

# science news<sup>®</sup> to the editor

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**COVER:** Their space station's overheating problem apparently solved by a makeshift sunshade, the Skylab astronauts headed toward completion of an eventful first week in space. Skylab commander Charles Conrad works in shirtsleeves. The six square boxes are food storage cabinets. See p. 352. (Wide World Photos)

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## Licensing parenthood

If the situation described in "Licensing proposal for parenthood" (SN: 5/12/73, p. 305) ever came true, we would really have a 1984. Who, in this entire world, is qualified to judge who is or is not competent to have children? To attempt to so judge would be playing God. Apparently, Roger W. McIntire does not know this or does not care.

Theresa Severn  
Tenafly, N.J.

A few questions about McIntire's proposal:

- Who and what will "qualify" a couple for parenthood? Wealth? Material possessions? Family background? Influence?
- What will happen to the "lawbreakers" who have children without a license?
- Will this proposal be extended to "weed out" undesirable children by prohibiting couples suspected of carrying genetic defects from becoming parents?

It's truly amazing what a supposedly educated scientist will come up with. Birth control is one thing, but McIntire's suggestions sound suspiciously like the hideous realities of 1984.

Susan Wythe  
Somerville, Mass.

While the idea is certainly not entirely new, the continuous advances of science certainly make the proposals of McIntire concerning the licensing of parents more thought provoking. To a layman there are the inevitable questions. . . .

Is not this entire matter more in the realm of politics, than of psychology? Does not our political system presume that all are innocent until proven guilty?—but does not the long-term contraceptive capsule, or vaccine presume guilt until the prospective parent establishes his "competence?"

Who would be the licensing agency? Would it be a select group of citizens? Is an average such group considered to be well enough informed to be effective? Would it be a governmental bureaucracy?

There exists a considerable degree of disagreement at present between many parents, none of whom have been guilty of child mistreatment, and some psychologists, as to just how children should be raised. Who would resolve this disagreement?

George V. Morris  
Sequim, Wash.

## Crime and bystander

Either your summary "Crime and the bystander" (SN: 5/12/73, p. 308) was incomplete, or Moriarty's experimental plan was poorly devised.

In the first case, the subject could easily conclude that the "thief" was a friend of the "radio owner," as generally people go to the beach in groups. In other words, in the first case, the subject was not sure he was witnessing a crime.

In the second case, the "radio owner's" request that he watch the radio gave the subject the additional knowledge that no one else was with him; that is, the subject then knew he was witnessing a crime when the radio was taken. I see no basis for concluding there was any "mild commitment."

John L. S. Hickey  
Wheaton, Md.

(Our brief summary didn't allow space for a full description of the experiment. In each case, before leaving the scene, the radio owner did tell those around him that he was alone.—Ed.)

## Self-paced study

I am a college freshman at the Illinois Institute of Technology involved in an NSF-sponsored experimental education program. The program centers around student participation in professional type engineering projects.

The Keller PSI method (SN: 4/21/73, p. 260) is used by the students to learn information needed in project problem solving. Objective quizzes are designed to test the students understanding (mastery) of major concepts in each study packet (module) area. A record of each student's mastered modules is kept on file as an outline of the fields in which the student is most knowledgeable.

Because the program is only in its first year, a success or failure tag cannot be put on its performance. Personally, I have benefited tremendously from this student orientated education and I am very optimistic that it will become a permanent department at I.I.T.

I find the self-paced study a much more efficient and effective means of learning than the traditional "classroom" education.

Carl J. Glim  
Chicago, Ill.

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