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Letters

Anxiety and suicide

In "New data question panic, suicide relation" (SN: 5/30/92, p.358), you describe a national study indicating that people who have panic attacks have a 20 percent chance of attempting suicide. You can imagine the anxiety this statistic causes in people who are afraid of losing control (a common fear of people with anxiety).

At last year's meeting of the Anxiety Disorders Association of America, none of the therapists had ever had a patient in therapy for anxiety who had attempted suicide. My own 20 years of experience in treating anxiety makes me question the diagnosis of anxiety disorder if there is a history of suicide attempts.

Eugene A. Fee
Editor, ANXIETY NEWSLETTER
Valley Forge, Pa.

Depression and destiny

I hope Israel Colón read the article on learned helplessness ("Powerless chemistry

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Cover: On June 28, a large earthquake ripped through California's Mojave Desert, leaving behind a clear crack heading off to the mountains on the horizon. The seismic surprise provides scientists with an unparalleled research opportunity, but it also raises disturbing implications about future quakes.
(Photo: I. K. Curtis Services, Inc./Burbank, Calif.)

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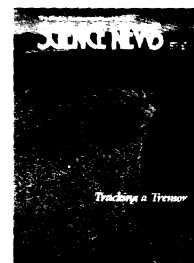
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Science Service, a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921, gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Program it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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of depression," SN: 6/13/92, p.396) that appeared just above your report on his study of seat belt use among blacks and Hispanics ("Destined for a dangerous ride?"). As a black Latina, I can report that I know exactly how those rats in the depression study felt.

The rats were exposed to uncontrollable and unpredictable stress, inflicted by researchers. I experience uncontrollable and unpredictable stress on a daily basis, inflicted by white people. Some days it is clerks or salespeople, who often pretend that I am not standing there waiting to ask them a question. Other days it is co-workers or acquaintances who unwittingly expose their unaware acceptance of the deeply ingrained prejudices that are as prevalent as air in the U.S.A. If the rats could answer Colón's survey, they would no doubt agree that "you can't change your destiny," as did many blacks and Latinos.

I wear my seat belt every time I get in my car. But I am a college-educated engineer and have a good job; I had to struggle mightily to overcome the worst effects of a "belief in an

inevitable destiny outside one's control" to achieve my education. Since I still struggle, to avoid the "learned helplessness" that causes the rats to "resign themselves to further discomfort," I identify strongly with other blacks and Latinos, still in the ghettos and barrios, who gave up long ago. Yes, education campaigns are key to resolving this issue, but the campaigns should educate whites on their unacknowledged prejudices and unaware racist behaviors.

Simonetta A. Rodriguez
Endicott, N.Y.

Channeling the pain?

In "I want my MTV" (SN: 5/23/92, p.351), you note that pediatricians suggest future studies should test MTV's effectiveness on dental patients. When I was a child in the '50s, my dentist used to show animated cartoons while drilling on my teeth. Result? After all these years I still can't stand watching cartoons!

Lou Mongan
Sausalito, Calif.

AUGUST 1, 1992

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