""""""Current comments"

If You Can't Stand the Heat,
Get Out of the Kitchen! Publishing Journals
Is Not Kid-Stuff!!

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Recently I learned that a leading medical library in the U.K. used the information contained in our Journal Citation Index1 to help make its journal purchasing decisions for 1973. The process was eminently fair, and operated on the principle that no other new journals be added to the collection until gaps uncovered by the JCI had been filled. By checking the 75 journals that appeared on both our most-cited and high-impact lists, this library found that it had overlooked about 30 important journals. When the library committee was presented with this list, not a single member could quarrel with the conclusion that years of purely subjective selection, based on individuals' recommendations, had produced an imbalance in the collection.

One of my colleagues in the journal publishing business is perturbed by all this "science" in journal selection. This is particularly surprising to me, because his firm produces a significant number of the journals that rank highest in ISI®'s studies. However, other organizations that publish the journals that rank lowest in our studies should be justifiably concerned, because we have publicly stated that this information will be used, among other criteria, in helping us make decisions about journal coverage.

Bad journals, like bad money, drive out the good. If mediocrity is encouraged, then eventually young scientists will lose their respect for anything in journals. This reaction is not uncommon in our lives. There is so much that is bad on American television that many people now refuse to buy a TV set. It has become simply too enervating to attempt selectivity. The large volume of violent and pointless films appearing in motion picture theaters causes a similar reaction to films. Perhaps this explains the current popularity of the silent films!

The admonition that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty" applies in science as well as politics. If scientists do not exert their influence, economic or otherwise, to turn off the junk, they will eventually be deluged by it. Citation studies have caused a number of editors to evaluate their journals in relation to others. I can only say to the editors of those that don't show up too well, "if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen!"

- Garfield, E. Citation analysis as a tool in journal evaluation. Science 178:471-79, 1972.
- See, for example: MacAdam, D.L. Citation analysis of J. Opt. Soc. Am. J. Opt. Soc. Am. 63:116, 1973.