

SCIENCE

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LETTERS

Let Me Count the Ways

I was amused and disturbed by a phrase in Gary Taubes' article "Measure for measure in science" (News & Comment, 14 May, p. 884): "objective measures of quality." Are we to believe that quality can now be objectified? Will our proclamations now be expected to take the form, "My love is like a single flower of *Rosa grandiflora* with a peak visible light reflectance of 650 nm"? Shall we expect the quality of mercy to be not only strained, but captured in a graduated cylinder? Will the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) provide us with an assessment of whether we are disgusted by the emphasis on citation analysis, or just annoyed?

Still, I suppose this is the price of entry to the brave new world. I eagerly await the next great contribution from ISI: the subjective measure of quantity.

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Science Watch's selection (1) of M. Leid *et al.*'s paper (2) as the hottest of 1992 reveals a problem with this type of analysis. *Science Watch* did not inform its readers that Leid *et al.*'s paper was not the only, and not even the first, of a series of papers reporting on similar discoveries. One was published a month earlier in the same journal (3), three others the same week (2, 4), and three more a few months later (5).

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5. T. H. Bugge, J. Pohl, O. Lonnoy, H. G. Stunnenberg, *EMBO J.* 11, 1409 (1992); M. S. Marks *et al.*, *ibid.*, p. 1419; P. L. Hallenbeck, M. S. Marks, R. E. Lippoldt, K. Ozato, V. M. Nikodem, *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.* 89, 5572 (1992).

I would like to clarify a reference to my comments by Taubes in his 14 May article "Measure for measure in science." In fact, at the CHUL Research Centre, we do not use the numbers of citations of individual re-

searchers to account for 40% of their performance; rather, we use the impact factor of the journals in which they publish. Moreover, to avoid bias toward specific research fields, we are putting in place a correction factor that takes into consideration the different levels of citations in various research disciplines. Another criterion of performance, researchers' grants, as Taubes correctly indicates, counts for 40%. High-quality publications and grants are both well-recognized criteria of performance in research.

To complete the assessment, an additional parameter, the number of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, accounts for the remaining 20%, and not students' performance, as indicated by Taubes. This last parameter endorses the academic involvement of researchers.

We are convinced that the use of these objective criteria has played a key role in the dynamic development of our institution, which now ranks among the top biomedical research centers in Canada.

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AAAS's Red Scare

Unlike Wernher von Braun, I was not a celebrity being handled with kid gloves by the military in the tumultuous 1950s (News & Comment, 23 Apr., p. 486). No one "warned" me not to join the AAAS Fellow in 1956. But my experience was consistent with von Braun's. In order to participate in a project under an anticipated contract from the Air Force, I needed "secret" clearance. The Personnel Security Questionnaire I filled out in 1956 requested much detail about every organization in which I had ever held membership. I filled it out very carefully, because, although I didn't have handlers, I did recognize the problem that I would face when it was observed that my parents, who had been naturalized citizens since 1913, were born in Russia. So I was meticulous as I listed 24 organizations (including even three alumni associations, five honorary societies, the American Automobile Association, and the Museum of Modern Art).

Eventually, Naval Intelligence showed up to question me. They ignored my parents' birthplace. The bulk of the time was spent grilling me about the AAAS, and I countered with questions about what was "subversive" about an organization to which almost every scientist in the country belonged. They were surprisingly willing to explain—much along the lines described in the article about von Braun. It was clear that anyone who spoke out against the outrageous behavior of the House Committee on Un-American Activities was, *ipso facto*, subversive.

My interview wound up with a session on the Consumers Union, which then (as now) published *Consumer Reports*, to which I had subscribed from 1950 to 1955. It was suspected that I had canceled my subscription to disaffiliate myself in preparation for the future Air Force contract!

Even though the AAAS and the Consumers Union were not among the 268 organizations then on the Attorney General's list "designated . . . as having interests in conflict with those of the United States of America," these two affiliations delayed my security clearance long enough so that the Air Force project was almost over before I could participate.

