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AIDS Politics

I was amazed but not amused by Jon Cohen's perception of the current state of HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) research (Special report: AIDS, "The changing of the guard," 28 June, p. 1876). For example, the "Heavy hitters 1993–95" list purporting to show the emergence of some new wave is taken from an article entitled, "AIDS: NIH stands out" (*1*). The *Science* list is made up of several individuals who usually, but not invariably, publish as a group. A summary impact score (citation per paper) for these groups would be

Laboratory of Immunoregulation, National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases (Orenstein + Pantaleo + Fauci)	University of Alabama, Birmingham (Shaw + Saag + Hahn)	Aaron Diamond AIDS Res. Ctr. (Ho + Cao + Moore)
73.01	54.51	43.43

and Robert Gallo's figures were not even included in this list. In this case of statistics of scientific esteem, readers should recall a statement paraphrased from Eugene McCarthy on football coaches, that one has to be smart enough to understand the principle, but not smart enough to lose interest.

HIV disease and its ultimate symptom, AIDS, is a tragedy that transcends politics and factions. A proper sociopolitical history of HIV research would reveal that coteries and cabals in this field are neither new nor have they been a particular source of original ideas or novel approaches for dealing with the disease. More important, factionalism is not the best way to produce new scientific concepts but is a symptom of lack of direction. Assigning the categories "old guard" or "new guard" does little for creative unity in disease research, whether they are accurate or not.

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References

1. *Sci. Watch* **7**, 1 (May/June 1996).

Schrödinger's Cat at Hand

When the Schrödinger cat paradox was first proposed in 1935, it was difficult to envision an experimental system in which to model Schrödinger's experiment. But C. Monroe *et al.* describe such a system in their research article "A 'Schrödinger cat' superposition state of an atom" (24 May, p. 1131). In an accompanying Research News article (24 May, p. 1101), Gary Taubes writes

> . . . Erwin Schrödinger described a cat shut up in what he called a "diabolical device": a closed box also containing a small amount of a radioactive substance. Over the course of an hour, the radioactive substance has a 50–50 chance of decaying. If it does, the decay is detected by a counter, which shatters a flask of deadly acid, killing the cat. If it doesn't, the cat lives.

But for the experiment to be a true paradox, the box must contain only *one* radioactive atom, as specified by Schrödinger. If there are numerous atoms in the box, it is a statistical certainty that at least one atom (but we cannot know which one) will decay in the course of the experiment, and the unfortunate cat will undoubtedly be killed. If, on the other hand, there is only one or very few atoms in the

box, we will not know whether the cat is dead or alive.

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As a naïve molecular biologist, I am perplexed by one facet of the problem of Schrödinger's cat as it is usually presented. Why can't the cat be considered an observer and therefore remove the uncertainty about its own life or death status?

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My 12-year-old daughter Phoebe is a student of quantum paradoxes, but she was concerned about an error in the illustration accompanying the Research News article with regard to feline anatomy. Presumably, even Schrödinger's cat would have foreleg "elbows," not "knees."

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The title of the Research News article "Schizophrenic atom doubles as Schrödinger's cat—or kitten" perpetuates a misconception about schizophrenia—which is nothing like split personality—and trivializes a potentially disabling mental disorder.

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"Kitten," as used by Taubes, seems needlessly macroscopic as a metaphor for a single trapped atom. How about "Schrödinger's furball"?

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Monkey Business

Presidential hopeful Pat Buchanan's assertion (described in News & Comment, 26 July, p. 421) that he personally is not descended from monkeys explains a lot to those of us who *are* from this planet.

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Corrections and Clarifications

In the letter "Risks from low doses of radiation: Continued" by Marvin Goldman (2 Aug., p. 562), the reference in the last paragraph on page 563 should have been "(3)" not "(2)."

The WWW address for Pedro at the end of note 3 in the letter "Not the 'Dark Ages' " by W. C. Barker and R. S. Ledley (12 July, p. 165) was incorrect. The correct address is http://www.public.iastate.edu/~pedro/rt_1.html

The WWW address for the document of the Council of Tobacco Research listed in the response by Jon Cohen (Letters, 12 July, p. 167) was incorrect. The correct address is http://galen.library.ucsf.edu/tobacco/docs/html/1916.01/1916.01.1.html

In the references (p. 16) of the letter by Darwin R. Labarthe about "Battling heart disease" (5 July, p. 15), references 3, 4, and 5 should have been listed as one reference, "3," and reference 6 should have been listed as "4." The numbers 1–4 as they appeared in the text were correct.

The figure (p. 47) showing the age distribution of the population of Europe (News, C. Holden, "New populations of old add to poor nations' burdens," 5 July, p. 46) was incorrect. The correct figure is shown below.