

‘Identity-Crises’ in Clones: a Distinct Possibility or a Far-Fetched Idea in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*

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Abstract: If humans are perfectly cloned in the future (after being legalized), how will the psychology of these clones function? Specifically, is there a possibility that they might face identity crises as humans do now? This paper aims to study this possibility in the fictional world of Kazuo Ishiguro created in his sci-fi novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005). It aims to navigate how Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth develop bonding among themselves and try to build a sense of belonging in a world where they have no purpose of existence other than donating their vital organs and meeting their demise. Examining the clones' limited knowledge of their origins, predetermined fate, and societal prejudice, the paper analyzes the psychological factors that contribute to their internal struggle. It discusses their yearning for self-determination, their search for meaning beyond their biological function, and their attempts to forge individual identities despite societal constraints. The paper tries to draw a conclusion based on the circumstances and events in the work of fiction, hence the result is specific to the fictional world built by Ishiguro.

Keywords: Identity crisis, Cloning, Science fiction, Dystopian world, Clones, Kazuo Ishiguro

Are clones capable of experiencing identity crises? If human clones are supposed to possess the same physiology as humans, it opens avenues to think about the possibility of the psychology of such beings. What feelings and emotions will they go through when they learn about their lack of hereditary lineage? In what way and up to what extent will the negative emotions affect the clones? Such intriguing question lies at the heart of this paper of Kazuo Ishiguro's thought-provoking and poignant novel, *Never Let Me Go* (2005). As we delve into the lives of Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth, we journey through a dystopian world where cloned individuals grapple with the complexities of their existence. The story occurs in a dystopian society where clones, known as "donors," are created to provide vital organs for the "normal" population. This raises important questions about the ethics and implications of human cloning.

In *NLMG*, Clones are raised in secluded boarding schools, isolated from the outside world, which compounds their sense of otherness and detachment from society. In their early days, their reality of being clones is kept hidden from them and later they are constantly reminded of their predetermined fate as organ donors, preventing them from discovering their true potential and individuality. "We took away your art because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we did it to prove you had souls at all." (Ishiguro, 2005) The intricately woven narrative delves into the lives of the characters who are clones, their identities, and the potential for identity crises that arise from their unique circumstances.

The psychological effect of the revelation of the truth of their origin and purpose of existence.

When exploring the concept of identity in clones concerning literature, one must recognize the profound psychological impact this secluded existence has on these individuals in *NLMG*. Clones, such as those depicted in the novel *NLMG* grapple with issues of identity and self-worth. Erikson defines identity as a "fundamental organizing principle which develops constantly throughout the lifespan." (Erikson, 1970) The intricate web of

emotions and challenges cloned individuals face sheds light on how their identity-based struggles can be looked into concerning:

- **Loss of Individuality:** Clones, created with the sole purpose of providing organs for their counterparts, struggle with a sense of purposelessness. Their agony of being stripped of agency, and being treated as commodities rather than unique beings can be heard in Kathy's narration when she says "We didn't have the same possibilities as ordinary kids...There were times when we tried to fight it, but it became evident that our paths were set for us" (Ishiguro, 2005). The sense of being manufactured and predetermined leads to a deep-seated feeling of emptiness and a constant search for meaning.
- **Existential Crisis:** Cloned individuals are confronted with existential questions about their purpose and significance in the world. They grapple with the idea that their lives may have been predetermined from the moment they come to know about themselves from Miss Lucy in the seventh chapter "You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do." (Ishiguro, 2005).
- **The Quest for Identity:** The clones desire to forge their own identities amidst an uncertain future aspiring to do something worthwhile. They long to build a future and aspire to build a successful career. Despite the limitations placed upon them, they continue to dream, aspire, and fight for a future where they can define themselves and leave their mark on the world. Their story serves as a powerful call to action, urging us to challenge societal norms that devalue individual lives and recognize the inherent worth of every human being.
- **Emotional Turmoil:** Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy, like normal human beings, experience a wide range of emotions, often intensified by the inherent complexities of their existence. It is one of the most compelling aspects of the novel. They navigate a complex inner world filled with emotions intensified by their unique existence as clones destined for organ donation.
- **The Burden of Knowledge:** Being aware of their purpose and ultimate fate, clones carry the weight of a future defined by sacrifice. They keep trying to find the person upon whom they are modeled, "Since each of us was copied at some point from a normal person, there must be, for each of us, somewhere out there, a model getting on with his or her life. This meant, at least in theory, you'd be able to find the person you were modeled from." (Ishiguro, 2005). This burden often leads to profound emotional distress, including anxiety, depression, and a sense of hopelessness.

