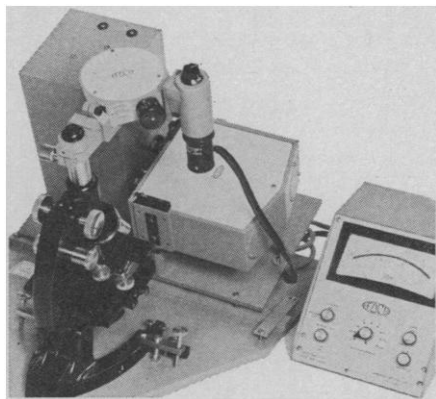


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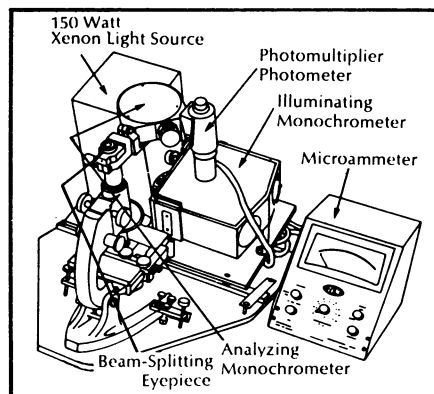
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Male Bias of NIH

Reporting on HEW's demand that the University of Michigan stop discriminating against women, Bazell (20 Nov., p. 834) asserts: "The women's liberation movement has a new ally: the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare." A most interesting claim, considering the record of NIH, an organization over which HEW is said to exercise some control.

Membership in one of the NIH Public Advisory Groups is a valued form of professional recognition to most scientists, and also provides opportunities for the "challenging interaction with other professionals" that, as Martha White has pointed out ("Psychological and social barriers to women in science," 23 Oct., p. 413), is difficult for many women to achieve. In choosing members for its committees and councils, NIH has a splendid chance to set a good example for its male-oriented client universities.

The *NIH Public Advisory Groups* directory (1 Jan. 1970) lists the members of 96 advisory groups associated with the several institutes: 914 members, of whom 22 are female. Next comes the members of the review committees of the Career Development Branch: 92 men, 1 woman. Following are the members of the 48 study sections that pass on research grant applications: 662 members, including 17 women. The rest of the book, dealing largely with public health and education, includes seven committees concerned with nurses' training; on these women predominate, 55 to 23. The other 35 groups are more orthodox: 375 men, 17 women.

Aside from the nurse-related groups, there are 192 committees, of which one has three women and eight have two. Most have none. Again excepting the nursing committees, there are 2044 extramural advisers, 1987 of whom are male. That's 97.2 percent.

I am well aware that the number of women qualified to serve on the advisory panels of NIH is limited, and this situation is due in part to the reluctance of most universities to give women a chance to develop their careers. Since HEW is demanding that universities "achieve a ratio of female employment in academic positions at least equivalent to availability," may I suggest that the ratio of females available to serve on NIH committees is better than 2.8 percent. For myself, I

am happy to admit my indebtedness to NIH for generous support of my research and for the training of my students (as well as for the privilege of serving on a study section). But NIH as a women's lib "ally"? Give us girls some good reliable enemies!

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Origin of Nitrogen

The report by Dalgarno and McElroy ("Mars: Is nitrogen present?," 9 Oct., p. 167) makes some interesting points about nitrogen in the atmospheres of Mars and Earth. However, papers of this sort seem consistently to ignore biological phenomena; the nitrogen now in Earth's atmosphere is mostly, if not entirely, of biological origin. Shouldn't one consider the possibility that on Mars electrical phenomena and ultraviolet light might purge the atmosphere of any nitrogen present and that it would not be restored if Mars lacks any counterpart of our denitrifying bacteria?

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Esoteric Fish

A clonal colony of the naturally gynogenetic teleost, *Poecilia formosa* (1), has been established in Florida and small numbers are now available for interested investigators. The genetic homogeneity of the colony suggests a usefulness for various biochemical, behavioral (2), and immunological (3) studies.

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