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The Roche Institute

In his letter of 26 March (p. 1810), T. S. Benedict Yen refers to Japanese support of research in the United States and infers that the Roche Institute of Molecular Biology is supported by U.S. government funds. I would like to clarify this point.

The Roche Institute of Molecular Biology was established in 1967 by Hoffmann-La Roche Inc., the U.S. affiliate of the multinational group of companies headed by Roche Holding Ltd. of Basel, Switzerland. Research at the institute is supported by Hoffmann-La Roche, the exception being support that comes from the U.S. government for a small number of postdoctoral fellows who come to the institute with their own salaries. It is therefore fair to say that U.S. taxpayers are not financing the research that is being conducted at the institute.

The Roche Institute is dedicated to carrying out basic scientific research and, even though it is privately funded, the research is published and shared throughout the U.S. scientific community. Institute scientists are encouraged to collaborate with scientists from universities and institutes in the United States and abroad. The institute has the largest postdoctoral

training program supported by one company in the biomedical field and has trained more than 700 postdoctoral fellows from more than 40 countries who have gone on to pursue scientific careers.

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U.S.-Japan SSC Collaboration

I am writing to inform the readers of *Science* of the current status of the talks between the United States and Japan on the Superconducting Super Collider (SSC). Christopher Anderson writes in his article "SSC deathwatch starts again" (News & Comment, 4 June, p. 1421) that "Japan . . . has put off any further discussions until [President] Clinton's position becomes clear, which has temporarily slowed the search for collaborators." This is not correct.

After the U.S. presidential election last fall, the Japan-U.S. Joint Working Group on the SSC reached the view that they should wait and watch the new administration's policy on the SSC evolve. In other words, it was not Japan, but both Japan and the United States, that decided to put off further discussions.

Despite the interruption caused by the U.S. elections, Japan and the United States agreed to continue talks this spring, and as of the date this letter was written (22 June), are working together to set a date for such talks.

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Killer Asteroid Twin?

Let me contribute gently to any mail that may be received about the title of the article "Second crater points to killer comets" by Richard A. Kerr (Research News, 12 Mar., p. 1543). In view of the recent reports of a surprisingly high frequency of "twinning" among closely observed asteroids (Random Samples, 15 Jan., p. 314), the article's heading might be reworded as "Second crater points to killer asteroid."

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Response: Astronomers do seem to be turning up a lot of double asteroids lately, but dynamicists have always had trouble figuring out how to separate the two components of double asteroids by more than a few kilometers before they hit Earth. If the killer Chicxulub impact in the Yucatan Peninsula and the Manson crater in Iowa were related, their 2400-kilometer separation would seem to require a breakup well before impact. Comets often break up and eventually spread over millions of kilometers, as evidenced by the recent spotting of 17 fragments from one comet (Random Samples, 16 Apr., p. 295).

—Richard A. Kerr

"Because It's There"

According to Jeremy Bernstein's *Mountain Passages* (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1989, p. 45), it was George Leigh Mallory who answered, "Because it is there" when asked why one would climb Mount Everest. Mallory died near the summit in 1924. Sir Edmund Hillary, to whom Barry Cipra attributes the comment ("One climber got there first," Research News, 4 June, p. 1424), successfully climbed the mountain in 1953 and said, "Well, we knocked the bastard off."

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Corrections and Clarifications

An article in the 16 April "Women in Science '93" section, "The pipeline is leaking women all the way along" (p. 409), included the statement that "On the whole, young women score at least as well, and perhaps slightly better, than young men" on the mathematics portion of the SAT. That is not the case; on average, women score slightly lower than men on that part of the SAT. In addition, while there are more males than females at the highest scoring levels, at the lowest levels there are more females than males, contrary to what the article reported.

The illustration of the life cycle of HIV on page 1257 of the 28 May issue should also have credited Mohammed Nasr from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases as a source.

In the heading of and throughout the review of *Spencer Baird of the Smithsonian* (21 May, p. 1163), the name of the first author of the book was misspelled. The correct spelling is Rivinus.