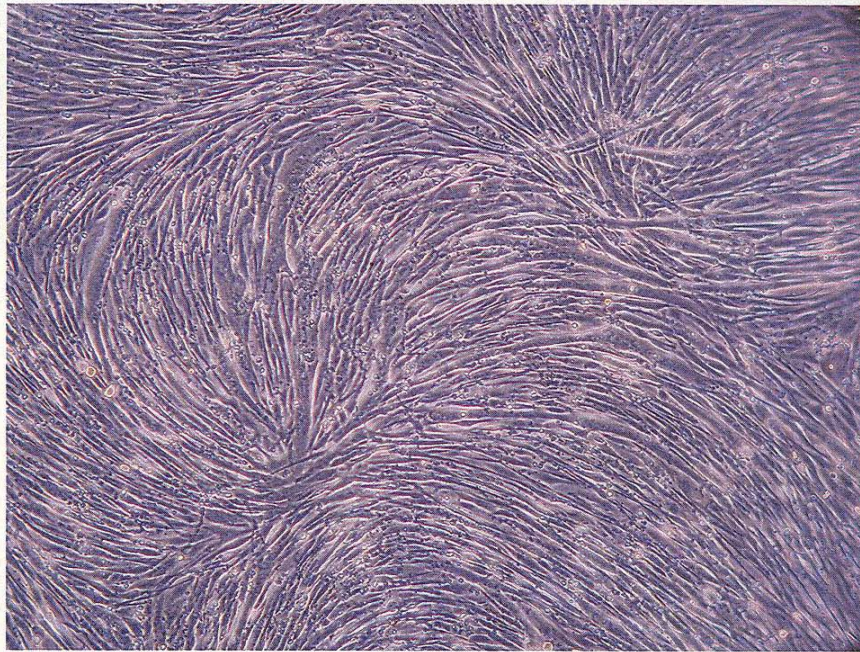


Tube steak? Mouse stem cells that have been fused to grow muscle fibers. The same process has been used with cow cells.



IN VITRO MEAT

that would produce meat overnight in your kitchen.

There are still several major hurdles to clear, like figuring out a way to get stem cells to proliferate cheaply enough that meat could be mass-produced. But if in vitro meat becomes viable, the environmental and ethical consequences could be profound. The thought of beef grown in the lab may turn your stomach, but in vitro meat would avoid many of the downsides of factory farming, most notably pollution: in the United States, livestock produce 1.4 billion tons of waste each year. What's more, once a meat-cell culture exists, it could function the way a yeast or yogurt culture does, so that meat growers wouldn't need to use a new animal for each set of starter cells — and the meat industry would no longer be dependent on slaughtering animals.

RAIZEL ROBIN

Juvenile Cynics

Adults often extol children for their innocence, but according to a recent study by researchers at Yale's department of psychology, kids are in fact the most hardened of cynics.

The study, which was written by Candice M. Mills and Frank C. Keil and appeared in the May 2005 issue of the journal *Psychological Science*, suggests that young children are especially apt to believe that when people distort the truth, they do so for selfish reasons. In one part of the experiment, kindergartners, second graders, fourth graders and sixth graders read or heard short stories about the outcomes of various contests. The children were then informed that some of the characters in these stories had falsely reported the results of the contests. The children had to decide whether the misstatements were due to lying, bias or innocent error.

More often than not, the children believed that the characters were lying — provided that a character's spreading of misinformation was clearly aligned with the promotion of the character's self-interest. In fact, the study shows young children to be more cynical than adults because they

are more likely to link self-interest with intentional deception as opposed to a mistake or subconscious bias. "Young children are less likely than adults to give people who make incorrect statements in their own favor the benefit of the doubt," Mills writes, "assuming instead that these kinds of inaccuracies arise from a malicious intent to deceive."

Mills attributes the study's results partly to the fact that many elementary-school children have yet to distinguish between conscious and unconscious thought. Clearly, outright deception is a simpler concept than subtle bias. In any case, the children's acute skepticism may be an increasingly important tool for the newest members of an information-based economy.

"I think it's really important to decide how children figure out what to believe, given how much information they encounter on the television and in the media and in advertisements and whatnot," Mills says. "The fact is that not all of the information they hear is accurate." And apparently kids often know it.

LEAH MESSINGER

Laptop That Will Save the World, The

Here in America, high-speed wireless Internet has become a commonplace amenity, and teenagers with Sidekicks can browse the Web on a beach. For many people in developing nations, however, the mere thought of owning a computer remains pure fantasy.

But maybe not for long. This year, Nicholas Negroponte, chairman of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab, unveiled a prototype of a \$100 laptop. With millions of dollars in financing from the likes of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation and Google, Negroponte and his colleagues have designed an extremely durable, compact, no-frills laptop, which they'd like to see in the hands of millions of children worldwide by 2008.

So how can any worthwhile computer cost less than a pair of good