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COVER: The center of a single droplet of exhaust, enlarged 1,750 times by electron microscope, of a model of one of the space shuttle's solid-propellant engines, is aiding researchers studying the shuttle's possible effects on earth's atmosphere. See p. 219. (Photo: USAF-Arnold Engineering Development Center)

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Copy Editor	Michelle Galler Riegel
Art Director	Dale Appleman
Assistant to the Editor	Susan Strasburger
Books	Margit Friedrich
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OCTOBER 4, 1975

LETTERS

Sexual stereotypes

The article "Sexism is Depressing," by Robert J. Trotter (SN: 9/13/75, p. 173) pointed-up, among other things, that children's sexual stereotypes are, indeed, present. Mr. Trotter explains, however, that these stereotypes can be modified in classroom settings through appropriate non-sexist intervention.

It is ironic that an advertisement, only one page removed from the sexism article, illustrates exactly what the article is all about. This ad stereotypically pictures a woman carrying several large ledger books to a man sitting behind a desk, apparently involved in decision-making.

Perhaps sexist-intervention can be applied not only in our schools, but in all sectors of society, including advertising.

R.F. Thomas
Queens, N.Y.

If someone sets out to show that A causes B, he ought to at least be able to show a correlation between the two. As a particular instance, it just happens that it is in the developed countries, those very countries where the specialization of sex roles is crumbling, that psychological depression among females is becoming a problem. May I be so bold as to point out that the correlation between "sexual stereotyping" and depression is thus a *negative* one?

Undaunted, Marcia Guttentag bravely holds that the one causes the other! In context, other factors are cited. But it is nevertheless "sexism" that gets the blame. The reader wonders if this isn't another case of trying to invoke science to sanctify doctrine. In the latter connection, one notes the researchers resort to certain faddish labels. "Sexism," for instance, can be found in only very recent dictionaries. It is a value-judgment term, deliberately coined to be just that. And "stereotype" is becoming an all too handy pejorative which one can apply with equal ease to any established concept or standard which one would like to see changed.

Warner Clements
Beverly Hills, Calif.

The report by Robert J. Trotter, "Sexism is Depressing," is an example of unscientific writing. The title is a positive statement, "Sexism is Depressing." The first paragraph, above the authors name, states that

women are depressed and the cause *may* be sexism.

I do not know what the word "sexism" means to Marcia Guttentag. Her report is that women have increased their entry into the labor market during the last twenty years and that the risk of depression has increased dramatically during this time. Could it be that women were better satisfied when they spent their time taking care of her home, husband and three children?

My opinion is that Marcia Guttentag should not be permitted to make experiments in schools to change the ideas of children.

James F. Jackson
Carlisle, Ind.

I feel compelled to point out an alternate and equally plausible conclusion Marcia Guttentag could have drawn from her research on sexism and depression in women ("Sexism is Depressing," SN: 9/13/75).

Considering the fact that sex-role differentiation is present in the vast majority of animal species, I think it reasonable to assume it is genetically determined. If so, it would seem unwise to decide unilaterally to encourage our children to behave in a way which is, perhaps, contrary to that determined by evolution.

Peter E. Holden
Denver, Colo.

I don't suppose that it would ever occur to such dedicated Marxists as Marcia Guttentag of Harvard and Senior Editor Robert J. Trotter (long a promoter of Marxist causes in SCIENCE NEWS) that the reason why a "young married, working blue-collar mother" would be "most likely to be depressed" might be totally unrelated to "social" causes. Did anyone think to ask if the young woman wanted to be working? Did anyone think to ask if the young woman wanted to work *full time* at two demanding jobs?

V.L. Chappell
Los Angeles, Calif.

Trotter's article on "Sexism is Depressing" is another apology for the woman's lib movement. Did it ever occur to Marcia Guttentag that maybe the women who work are uncomfortable in this role because they would rather be mothers? Please keep half-baked articles like this out of the News. You're becoming like the Readers Digest, printing anything so long as it is sensational.

Howard L. McFann
Linwood, N.J.

More letters appear on page 223.

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