of gender selection? The recent news or articles published that the illegal abortion on the grounds of gender might take place in Britain within immigrant communities by analysing the birth statistics. <sup>37</sup> As we know, the

termination of pregnancy based on the gender is illegal in the UK. But, the abortions of fetuses up to 24 weeks are allowed if the pregnancy was on ground of physical and caused psychological risk to the mother, or in cases the child was severely physically or mentally abnormal. 38 According to the recent article by Elena Ralli, there are also evidence shown that the sex-selective abortion is spreading in Europe and the U. S. too. 39 If the sex selection is legalized, it will cause the selective abortion became more common and parents will simply kill a human life legally because they want to choose the desired gender of their child. While, there are some arguments stating that the mystery of childbirth is not easy to shatter. Sharla Miller, who go for gender selection, denies the suggestion that it is like playing God. She believed that it is just like every procedure that medical can do for us. 40 For example, when the elder child suffers from spina bifida, they fixed it out. Were they playing with God? Moreover, the gender selection is important and helpful for parents to plan their child's future like choosing the clothes, naming etc. The sex selection happened in many countries and cultured by abandonment of unwanted babies or selection abortion. Everyone felt that this is a cruel and terrible waste of human life and also very dangerous for the mother. Obviously, many people strongly object the abortion on moral grounds. The development of new technologies in determining the gender in the early stage of pregnancy will definitely reduce and eventually stop the use of selective abortion.

33 Meek, J. (2001). Baby Blues. The Guardian.

34 Nuffield Council on Bioethics, Genetics and Human Behaviour (2002). The ethical context, Para13. 78

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35 Leung, R. (2004). Choose the sex of Your Baby. CBS News.

36 Harker, R. (2012) Statistics on Abortions. Page 2.

37 Mason, R. (2013). The abortion of unwanted girls taking place in the UK. Telegraph.

38 HFE Act 1990, Schedule 2, para 1ZB.

39 Ralli, E. (2013). Alarming rise in abortion of female fetuses in Europe. New Europe Online.

40 Leung, R. (2004).

After stating the arguments arising in whether the sex selection should be permitted and the most serious effect- abortion because of gender selection.

So, what is your opinion on sex-selection? Should the parents be permitted to pre-determine their future child's gender? In my opinion, sex selection

should not be permitted to the parents to choose the gender of their future child. From my perspectives, gender selection is extremely bad for women.

In other words, girls are discriminated by the social. As mentioned above, the cultural preferences for boys led to the male children are more likely to be

educated and employed in good jobs which can earn enough income to support a family. Besides, boys are also expected by the families to

contribute to the family's well-being and take care of aging parents.

Unfortunately, the girls were not only treated as liabilities rather than assets, they also did not have the same treatment in education and employment. 41

But, these ideas were no longer establish in 21st century global culture. We know, of course, that women can also success in education and workplace if

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there is no sex discrimination and they are given the same opportunities as men. Furthermore, women can be the one to help in raising their families and communities out of poverty. Therefore, we should not offer the sex-selection services that support false and outdated aristocracy system.

Next, again sex-selection is not fair to women and even to the baby girl. We know, of course, conceiving a baby need man and woman to work together. It is actually known that the male plays an important role to determine whether the baby conceive is boy or girl. In other words, man is the one who produces heterogametic sperm which containing either X chromosome or a Y chromosome to decide the gender of their child. Why I argued that it is not fair to women? This is because a huge number of husbands keep blaming his wife for not conceiving a boy. What's wrong with the women? Women only provide an immotile egg to let sperms (which decide the sex) to fertilise. Unfortunately, many husbands still push this responsibility to women and give pressure to their wife. The reason why the women felt that they were unable to 'save' their daughter because many women became the victims of family violence when they were carrying girls. Some had been slapped, bumped and shoved around by aggressive husbands and in-laws, or even kicked in the stomach in an effort to let them miscarry. 42 While, some denied food and water in order to coerce them to abort their unwanted girl babies. 43 Most women, who come to the fertility clinic to ask for help in conceiving a boy, are likely under pressure from her husband or her husband's families to avoid from any mishap happened to them. It is not fair to let a woman to undertake this heavy responsibility. Although the reproductive technology today is able to help women free from coercion or



pressure, it is actually bringing to the severe problem later on. It will turn to the continuous controversial if gender selection services are allowed. After helping in relieving the pressure of women from their husband, it comes to other problems where the imbalance sex population occurs. Due to this imbalance population, again more and more problems happened.

