

## Gene-Xer's Making an Impact

### *To the Editor:*

Thank you, Dr. Petsko, for the wonderful exposé on impact factors (*ASBMB Today*, October, 2008). Perhaps you might consider commenting on Jorge Hirsch's H-index that measures a researcher's impact on science, potentially a more appropriate indicator of one's impact in their specific field.

As a Generation X researcher, I find myself in the exciting category of scientists who are actually bridging the gap between the genome and its secret, and the "established" researchers. Unfortunately, it is from this pool of "established" researchers, many of whom wouldn't know the difference between a restriction site and short sight (but who still contribute as co-authors to an impossible number of articles each year), that high-impact journals all too often draw from to review our manuscripts. Do I sound cynical? I

suppose I do, and for that I apologize. I do not mean to generalize as there is fantastic work being done by some of the "big" labs. However, it is a sad fact, but a consensus amongst many of us Gene-Xer's, that we and our graduate students spend a disproportionate amount of time (and hard-gained operating funds!) wading through a literature that is quite often flawed (or perhaps simply over-interpreted because of pressure to publish? I mean, really! Why are there researchers who still adhere to the misguided notion that cell signalling cascades are linear?). Of course, the biggest challenge is in convincing journal editors and reviewers (with much tongue-biting, but great diplomacy, I might add!) that our data and the interpretation thereof, is indeed correct. Geographical and institutional bias renders this an even greater challenge; I am from the University of Saskatchewan. Did I hear you say "Saskatchewhere"?

Gene-Xer's tend to live by Eric Hoffer's adage, "In times of change learners inherit the earth; while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to

deal with a world that no longer exists." However inspiring this sounds, Hoffer's philosophy is not the best formula for success in this impact factor-driven environment, where we all too often have to deal with *learned* grant application and journal reviewers who apparently fear the evolution of concepts and who choose to ascribe to the comforting ostrich-head-in-the-sand, "What, me worry?" mind-frame championed by that other notable philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Alfred E. Neuman.

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unless the second resubmission is triaged, I think investigators who have never had an NIH grant should be given the option of a third resubmission. If study sections do their jobs, the additional CONSTRUCTIVE criticism should be very valuable to a young scientist.

Do you have a different opinion? Good, then let NIH know about it. If we want things to improve, we all need to take an interest in what is happening. Because the funding situation is not going to get much better any time soon—I think the recession we're already in is going to be deep and dark compared with the last few—it is imperative that peer review, the jewel in the crown of American science, works as well as possible.

Meanwhile, I think the best advice to give young scientists, who are the ones we all need to be most concerned

about (they are, after all, the lifeblood of our profession), is not to pay attention to rumors about queuing, which might make you think you should just get in line with an imperfect proposal and try to fix it in the first revision. Personally, I've not seen much evidence for queuing in the way proposals are ranked, at least in the study sections that I participate in. And if NIH is not going to make allowances for beginning investigators and sticks with the one resubmission-only policy across the board, it's important that the first submission be as close to fundable as possible. Besides, I think a young investigator should make the strongest case he or she can, by writing the best possible proposal, so that the study section has the best possible impression of them the first time it encounters them. Second chances are all well and good, but as my mother was fond of saying: "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." 