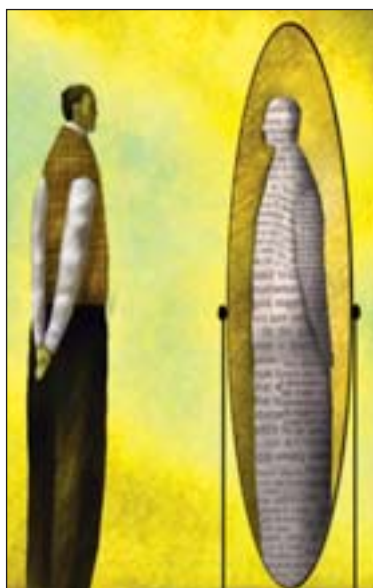


Don't be misled by citation figures! (14)

Tracky Transcriptions

Lund sat in the library, reading the article. He couldn't help but notice his anger gradually rising. The text itself wasn't particularly exciting; it dealt with a simple poll about whether or not researchers really read the papers which they quote in the reference lists of their own articles. The result was a little disturbing: many of the papers quoted by the authors hadn't been read at all or perhaps only rudimentarily, and many of them only made it into the reference lists because they had previously been cited by others in the same context.

"Hrmp! A simple transcription, eh? Well let's hope they at least copy it accurately this time," Lund grumbled as his face grew even redder. He thought this old topic from days gone by had long been laid to rest, but obviously not! A seemingly harmless report like this was enough to bring everything back to the boil. "So what!" he admitted, downhearted, "who can blame me? After all, it was definitely an extremely stupid situation back then."



God knows, it certainly was. Lund, a biochemist, was working on membrane proteins. At that time there was one major problem with membrane proteins: how to get them into solution without destroying structure and activity. Sure, there were plenty of detergents available and, from time to time, one of them really solubilised a protein from its membrane without any damage. However, in the vast majority of cases, it turned into a long and futile trial and error session in an effort to determine with which detergents, in what quantities and combinations, under which conditions the job would finally succeed.

That was until Lund was determined to tackle the problem himself. He met with a physicist and a chemist, and the three exchanged ideas and made many notes. Lund then went to the chemist's lab and, after much effort, they synthesised a new designer detergent, which they branded with the somewhat daft acronym KLOPS.

It wasn't long before KLOPS exceeded even Lund's boldest expectations: it brought eight out of ten membrane proteins into solution, including even some of the "most hydrophobic chunks". It certainly wasn't a great discovery but the *Journal of Biological Chemistry* nevertheless published his article. Furthermore, several suppliers of laboratory chemicals immediately introduced KLOPS into their product lines.

Several months later, the *Annual Reviews of Biochemistry* published a comprehensive review of the functional solubilisation of membrane proteins. It was destined to become the "standard article" for everyone in the protein solubilisation business over the following decade.

The review devoted an entire chapter to Lund's KLOPS. This was at least written with far more care than the reference list. Here, the authors managed to drop two major clangers in the quotation of his paper: they converted "Lund R." into "Land R." and omitted the "J" in "*J Biol Chem*".

Such sloppiness resulted in detrimental consequences: almost everybody who used KLOPS for solubilisation afterwards just took the reference for KLOPS from the review and, in turn, transferred "Land R. *et al.*, *Biol Chem* 233: 557-64" to their papers without further proofing.

Subsequently, a non-existent paper has received 634 citations to-date. For "Lund R"; on the other hand, the databases list a total of just 287 citations – a mere 76 for his "real" KLOPS paper.

Lund himself, however, stopped following these numbers a long time ago, for obvious reasons!

RALF NEUMANN

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