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The fame game

The closest most scientists come to celebrity is conducting a conference presentation and perhaps having their image projected onto a big screen for the benefit of their peers in the back row. Researchers, even Nobel laureates, are relatively anonymous to the general public. But on 21 March, a group of scientists appeared on the cover of a glossy Sunday magazine read in millions of US households.

The credit for getting them onto the cover of *Parade*, in a space normally reserved for athletes, actors and pop singers, belongs to Research!America, a science-advocacy group in Alexandria, Virginia. But this public-relations coup has implications beyond a brief spell in the limelight. If non-scientists could be convinced to see researchers as rock stars, maybe scientists' careers would improve.

For example, Tshaka Cunningham, a graduate student at Rockefeller University in New York, sometimes fantasizes that if scientists were celebrities then he might have similar earnings to professional basketball players. And having a captive audience watch him clone a gene ought to make it easier for him to secure funding for his HIV research (see page 450).

There have been some isolated incidents where scientists have entertained such audiences. A few years ago, journalists queued up to have their copies of *Science* and *Nature* signed by the authors of both the public and private human-genome papers. And more recently, the world watched live as the Mars lander team awaited word that the probe had reached the surface safely.

Of course, scientists as celebrities could go too far — the trashing of green-rooms at conferences would be unfortunate. But some more panache with both peers and the public would be welcome. So scientists might consider adopting some Mick Jagger swagger when they fire up that next PowerPoint presentation.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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