

# SCIENCE NEWS®

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**COVER:** Huge rock overhang dwarfs an unusual scientific team near Mbangombe, Zambia, studying one of the longest continuously occupied prehistoric sites in central Africa. Two-thirds of the participants in the 1971 effort, working with David Phillipson of Cambridge University, paid for the chance of helping with the research and thereby providing an alternative source of funding, thanks to an unusual organization called Educational Expeditions International. See p. 10. (Photo: EEI)

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**Subscription Department**  
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# LETTERS

## Women: Another perspective

I do not believe that the letters in SCIENCE NEWS (11/1/75) on the letters (10/4/75) on women and depression quite hit the point. The issue I think revolves about the concept of genetic and evolutionary determinism.

But these terms must be used with great care—especially if social implications are to be drawn from them. PKU, diabetes, Down's Syndrome are all genetically determined. But if the resulting condition can be changed in some obviously beneficial way, shall we refuse to do so because of genetic determination? Suppose that there are vast, genetically determined differences between men and women; what follows? Females are usually lighter and less muscularly developed than males. Shall males then cite genetic determination as they beat their wives insensible?

Because being a woman is genetically determined, it is easy to think that our treatment of women is also genetically determined and ought to remain so. This is not correct, logically or biologically. Neither is it in keeping with what truly separates man from other animals: compassion, love, charity and benevolence.

If it is all right to treat PKU and diabetes, then why isn't it all right to foster an environment so that equal rights are at least a good possibility? Wouldn't a diabetic become depressed upon learning that insulin were no longer available? Would one then point out a positive correlation between diabetes and depression when faced with the argument that withdrawing insulin was causing diabetics to become depressed, that they therefore should never have had insulin?

All this treats being a woman as if it were a pathological condition. This provides good insight. Being a woman can be pathological—to the intellect and to one's sense of fair play, if the condition is not properly treated. For women to ask for treatment predicated on their ability alone is not to ask anyone to violate any natural laws—it is only to ask for consideration as a full-fledged human being.

Arthur Zucker  
Department of Humanities  
College of Medicine  
Milton S. Hershey Medical Center  
Pennsylvania State University  
Hershey, Pa.

## Tempered enthusiasm

One's enthusiasm for cerebral stimulating devices for pain reduction (SN: 11/22/75, p. 327) must be tempered by the numerous problems that confront the clinical investigator. Significant among these is the fact that the efficacy of these machines seems inevitably to decrease with the passage of time. Only rarely have the results remained as consistently good as they were at the time of implantation. Increasing and then unacceptable electrical currents become necessary for the palliation of pain.

Requisite reimplantations (of far greater moment than an inconvenience where cerebral or spinal operations are concerned) are frequent, and autoimmune rejections often require total removal. Electrodes, previously in contact with the pia mater, are found to be coated by adhesions. Less reactive, or rather, *unreactive* substances are necessary for use as electrodes before such a pain-free state as suggested by your article may be construed as a reality.

Howard Lieberman, M.D.  
Elizabeth Neurosurgical Group  
Elizabeth, N.J.

## Homer Smith's homeland

I have been an ardent reader of SCIENCE NEWS for many years but seldom felt qualified to question or even have an independent opinion about statements made in the publication.

Now I do have something to say: On page 310 of the Nov. 15 issue Homer W. Smith is described as a British physiologist. A long-time friend of mine, Homer Smith was less British than I am. I was born in Denver and he was born in Cripple Creek, Colorado, and most of his career was devoted to the study of the kidney at New York University College of Medicine.

I believe editors had trouble placing *Kamongo*. Was it science or philosophy, or fiction? Homer was a restless, deeply probing investigator of the human condition, not just the human kidney or the lungfish.

Bethuel M. Webster  
New York, N.Y.

(Many other readers also wrote to point out the error.—Ed.)

Address communications to Editor,  
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