The Role of Memory and Identity in Clones

In the world of clones, the delicate interplay between memory and identity holds significant importance. Clones, by their very nature, are replicas of existing individuals, created to serve others. However, as we delve deeper into their existence, we find that memory and identity are not simply copied and transferred from their genetic sources. Rather, they undergo a complex formation process, shaping the clones' sense of self and understanding of the world around them.

Invented by J. B. S. Haldane, the term "clone" is derived from the ancient Greek word "klon" meaning "twig" referring to the process of re-growing a new plant from its twig. There are two types of cloning: Reproductive and therapeutic. Reproductive Cloning or organism cloning involves the process of making a genetically identical organism (in this context human being) from the stem cells of another. Unlike Therapeutic Cloning of human cells which has several medical benefits including organ transplants, skin replacement, and regeneration of tissues, bones, cartilage, retina, etc., reproductive cloning is still cloaked in controversies regarding the "ethics of cloning". Although scientists are actively researching in this field and have successfully cloned entire animals (22 species) attempts at human cloning are yet to receive a government permit. The phrase Ethics of Cloning in Bioethics (a study concerning the ethical issues arising from advanced biotechnology) refers to a debate on human values and moral grounds regarding the possibility and the consequence of human cloning. Although therapeutic cloning has gained supporters for its life-saving prospects, reproductive cloning receives followers such as infertile parents or those whose children died infants. However, the idea of reproductive cloning has gained much opposition from secular groups (religious groups believe that it is a man trying to play

God) due to the possibility of human clones being turned into commodities and harvested for organs: a new low in humanity. Nonetheless, less abusive issues such as identity, legal rights, and societal and familial positions have also kept governments from authorizing it.

Euphemism In *Never Let Me Go* (2005)

Ishiguro employs euphemistic terms framing the business of cloning in the novel. Donors – the clones from whom the organs were being harvested. Carer – the clones who gave company to the donor clones as they went on with their donations. Complete – the death of clones. Possible – the real sponsor or model from whose stem cells the clones have been created.

“Donors” denotes clones who cater with organs freshly harvested from their living bodies to the requirement of the clientele. Ishiguro doesn’t provide a definite order in which the organs were harvested. But the maximum number of donations which is five tells the tale. First the clones part with vital organs that are present in pairs in their body- lungs, kidneys, eyes, and limbs. When they run out of those they have to give up the minimum organs supporting their lives and then they die. Although the word “donor” connotes a deliberate act, here a ‘donor’ is not a volunteer. Ishiguro ironically uses it to hint at the underlying involuntary nature of the donation program.

The government bodies in charge of the clone management program make sure that from infancy onwards, the clones are mentally conditioned to be content with the idea of organ donation as the only purpose of their existence. This is evident from how Kathy maintains her composure while casually relating to the strict rules of Hailsham forbidding pregnancy or smoking, which will change their bodies accordingly and render them unsuitable for its consumers. Only those clones having no urgent requirement for donation are appointed as a ‘carer’ instead.

“Carer” refers to clones who offer care and compassion to the ‘donors’ and help them to “stay calm” while going through and recovering from consecutive donations. One “carer” is assigned to one ‘donor’ until the latter ‘complete’ or dies from her wounds and missing body parts. The possibility of the ‘donors’ revolting against this system is nipped in the bud by the authorities by recruiting clones to care for other clones: a well-planned program. This certainly upsets a possible unity and works to dissipate any accumulating potential willing to disobey the authority of the government. Kathy unknowingly serves as a watchdog of her collar.

The word “complete” makes an entry halfway through the novel at the beginning of chapter eighteen. It is again a euphemistic term referring to the death of the clones. Pertaining to their nature of conception, conditioned upbringing, and their identity as a copy of the original model human, their end of life is akin to completion of a job. To term it as “death” would simply bestow upon the clones a human status which Ishiguro consciously evades, driving home the nature of the state policy.

The clones enter the services as carers and gain first-hand experience regarding what is going to happen to them, they are called in to begin their donations. After they start donating they die eventually. It is a part of conditioning the clones to prepare them for what is about to befall. Since they have already been a “carer” the donation system banks on the humanity of the clones to be less of a nuisance to the person caring for them. The novel ends with the idea that the reality the clones live in doesn’t approve of clones gaining human status. But it is exactly what the relationship between a donor and a “carer” is all about: being human/kind to the other.

However, the narrative focuses on privileged clones, reared within the peripheries of Hailsham. They grow up, make friends, fall in love, and die a bit at a time donating their organs one by one. What happens to the underprivileged ones or those who weren’t lucky enough to be reared in an institution is left to the reader’s imagination.

