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COVER: Nature lavished a great optical gift on a dead branch of the evolutionary tree. A recent study of trilobite fossils has revealed that the Paleozoic animals possessed, perhaps, the most sophisticated eye lenses ever produced by nature—lenses that are devoid of all spherical aberrations. See page 72. (Photo: R. Levi Setti/University of Chicago Press)

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to the editor

Selecting a baby's sex

In reference to your article on sort-
ing sperm . . . to make boy babies (SN:
1/12/74, p. 20).

What about those of us who prefer
baby girls?

Nancy H. Chaconas
Bethesda, Md.

I have been a subscriber to SCIENCE
NEWS for quite a while and have ben-
efited from reading your magazine, but
I am extremely disappointed and surprised
by the article "Babymaking: Dress them
in blue" (SN: 1/12/74, p. 20). I cannot
remember any article in the past in your
publication that employed so many sexist,
nonscientific concepts and insinuations as
this one has; the tone of this article is an
affront to me as a scientist and a woman.

The first paragraph, besides being un-
necessary, is filled with prejudice. You
make the nonscientific assumption that
choosing a boy baby is a more desirable,
intelligent, generally favored decision. . . .

In paragraph two you write, "A baby's
sex is determined by the father not the
mother"; it certainly is not! The father
knows as little as the mother as far
as sex determination is concerned. The de-
terminers are chance, timing, biochemistry
(of the mother's vagina) and the genetics
of the father's sperm. . . .

Why not include the facts that those
fat, slow, lumbering X sperm are better
able to endure hostile acidic environments
than Y sperm and have better overall en-
durance than their slim, mobile counter-
parts. Why not include the other facts
concerning the larger production of male
infants, i.e. that more Y sperm must be
produced than X sperm anyway due to
their relatively low endurance in the fe-
male reproductive tract and that more
male babies than female babies are need-
ed due to higher male infant mortality
just to approximate 50-50 adult sex ratio.
(Perhaps relative male weakness is one of
those unmentioned "reasons" that men are
"dying earlier than women.")

Just as speculation, it seems to me this
method could also be used to select for
girl babies. Even if that is technically in-
feasible, couldn't you have titled this as
an article on infant sex-selection instead
of emotionally billing it boy-babymaking?

Evelyn Monsay
Princeton, N.J.

(The emphasis on male-producing Y

sperm in the research and in the article
was not a matter of choice. "Although we
have discovered a practical way to isolate
Y sperm, we have not achieved compa-
rable results with X sperm at the same
time," report the Schering investigators.
One problem is that at this stage of their
research what is left over after they have
isolated out the Y sperm is not X sperm
alone but a mixture of normal X sperm
plus non-mobile and abnormal sperm.

(We made no statement that choosing
a boy baby is a more desirable, generally
favored decision. We were merely noting
that some couples, at some times, for
a variety of reasons, may prefer a boy.
Just as many if not more couples may pre-
fer having a girl. Unfortunately, at this
point the research reported in the article
cannot be of help to them.—Ed.)

The dairy industry has made use of
artificial insemination for cattle breeding
for a long time. The artificial breeders
centrifuge bull sperm in order to get the
female sperm for breeding purposes. Like
other animal breeders, they put a great
deal of stress on genetics. The bull sperm
is frozen, and if the offspring have been
good milk producers, then the sperm will
be available for perhaps years after the
bull has died of old age.

In the areas of genetics and reproduc-
tion, veterinary medicine seems to be
years ahead of human medicine.

D. K. Lowe
Clarion State College
Clarion, Pa.

Demythologizing homosexuality

I was gratified to learn that the American
Psychological Association had at last re-
moved homosexuality from its "abnormal
psychology" category and that the Ameri-
can Psychiatric Association's board of trust-
ees had voted to remove homosexuality
from its diagnostic and statistical manual
of mental disorders (SN: 12/22-29/73,
p. 389). You appeared, however, to un-
dermine the effectiveness of the disclosure
with, "the APA does not say that homo-
sexuality is normal" and your labeling of
triumphant representatives of the Gay
Movement as "optimistic." Instead you
might pay tribute to the several gay libera-
tion groups that have courageously and
indignantly fought for these changes. By
helping to demythologize homosexuality,
these individuals work for a more just, a
saner world for all.

Bailey Bowen Whitaker, Ph.D.
Berkeley, Calif.

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