Letters

Women Lab Heads

Two recent News & Comment articles in the issue of 28 June seem to me to send contradictory messages. The article that discusses the lack of women mathematicians in tenured positions in the top ten mathematics departments (Paul Selvin, "Does the Harrison case reveal sexism in math?," p. 1781) was laudable and suggests that perhaps the editors of *Science* are genuinely concerned about equal professional opportunities for all scientists. The adjacent article "Labstyles of the famous and well funded" (subtitled "Small labs have their partisans; so do big ones. The key, however, is not size alone but the style of the lab's chief—*his* [emphasis mine] talent for organizing, inspiring, and communicating)," was an informative comparison of "several dozen" (five pictured) prestigious molecular biologists' management styles. However, the absence of female lab heads is glaringly apparent. In contrast to mathematics, there is not quite such a dearth of innovative, important, well-funded female lab heads in molecular biology (some of whom are tenured). Many have made and are still making major contributions to the field, and their management style would certainly be as interesting as those whose styles were featured in the article. Even a brief consideration brings many to mind—Joan Steitz, Barbara Pearse, Elizabeth Robertson, Melanie Cobb, Nancy Kleckner, Barbara Wohl, and Joan Brugge. The choice of 12 male profiles is also statistically unrepresentative of the field (even of the "well-funded"). The juxtaposition of the two articles is insulting and emblematic of cultural ambivalence about women scientists. Are the editors of *Science* uncomfortable contemplating a female lab head managing male colleagues?

MARION FREISTADT
Department of Microbiology,
College of Physicians and Surgeons of
Columbia University,
701 West 168th Street,
New York, NY 10032

Response: The news editors and reporters of *Science* are dedicated to addressing the problems of underrepresentation of women in the profession, and we hope our record speaks for itself (see Faye Flam, News & Comment, "Still a chilly climate for women?," 21 June, p. 1604; Marcia Barinaga, News & Comment, "Sexism charged by Stanford physician," 14 June, p. 1484; Marcia Barinaga, Science Careers, "Real life," 21 May, p. 1144). In putting together a weekly news section, it is not possible to balance every story with regard to ethnic, political, gender, geographical, etc. aspects. Over a period of time, we hope we are not only fair but also comprehensive. We trust our readers judge us on that record, but criticism can help us raise our standards.—EDS.

Shaking the Family Tree

After being overshadowed for many years by developments in early hominid studies, issues concerning recent human origins are once again a focus for controversy and debate. Elizabeth Culotta (News & Comment, 19 Apr., p. 376) reviews one particular skirmish at the recent meeting of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists in Milwaukee, with pro-Neandertal partisans "fighting back" over the evolutionary status of Neandertals and other Upper Pleistocene groups from the Middle East. Culotta quotes Milford Wolpoff as asserting that the degree of variability within this material (from the Israeli cave sites Skhul, Qafzeh, Tabun, and Kebara) "wasn't all that great—no greater than in today's Detroit, with its population of European Americans, African Americans, Amerindians, and Asians."

We have no wish to offend the citizens of Detroit, but we doubt whether they, or any other single population, provide an adequate measure of the diversity of this Upper Pleistocene material. We have compared the variability of the fossil specimens with that of contemporary *Homo sapiens* using the method described in (*1*, p. 336). Modern humans are represented by the large (n = 2216) worldwide sample measured by W. W. Howells (*2*) and used in numerous studies as a measure of contemporary cranial diversity.

Using 19 cranial variables from Howells' data set, we found that the average D^2 distance between all pairs of 2216 recent crania was 38.4, whereas the average inter-individual D^2 distance between four Middle Eastern specimens (Qafzeh 6, Skhul 5, Tabun 1, and Amud) turned out to be significantly greater ($P \leq 0.05$) at 64.5. The results indicate that it is not just the population of Detroit, but a large worldwide sample of modern humans, that is appreciably less diverse than the Middle Eastern fossils.

Culotta also quotes Yoel Rak, who describes the Kebara and Qafzeh fossils as "two specimens found in caves 30 km apart. And the differences in them are larger than those in the Alaskan Eskimos and the bushmen in Africa." We have also checked this statement using the test described in (*1*, p. 332). We found the distance between a Neandertal specimen (Tabun 1—we had no data for Kebara) on the one hand and Skhul 5 and Qafzeh 6 and 9, on the other, to be 66.9, which is markedly (and at $P \leq 0.05$ significantly) greater than the distance between Eskimos and African bushmen (17.1).

The evolutionary status of Neandertals and other groups remains uncertain and intriguing. But nothing is to be gained by rejecting reality and asserting that Upper Pleistocene diversity was comparable to that of local populations today; it wasn't.

G. N. VAN VARK
Department of Anatomy,
University of Groningen,
Oostersingel 69,
9713 EZ Groningen,
The Netherlands
A. BILSBOROUGH
Department of Anthropology,
University of Durham,
43 Old Elvet,
Durham DH1 3HN,
United Kingdom

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2. W. W. Howells, *Pap. Peabody Mus. Archaeol. Ethnol. Harv. Univ.* **67**, 259 (1973).

EC Biotechnology Policy

Michael Balter's article about the evolution of European regulation of biotechnology research (News & Comment, 7 June, p. 1366) was extremely interesting. However, some of his points on European Community (EC) policy have been overtaken by a May 1991 EC Commission report (*1*).

The Commission is definitively proposing the rejection of any systematic "fourth hurdle" (evaluation of socio-economic impact) for the approval of new products.

> Where a biotechnological product is assessed, the three traditional criteria [safety, quality, efficacy], based on scientific evaluation apply. By their nature, socioeconomic aspects need to be considered in a different way. *It is not the intention to have another systematic assessment in addition to the three criteria* (emphasis added).

The report adds, however, that the Commission also has a "general obligation to take into account other Community policies and objectives." The report notes that this might lead, not to a general and systematic consideration of socioeconomic impact, but to special evaluation in some cases. And the