

preimplantation genetics. Unfortunately, a rider attached to the compromise federal spending bill at the insistence of the Republican majority forbade all federal funding of research involving human embryos. The ultimate irony is that preimplantation genetics was developed to provide an alternative to aborting genetically abnormal fetuses, a goal consistent with the Republicans' opposition to abortion. Yet this law prohibited federally funded research in this field. Faced with this repressive law, Hughes endeavoured to move his preimplantation activities off the NIH campus and into the private sector to comply with the law while continuing his ground-breaking research.

After allegations by a postdoc, it became public knowledge that Hughes was doing preimplantation genetics at his off-campus site. Instead of support from the scientific community and outrage at government intrusion into genetic research, NIH and Georgetown scientists and administrators fell over themselves to express "shock" that preimplantation diagnosis was going on. Shocked that a brilliant scientist recruited to develop the field of preimplantation genetics was caught red-handed actually doing preimplantation genetics! Why not support the man they recruited? Instead of feigning ignorance and suggesting unethical behaviour, why not tell the public

that Hughes made extraordinary efforts with restrictive federal laws while still offering couples a chance to avoid aborting abnormal fetuses?

In *Casablanca*, Rick and Louis eventually team up to defy the oppressors. Unfortunately that kind of courage was not evidenced in recent events. Hughes was abandoned and hung out to dry.

Hughes' dismissal and abandonment is a profound and disturbing example of the continued politicization of American science. Soon only politically correct projects will be funded and carried out, and science will become just a pawn in the partisan political agenda.

Charles M. Strom

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Not too old at 30

Sir — Why are advertisements for PhD students specifically directed at those who are "under 30" or a "young student"? I am surprised that a journal such as *Nature* should support such discrimination. Indeed, it may conflict with equal opportunities legislation.

I am a mature student, one of many in universities. We mature 30–40-year-old budding scientists who are dedicated to our

subject would love an opportunity to undertake PhD research. But not only are we constantly reminded of our lack of 'neuronal plasticity' by the industrial sector, but it seems that advertising for basic research is allowed blatantly to reinforce this view. Mature students with good degrees and prizes get the impression that further research must be through low-profile, ill-funded and very low paid studentships. This ensures that after finishing a PhD we are specialized in a field with little applicability to industry. As for academic institutions, expanding industrial links with universities also prohibit employment of those specialized in low-profile areas.

It is more than disheartening for mature students, often with a flair for science, to be discriminated against in this way. Heaven forbid if we are female too! Perhaps *Nature* should set an example by adopting a policy of ensuring that those placing advertisements realize the concept of equal opportunities.

Gina Clayton

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◆ Stimulated by this letter, *Nature* intends in future to discourage advertisers from discriminating on the grounds of age.

It is already illegal in some countries.

— Editor, *Nature*.

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