

OF THE WEEK

step toward artificial vision	68
radar map of mercury	68
puzzles of human past	69
hard thinking on solar energy	69
viruses and asthma	70
climate and geomagnetism	70
fatty acids in meteorites	71
new radio telescope	71
skylab heads toward finale	71

RESEARCH NOTES

archaeology	74
technology	74
biomedical sciences	75
natural sciences	75

ARTICLES

the optometry of trilobites	72
-----------------------------	----

DEPARTMENTS

letters	67
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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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11 W. 42nd St., New York, N.Y. 10036
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to the editor

Selecting a baby's sex

In reference to your article on sorting 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 benefited 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 unnecessary, 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 determiners 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 endurance than their slim, mobile counterparts. 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 female reproductive tract and that more male babies than female babies are needed 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 infeasible, 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 comparable 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 prefer 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 reproduction, 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 removed homosexuality from its "abnormal psychology" category and that the American Psychiatric Association's board of trustees 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 undermine the effectiveness of the disclosure with, "the APA does not say that homosexuality is normal" and your labeling of triumphant representatives of the Gay Movement as "optimistic." Instead you might pay tribute to the several gay liberation 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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67