

# Representations of Cloning in the Public Sphere

Grace Reid

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## **Research Question**

***What are the social representations of cloning risks and benefits?***

### **Methodology**

Focus groups: In order to explore social representations in public perception, three focus groups were held in January 2003. The focus groups were composed of randomly recruited members of the general public from Calgary, Alberta.

### **Content Analysis**

In order to investigate social representations in the media, *Globe and Mail* articles about cloning were coded and analysed from 1997, when Dolly was cloned, through to 2001.

## **Conclusions**

### **Social Representations of Body Part Cloning**

The *Globe and Mail* articles and the focus group participants shared the same hopes for body part cloning, but they differed regarding concerns.

### **Social Representations of Animal Cloning**

Both the *Globe and Mail* articles and the focus group participants recognized that there are both benefits and risks for animal cloning. They identified very different sets of benefits and risks. However, both agreed that cloning endangered/extinct animals would be a benefit and that genetic defects would be a risk.

### **Social Representations of Human Cloning**

The *Globe and Mail* presented a balanced picture of the risks and benefits associated with human cloning, but the focus group participants clearly had limited hopes for this type of cloning—they saw it as mad science.

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*Grace Reid is a graduate student in the Communications Studies Program, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.*



## Focus Group Findings

Body Part Cloning	Animal Cloning	Human Cloning
<p><b>HOPES</b> The public identified two key hopes for body part cloning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Increase in organs available for transplants.</li> <li>•Curing diseases, such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s.</li> </ul> <p><b>CONCERNS</b> At first participants said they had no concerns about body part cloning. However, after a couple of minutes of brainstorming, the groups generated three main categories of concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The process of body part cloning.</li> <li>•Access to body part cloning.</li> <li>•Ethics of prolonging life through body part cloning.</li> </ul> <p><b>POSITIONS</b> Participants’ hopes for extending human life outnumbered any concerns they raised. As such, the majority of focus group participants were in favour of body part cloning.</p>	<p><b>HOPES</b> Participants’ main categories of hopes for animal cloning included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Expansion of scientific/medical knowledge.</li> <li>•Perfecting cloning technique on animals before it is used on humans.</li> <li>•Bringing endangered/extinct species back to life.</li> </ul> <p><b>CONCERNS</b> The two major concerns raised were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Genetic defects in cloned animals.</li> <li>•Impact of cloned animals on the environment.</li> </ul> <p><b>POSITIONS</b> The time spent on hopes and concerns was fairly equal across all three focus groups, as were the total number of categories for both hopes and concerns. Participants were divided on animal cloning.</p>	<p><b>HOPES</b> Participants made it very clear that they had no hopes for human cloning:</p> <p>“I don’t think this group is really hoping for human cloning. I might be generalizing, but nobody put human cloning down as a hope.”</p> <p><b>CONCERNS</b> Participants had a lot of anxiety about human cloning. They identified seven main categories of concern:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Use of human cloning for evil purposes.</li> <li>•Inhumane treatment of clones.</li> <li>•Clones not the same as originals.</li> <li>•Lack of regulation.</li> <li>•Possibility of clones without souls.</li> <li>•Environmental impacts.</li> <li>•Scientists “playing God.”</li> </ul> <p><b>POSITIONS</b> The majority of focus group participants opposed human cloning.</p>

## Content Analysis Findings

Body Part Cloning	Animal Cloning	Human Cloning
<p><b>BENEFITS</b> The <i>Globe and Mail</i> identified two main benefits of body part cloning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Solving the organ transplant shortage.</li> <li>•Curing of diseases.</li> </ul> <p><b>RISKS</b> The articles only presented one key risk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Creation of human life only to terminate it.</li> </ul> <p><b>BENEFIT/RISK RATIO</b> The <i>Globe and Mail</i> mentioned benefits of body part cloning twice as much as risks.</p>	<p><b>BENEFITS</b> The top three benefits mentioned were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Creation of health-care products.</li> <li>•Animal husbandry.</li> <li>•Revival of endangered and extinct species.</li> </ul> <p><b>RISKS</b> The <i>Globe and Mail</i> identified two main categories of risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Several failed attempts for one successful animal clone.</li> <li>•Genetic defects.</li> </ul> <p><b>BENEFIT/RISK RATIO</b> The articles mention almost equal numbers of benefits and risks.</p>	<p><b>BENEFITS</b> The <i>Globe and Mail</i> articles talked predominantly about two benefits for human cloning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Cloning of children for infertile couples.</li> <li>•Cloning of departed loved ones.</li> </ul> <p><b>RISKS</b> The key human cloning risks were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Human clones with genetic defects.</li> <li>•Loss of genetic identity.</li> <li>•Human cloning getting out of control.</li> </ul> <p><b>BENEFIT/RISK RATIO</b> The <i>Globe and Mail</i> raised approximately equal numbers of benefits and risks for human cloning.</p>

