



SCIENCE as CULTURE

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Stem cells are linked with stories of hope and promise, as well as risk and disappointment. Commentators on these experimental cells often attempt to distinguish between their realistic potential and merely speculative hope or hype. Yet this distinction can be deceptive. Potential futures are being shaped by various investments – be they in the form of expert promises, elusive hopes or venture capital. Hope, hype and promise structure scientific innovation; they also inform responses of its many public audiences.

This special issue analyses how stem cell stories build potential futures in ways which attract investments. The articles look back at the past decade since a 1998 scientific paper reported a 'breakthrough' in the first isolation of human embryonic stem cells. Contributors address questions such as: What stories are being told? Who is interested in stem cells and why? What does stem cell science promise to deliver? And what is left out?

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