

# Peat and Re-peat



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→ Robert E.  
Horseman,  
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ILLUSTRATION  
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“Now we have the technology that can make a cloned child,” writes Steve Connor, science editor of *The Independent*.

We should proceed cautiously here, more so than was exercised creating the child in the first place. Recognizing the wide diversity of members of, say, the Osmond Family and the Manson Family, not everybody should get to vote.

Remember Dolly, the Ewe de Benchmark clone of a few years ago? The technology involved in Dolly’s cloning is said to be vastly more complicated than this new procedure that is so simple and efficient, scientists are worried some maverick attempts to perform it would be too real to ignore.

Robert Lanza, chief scientific officer of Advanced Cell Technology, an American biotechnology company, warns, “It’s unethical and unsafe. If this was applied to humans, it would be enormously impor-

tant and troublesome.”

Dr. Lanza probably is referring to the parents of teenaged children who would jump at the chance to do a little discreet gene manipulation if they thought it wouldn’t make things worse. Apparently it is another of these things like performing your own rhinoplasty, we are forever being warned about to “Never try this at home.”

To date, fears that the successful cloning of Dolly would result in the world being overrun by look-alike sheep have not materialized, although it would be hard to tell. To the untrained eye, sheep, like penguins, look pretty much the same. Nevertheless, Lanza says, “We now have a working technology whereby anyone, young or old, fertile or infertile, straight or gay, can pass on their genes to a child by using just a few skin cells.” Not

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discussed yet is the inevitable problem of convincing the cloned individual he is not the original.

If you, as a layman, have trouble absorbing these biotechnical revelations, rest assured they work. Presumably, those selected skin cells should not be saturated with tattoo ink, in which case the clone might resemble a Jackson Pollock canvas.

The cloning research is not being done on live people, but, as usual, on mice. Put a mouse alongside a man, like in a police lineup and you fail to see any physical connection that would warrant the substitution. Men are taller, for one thing. But you are not a scientist, a group that has learned by experience that a mouse will put up with indignities a man and PETA will not tolerate. Mice have been reprogrammed and genetically tweaked until almost anything is possible except a normal, cheese-eating existence.

As long as mousetraps still work and crazed rogue mice are not running up pant legs or down blouses, we are content to leave the experiments to the lab techs and concentrate on the promises and waffling of political candidates. A federal grant for research labs is small potatoes compared to the \$500 million or so required for presidential campaign expenses. The results for both are frequently disappointing.

Set aside for the moment the religious and ethical elements of producing "designer children." It is our obligation as dental professionals to ponder not only how many implants can be billed to a working man's salary and how many veneers it would take to create a virtual clone of Julia Roberts, but how much research money is being directed to improving human dentition.

Say you are a parent of a child in her third year of orthodontic treatment

so she can look like Hillary Swank and make a bundle displaying all 32 teeth in TV commercials. What if you could have had a hand in designing this kid without the peg laterals, the impacted third molars and the 2 centimeter overjet? Imagine choosing a shade for her anteriors so white, she would never bug you for a makeover before she was even into puberty? Never mind the hair, eyes, lips, and all the other attributes real or enhanced requisite for the young to survive in today's milieu, this is important stuff and we need to keep an eye on these genetic programmers.

Dr. Lanza concludes with "... for instance, if we had a few skin cells from

Albert Einstein, or anyone else in the world, you could have a child that is, say, 10 percent or 70 percent Albert Einstein by just injecting a few of their cells into an embryo."

Maybe Einstein is not the best example, because harvesting some of his skin cells could be a problem as they have been largely unavailable since his death in 1955. Besides, we already have too many kids with funny hair.

Assuming God really wants everyone to be happy except for, perhaps, mice, if you are considering becoming in a family way, you might want to postpone it for 15 or 20 years until your options become clearer. ■■■■