

## This Week

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## Letters

### Depressions rooted in experience

It is professionally reassuring to read the critical study of the diagnosis of depression ("Depression Gets Doleful Diagnosis," SN: 2/14/98, p. 100). Unfortunately, psychiatry has succumbed not only to the demands of managed care, but to a society that has come to expect instant gratification. It has almost abandoned dynamic psychiatry for the quick fix of pills and brief, superficial psychotherapy.

In an attempt to gain scientific credibility, it has resorted to an elaborate diagnostic system based primarily on symptoms that are about as indicative of a specific diagnosis as a fever is in general medicine.

However effective an antidepressant may be, ignoring a detailed personal history and stress stemming from a patient's lifestyle as contributing causes to depression borders on incompetence. The fact that biological changes found in "depression" may not be genetic or organic, but produced psycholog-

ically by history and stress is rarely considered adequately.

*Warren A. Baker  
Denver, Colo.*

**The healthy debate** over depression as either "a disease-like process" or "the extreme end of a symptom continuum" is based on a rather dubious premise: that depression is a single mental disorder. Some organically based depressions are seriously debilitating. Others are appropriate responses to life situations of loss, trauma, disappointment, or despair.

Thinking inside the medical box (political need notwithstanding) will continue to rob us of the wider view of depressions rooted in individual experiences. Stretching the box to include a wider range of symptoms, and thereby expanding the diagnostic application of "major depression," is even more depressing.

*Eugene J. Webb  
Houston, Texas*

### Sauce for the gander

I question the notion in "Valuable Vices"

**Cover:** Can butterflies learn preferences for flower colors or knacks for finding the nectar in certain flower shapes? Pollination researchers have started to find out.

**Page 233** (Photo: Dave Cavagnaro, Fenton Communications, Washington, D.C.)



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(SN: 2/28/98, p. 142) that longevity might be a consequence of an active sex life rather than being correlated with it. How "the analysis [of the study cited] accounted for the possibility" and still allowed the author to suggest a cause-effect relationship is beyond comprehension.

*Savely Savva  
Carmel, Calif.*

**Your article implies** that the frequency of sexual intercourse was a measure of frequency of orgasm. Was the "trained interviewer" too embarrassed to ask how often the men of Caerphilly masturbated?

Later in the article, the investigator speculates, "One endearing explanation is that pleasure is actually health-giving." Endearing? How about obvious?

*Barry Evans  
Palo Alto, Calif.*

### Why weren't the women of Caerphilly

*Letters continued on p. 232*