41 Pande, R., and Malhotra, A. (2006). Son preference and daughter neglect in India: What happened to living girls? Washington, D. C.: International Center for Research on Women.

42 Raj et al. (2011). Abuse from in-laws during pregnancy and post-partum: qualitative and quantitative findings from low-income mothers of Infants in Mumbai, India. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 15(6): 700-712.

43 Puri et al. (2011). Pg. 1174

If gender selection is permitted, it will bring to the social and economic consequences. Although not every family prefers son over daughter, but it sure will lead to the imbalance of population. For example, the one-child policy which has a limitation on the number of children in each couple, causing the couples with strong son preference. 44 Consequently, the shortage of women in China has disastrous and serious social effect. . For example, in China and India, many young men are unable to find a partner, resulting in the rising of sexual violence, prostitution, kidnapping and forced marriage. 45, 46 In addition, due to the selfishness of the parents to have a male heir and abort the girl fetuses, it may increase the mental health problems and severely abnormal social behaviour among men as well as leaving some men unable to get married and having their own family. 47 The <https://assignbuster.com/should-parents-be-allowed-to-choose-sex/>

sex-selection problem might lead to the marriage squeeze problem which is happening now in China. This problem has commonly happened between the uneducated male in rural area. A study indicated that 15% of uneducated men at age 40 were still single, whereas there are only 0.5% among those were university-educated men in the early 1980s. 48 The percentage keeps increasing from year to year. The Chinese officials predict that " after 2030 some 30 million young men will be unable to find a marriage age". 49 Besides, the sex-ratio imbalance in one country not only increases the crime, but also the number of sex workers with HIV infection and other sexually transmitted diseases. There is evidence that young single men with HIV positive are more likely to pay for sex. 50 There are many negative consequences of sex selection which we can clearly know from some of the country like China and India. So, should the gender selection permitted because of one's individuality?

Moreover, gender selection reinforces in oppressing and false gender roles. This problem is most probably happened to the population which utilizes gender selection technology after having one or more same gender of children. An evidence from the Slate article " How to Buy a Daughter," profiled a woman named Megan Simpson who was grown up in a family of four sisters and like to sew, bake, make up and so on and she wished to share these interests with her girl who can dress in pink. 51 The problem, of course not every little girl like sewing, baking or even dressing up in pink. That's same go to the boys, not every little boy like sports, blue colour shirt. So, the relationship between the gender of children and their preferences is unpredictable, changeable and not exactly like what we think. Why we need

to have a thought that which things are suitable for girls and which one is for boys? Is that good to allow parents to engineer their children based on their interests or the purpose of achieving the cultural norms? The sex-selection should not be allowed due to this reason. The child will be the one to suffer if their interests are entirely opposite with their parent's wish or cultural norms. In this situation, obviously either the child or the parents will disappoint with each other.

44 Leung, M. (2011). Pg 12.

45 Christakis, E. (2013). Rape in India: A Result of Sex Selection? Time.

46 Dagar, R. (2001). Life enhancing mechanisms, life depriving outcomes: case of female foeticide. Chandigarh: Institute for Development and Communication.

47 Leung, M. (2011). Pg 12.

48 Wang, F. (2005). Asia Pacific Issues. East West Centre.

49 Vermeer, E. B. (2006). " Demographic Dimensions of China's Development," Population and Development Review, 32: 115-144.

50 South, S. J., and Trent, K. (2010). " Imbalanced Sex Ratios, Men's Sexual Behaviour, and Risk of Sexually Transmitted Infection in China". Journal of Health and Social Behaviour, 51 (4): 376-390.

51 Sidhu, J. (2012). How to Buy a Daughter. Slate.

In conclusion, so far we have discussed the use of sex selection in a reproductive field, where it is practiced for the purpose of preventing hereditary sex-linked disorders. We see no reason why, if a method to determine the sex of a child before fertilization is developed, this technology should not offer to a couple who have good medical reasons and purposely want to choose the gender of their child. But, if an easy and efficient technique of ensuring the conception of the particular sex of the child became available, some couples would obviously hope to make use of it for the purpose of social reasons. 51 Such decision will affect the family and the children involved and somehow would bring the implications to society. It is actually hard to predict, either in the short or long term, this practice effect on the ratio of the males to females within society. Studies have shown that the majority of couples would choose the boy as their first child. If this happened, it again raises the controversy where there is considerable evidence that the first child may enjoy more advantages over the younger siblings. Since there are difficult to predict the outcome of any such practice, we have not found it possible to amend the laws and regulation in the sex selection.

52 Cmnd 9314, London: HMSO, 1984.