

How *SCI*® Bypasses
“The Road to Scientific Oblivion”

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A recent letter in *JAMA*¹ stirred me to the heights of creativity. The result was the following letter² which should be self-explanatory. Unlike Dr. Jacobs' friends I have always lavished citations on my "enemies". Unwilling

as they are to recognize my work by appropriate citations I have always cited theirs knowing that this would cause my papers to be retrieved, in the *Science Citation Index*®, by anyone who bothered to follow up their "original" work.

1. Jacobs, G. "The Importance of Not Being Cited", *J. Am. Med. Assn.* 217:698 (1971).
2. Garfield, E. "The Road to Scientific Oblivion", *J. Am. Med. Assn.* 218:886-7 (November 8, 1971).

To the Editor.—Jacobs' failure to cite any literature on the *Science Citation Index (SCI)*, which he mentions in his letter on "The Importance of Not Being Cited" (217:698, 1971), might have privileged it with the oblivion he seems to applaud. But *SCI*'s indexing staff called the letter to my attention. Jacob's citing himself and then decrying the end of oblivion puts self-citation to a new and curious use.

Jacobs is mistaken, however, on two points. First, his article¹ was not completely buried in *Aerospace Medicine* where, admittedly, few physicians would see it. It may be true that his article "has not appeared in the bibliography of any scientific publication," but it is not true that it "thus has never been cited in the *Science Citation Index*." The article was abstracted in *THE JOURNAL* (190:208, 1964), and the citations for both the paper and the abstract did indeed appear in the 1964 *SCI*. Second, his idea of a "Never Cited Index" (or *Index*

Oblivionis) is not an original concept. Information on uncitedness was included in the Institute for Scientific Information's *Genetics Citation Index*,² the experimental index which led to the establishment of the *SCI*. Furthermore, the concept was discussed recently in *Current Contents*.³

Jacobs does not, of course, mention the main reason why a very large number of papers remain uncited and justifiably achieve oblivion. We are hoping to provide concrete data on the causes of uncitedness, but I believe that most who attain the true *status oblivionis* deserve it. Never-cited and infrequently cited authors should not, however, seek the consolation Jacobs offers in the notion that uncitedness may ally them with some supposedly unrecognized and uncited pioneer-genius. Mendel is the usual example, but the myth that Mendel's work was uncited before it was rediscovered in 1900 has been disproved.^{4,5}

Your readers may be interested to learn that we are seeking some method of estimating potential uncitedness (PU) for use by editors and referees. The PUs would have to be correlated eventually with NEMESIS (*NE*ver *ME*ntioned *SI*nce Scores). Reviewers and historians might be grateful beneficiaries of the PU/NEMESIS correlation. Once validated, we shall undoubtedly publish the results in the *Journal of Irreproducible Results*, along with research on the backscratcher theory which supposedly invalidates the use of citation counts as a means of evaluating research. If Jacobs has had no friends willing to cite

his articles, one must truly wonder: "With such friends, who needs enemies?"

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1. Jacobs G: Cybernetics, homeostasis and a model of disease. *Aerospace Med* 35:726, 1964.
2. Garfield E, Sher IH: *Genetics Citation Index: Experimental Citation Indexes to Genetics with Special Emphasis on Human Genetics*. Philadelphia, Institute for Scientific Information, 1963.
3. Garfield E: When is a negative search result positive? *Current Contents/Life Sciences* 13:4-5, 1970.
4. Garfield E: Would Mendel's work have been ignored if the *Science Citation Index* was available 100 years ago? *Current Contents/Life Sciences* 12:5-6, 1969.
5. Zirkle C: Some oddities in the delayed discovery of Mendelism. *J Hered* 55:65-72, 1964.