“Ishiguro cites three areas - gene editing, robotics, and Artificial Intelligence - that he believes could transform the way we live and interact with each other over the next 30 years. [...] Kazuo Ishiguro argues that the social

changes unleashed by gene editing technologies, such as Crispr3, could undermine core human values” Hannah Devlin, The Guardian. (Devlin,2016)

Unfortunately, the violent death of the clones happens for the sake of deferring their sponsor’s death. It is possible that the authors of these stories had in mind the fact that cloning if sanctioned would be nothing but an extra-life similar to the one we find in the virtual reality of video games. It resonates with the consumer mantra. One life is not enough: *yeh dil maange more* (trans. This heart wants more)

1. The Fragility of Memories: In NLMG, Clones' memories are more flexible and stable than one might assume. They are not exact replicas of the memories of their genetic sources but are instead fragmented and shaped by their own unique experiences. Each clone possesses a distinct set of memories, influenced by their interactions, observations, and emotions. For instance, Tommy is a character who is shown as someone who throws tantrums at the beginning but as there is character development he stops doing it. These memories, in turn, contribute to the formation of their identities.

2. The Search for Identity: As clones navigate their existence, they embark on a quest to uncover their identities. They wrestle with the question of who they truly are, beyond their purpose as organ ‘donors’ or ‘carers’. This search is often fraught with confusion, doubt, and a profound sense of loss. Their struggle to establish a sense of self is intensified by the societal expectations placed upon them, which often limit their autonomy and freedom. It leads to a ‘legitimation crisis’, “is the inability of a social entity to fulfill the demands and expectations it has placed on itself”.(Baumeister,1985)

3. The Liminal Space: Clones exist in a liminal space, suspended between their individuality and the expectations thrust upon them by society. They are constantly grappling with the tension between their desires and the roles they are assigned. This struggle highlights the inherent complexities of identity formation and how external factors can shape one's sense of self.

4. The Power of Self-Reflection: Clones engage in deep introspection and self-reflection throughout their journey, seeking to understand their experiences and emotions. This internal exploration becomes instrumental in the development of their identities. By questioning their existence, contemplating their relationships, and analyzing their memories, clones gradually piece together fragments of their narratives. Which makes Kathy question, “Why? Why is it so much worse for us?”(Ishiguro,2005).

Pre-conditioned from a Young age to Prevent the Establishment of a Strong Sense of Identity

The Pre-conditioning of the clones, from a young age to prevent the establishment of a strong sense of identity raises ethical and psychological concerns that reverberate across various fields, including literature, philosophy, and psychology. Here's a breakdown of the statement and its implications.

In NLMG’s world, the prevention of identity formation has the psychological impact of suppressing identity development has detrimental effects on Kathy’s mental health and well-being. It leads to feelings of emptiness, confusion, and a lack of self-worth. She struggles to establish relationships and find her place in the world. This action is in direct contradiction to Miss Lucy’s statement about keeping the students of Hailsham healthy, “You’re... special. So keeping yourselves well, keeping yourselves very healthy inside, that’s much more important for each of you than it is for me.” (Ishiguro, 2005).

It also leads to a loss of agency by preventing clones from developing their sense of self, they are robbed of their agency and autonomy. They become puppets manipulated by external forces, unable to determine their own lives. The erosion of individuality in these clones creates a lack of a strong identity can lead to conformity and a fear of standing out. Individuals may become indistinguishable from one another, losing their unique qualities and perspectives.

It is a suppression of motivations to control and manipulate those who suppress the identity formation of the clones bred for organ donation. The unrevealed authorities of NLMG’s society aim to control these individuals to prevent them from challenging the status quo, in which they keep donating their vital organs without questioning the system. To maintain the order and stability of this system the clones need to lack

individual identity. The administration fears the potential for dissent and rebellion that could arise from strong individual identities and the development of unity among them.

This practice of creating a lack of confidence may remind an Indian reader of the common practice of devaluing Indian knowledge by the officials of imperial British rule in the classic example of Lord Macaulay's 'Minutes on Indian Education (1835), which says,

"...I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England..."

Such cases of deliberately creating identity crises are portrayed in NLMG by Kazuo Ishiguro directly addresses this theme. The clones are raised with limited access to information about themselves and their purpose. This, coupled with their predetermined fate, prevents them from developing a strong sense of self. George Orwell's dystopian masterpiece, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1984), similarly explores the consequences of a totalitarian regime that controls every aspect of its citizens' lives, including their thoughts and identities. *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood is also a chilling novel that depicts a society where women are stripped of their identity, and individuality and forced to conform to a rigid social hierarchy.

Such practices have major ethical concerns both in real and fictional worlds which include the violation of human rights by mentally suppressing an individual which is a fundamental violation of individual human rights, including the right to self-determination and freedom of expression. It is a form of exploitation and abuse of individuals who lack a strong sense of self and are more susceptible to exploitation and abuse. They may be easily manipulated or coerced into doing things against their will. It may result in loss of diversity and creativity in a world without strong individual identities would be a bland and homogenous one. It would stifle creativity, innovation, and the potential for progress.

