

# LETTERS

4601

## Inappropriate Analogy

I read with shock and distaste the opening of the Research News article about the Keck telescope that begins, "In the pages of *Mademoiselle* and *Cosmo*, there's an eternal debate about whether bigger really is better" (15 Apr., p. 346). A sophomoric sexual reference attributed to women's magazines is hardly an appropriate lead-in to a *Science* article, especially when more amusing and less offensive "bigger is better" analogies exist. Respect for your female and male readers should preclude the publication of such a comment. This type of writing degrades the journal.

Diana Lane

Department of Rangeltana Ecosystem Science,  
Colorado State University,  
Fort Collins, CO 80523, USA

*Response:* The News department regrets the tone of the offending sentence in the article. Those sentences were inappropriate, and the News department takes responsibility for them. In the future we will redouble our efforts to be sure it doesn't happen again.

—John Benditt, Features Editor

## Black Rhino Conservation

Our recent Policy Forum (4 Mar., p. 1241) about the efficacy of different black rhino conservation strategies may have had an unfortunate result, the premature termination of our research project in Namibia. We had little choice but to leave the country when our research permits were not renewed. This occurred after publication of our Policy Forum, which did not unequivocally support "official" policy.

Our study was designed to evaluate biological consequences of dehorning rhinos as a conservation measure. It was officially approved by Namibia's Ministry of Wildlife, Conservation, and Tourism (MWCT). After 3 years, our findings regarding dehorning were mixed, news apparently not well received by MWCT officials in light of their decision to continue to dehorn rhinos and to support legalized horn trade.

Namibia, as an independent country, should of course be free to manage their resources any way that they so please. The choice to accept or discard information is

ultimately theirs alone. But they have much to lose. There will now be no way to validate declarations about the success or failure of different programs, including dehorning. Without research by independent scientists, it will be difficult to know whether assertions of management successes are credible. The MWCT is no longer free from conflicts of interest. As they pointed out to us, some of our results could be used by detractors of the dehorning tactic and possibly hundreds of thousands of international dollars would be lost.

Clearly, the unenviable dilemma is whether to make no waves and continue one's work or, at some risk, to attempt to notify local officials, drawing attention to results that do not wholeheartedly embrace a host country's official policy. It would be impossible for any field study of rhino conservation, no matter how long, to remove unequivocally all possible competing explanations. Because many countries are now trying to assess management strategies for rhinos and to implement sanctions against those using rhino horn, we felt a responsibility to release scientific results quickly so as to enable informed decision-making.

Joel Berger

Program in Ecology, Evolution and  
Conservation Biology,  
University of Nevada,  
Reno, Nevada 89512, USA

Carol Cunningham  
Department of Environmental and  
Resource Sciences,  
University of Nevada, Reno

## Outcomes Research

We read Christopher Anderson's review of outcomes research with a curious sense of déjà vu (News & Comment, 25 Feb., p. 1080). The alleged inadequacies of nonrandomized studies of human health have provoked spirited exchanges in *Science* and elsewhere (1). These debates have centered on traditional epidemiologic studies of disease causation in which, for ethical reasons, randomization is prohibited and nonrandomized studies must be used.

For assessing new therapies, however, randomization is often ethically acceptable and has traditionally been the method of choice. Randomization greatly enhances one's ability to make unbiased comparisons