

Science[®] News

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Incorporating Science News Letter

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COVER: End of the journey. A woman sits despondently in a refugee camp in Upper Volta. Her people, once the proud nomadic herdsmen of the Sahel, now rely on outside aid to save them from starvation after droughts parched their land. Changing weather patterns and increased food prices threaten to make this scene be repeated in more populous areas of the world. See p. 306, first of a two-part series. (Credit: FAO)

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May 11, 1974

To the Editor

Babies' awareness

I am always amused when psychologists "discover" what mothers have known all along "Babies: More aware than we think" (SN: 4/6/74, p. 222). Twenty-five years ago, I published a journal of a childbirth (*An Interesting Condition*, by Abigail Lewis, Doubleday), in which I described how my two-week-old daughter, in an upstairs bedroom, would start crying whenever guests came in downstairs. Repeated experiments showed that all she wanted was to be carried downstairs, where she would peer around intently at everything and everybody. When my second daughter was born (natural childbirth, no drugs), the first thing she did was to crane around, peering at everything, particularly the overhead lights. My conclusion was that babies are not born as clean slates, who must be "taught" to be human, but already possess innate traits which unfold in response to inner and outer cues . . . as do all young animals.

Moreover, in my experience, both very young children and animals can understand far more words and phrases than we give them credit for. . . . Adult humans are so proud of their verbal abilities that they learn to block off the sensory awarenesses and cues by which animals and babies learn to "read" their environment. In many cases both babies and animals are far more aware, and communicating in their own ways, than adult humans.

Mrs. Otis Kidwell Burger
New York, N.Y.

Isn't science wonderful! First a scientist "demonstrated that babies can indeed distinguish . . . in the first few days of life." And now "psychologists know that most one- to two-week-old children can also respond. . . ." Now too a behavioral scientist, Genevieve Carpenter, has concluded that "More sophisticated information processing capabilities appear to be operating in the newborn's interaction with its environment than we had thought possible" (SN: 4/6/74, p. 222). Her conclusions, of course, will be recognized.

Women with lesser titles, however, mere mothers, are not considered to be objective enough to make a scientific judgment or even an intelligent judgment about their babies' ability to see, recognize and re-

spond. Women who have been so bold as to make those judgments have suffered the condescension of their pediatricians.

Please, don't tell us it has been "discovered" that babies are bright and responsive from their first weeks and even days of birth. I find it arrogant.

Anna K. Carter
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Engineers and the people mover

What is wrong with our engineers ("Blow up: Removing the people mover" SN: 4/20/74, p. 254)?

This is similar to the report of the vast amount spent by the Army for a tank that was unsatisfactory. It is similar to the C5A the Air Force bought that was restricted on the load it could carry because of design problems.

Can it be that our engineers are not taught rigorous thinking? Can it be they are unskilled with their language and cannot communicate effectively? Can it be they are so confident that they can "design" something that they do not test their design before they try to produce it?

James F. Jackson
Carlisle, Ind.

It's all in the title

In a recent letter, P. Schuyler Miller discusses the trend toward longer titles for scientific papers, and notes we may soon see instances in which the title *is* the paper (SN: 4/20/74, p. 251). The nearest I know to such a case is a note by R. Moran in MADROÑO in 1962, reporting a new locality for the plant *Cneoridium dumosum*. The note is entitled:

Cneoridium dumosum (Nuttall) Hooker f. Collected March 26, 1960, at an Elevation of about 1450 Meters on Cerro Quemazón, 15 Miles South of Bahía de los Angeles, Baja California, México. Apparently for a Southeastward Range Extension of Some 140 Miles.

The text of the article is simply, "I got it there then (0868)." The number refers to the museum specimen documenting the report. He follows this text with unusually detailed acknowledgments.

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