Preventing the establishment of a strong sense of identity is a dangerous and ethically objectionable practice. It undermines individual autonomy, stifles creativity, and can lead to various psychological and social problems. Protecting and nurturing individual identities can build a more diverse, inclusive, and vibrant society.

Ishiguro's Use of the Clones' Plight to Critique Societal Attitudes Limiting the Opportunities for Self-realization and Self-expression.

The clones, created solely for organ donation, are denied access to information about their origins and purpose. They are raised in a sterile environment that restricts their experiences and discourages independent thought. This lack of control over their lives and identities prevents them from fully exploring their potential and discovering their true selves. Ishiguro's portrayal of the clones' restricted lives highlights the dangers of conformity and the importance of allowing individuals to express their individuality. The clones are encouraged to be passive and obedient, their individuality suppressed in favor of fulfilling their predetermined role. This stifling environment stands in stark contrast to the richness and complexity of human experience, highlighting the vital role that self-discovery plays in a fulfilling life.

Furthermore, the novel critiques the societal tendency to categorize and label individuals, often based on superficial characteristics or predetermined roles. The clones are constantly reminded of their status as "donors," their lives defined by their biological function. This constant labeling reinforces a sense of powerlessness and diminishes their sense of self-worth. By exploring the clones' experiences, Ishiguro challenges readers to examine their own societal biases and consider how they might be limiting the opportunities for self-discovery and expression for themselves and others. The novel encourages us to embrace diversity, individuality, and the right of every individual to explore their full potential.

The use of the clones' plight is a powerful tool for critiquing the societal limitations placed on individuals' self-discovery and self-expression. By highlighting the dangers of conformity and the importance of individuality, the novel encourages readers to challenge societal norms and embrace the richness and complexity of human experience.

Reflecting on School Days to Make a Sense of Belonging

In Kazuo Ishiguro's NLMG, Kathy often reflects on her time at Hailsham, the boarding school where she spent her childhood. These reflections are not simply nostalgic reminiscences; they are attempts to make sense of her place in the world and find a sense of belonging in the present.

‘Driving around the country now, I still see things that will remind me of Hailsham. I might pass the corner of a misty field, or see part of a large house in the distance as I come down the side of a valley, even a particular arrangement of poplar trees up on a hillside, and I’ll think: “Maybe that’s it! I’ve found it! This actually is Hailsham !” (Ishiguro,2005)

Despite its sterile environment and strict rules, Hailsham represented a sanctuary for Kathy and her friends. It was a place where they felt safe, loved, and accepted. They had a sense of community and belonging, surrounded by others who shared their fate as clones. Their lives change with the loss of innocence and searching for identity. However, with the revelation of their true purpose as organ donors, their idyllic existence at Hailsham was shattered. Their sense of security was replaced by fear and uncertainty about their future. This realization forced them to grapple with their identities and search for meaning in a world that devalued their existence.

Kathy attempts to establish a sense of connection and belonging through the memories of Hailsham, a source of comfort and connection. They remind her of a time when she felt loved and accepted, and they provide a sense of identity that transcends her predetermined role as a donor. Hailsham serves as a haven not just as an institution but also aids in finding meaning in the relationships she had at that place. Despite the limitations placed upon them, the clones at Hailsham developed deep bonds of love and friendship. These relationships provided them with a sense of purpose and belonging, reminding them that they were not alone in their struggle. Her reflections on Hailsham also serve as a subtle critique of the societal norms that devalued clones' lives. By highlighting the love, joy, and individuality present in their childhood, she challenges the notion that their only value lies in their biological function.

The universality of Searching for Belonging in Kathy's specific situation as a clone is unique, her struggle to find belonging and meaning resonates with a universal human experience. We all yearn to feel accepted and loved, to connect with others, and to find our place in the world. Kathy's reflections on her school days in NLMG are more than just nostalgic memories. They represent her attempt to make sense of her identity and find belonging in a world that often devalues her existence. By remembering the love, friendship, and sense of community she found at Hailsham, she finds solace and strength to navigate the challenges of the present. Additionally, her story reminds us of the importance of connection, acceptance, and the universal human desire to belong.

Societal Reflections in Never Let Me Go

In the dystopian novel *Never Let Me Go*, author Kazuo Ishiguro presents a captivating exploration of identity, ethics, and the consequences of scientific advancements. One prominent aspect of the novel is its penetrating societal reflections, which shed light on the moral complexities surrounding the creation and treatment of clones. This section delves into these thought-provoking themes, analyzing how Ishiguro's narrative serves as a platform for social commentary.

Ishiguro looks into a utilitarian society where existence is defined by the purpose. The clones in *Never Let Me Go* are raised with the sole purpose of providing vital organs for transplants. This bleak reality raises profound questions about a society that sacrifices the lives of a specific group for the benefit of others. Which is blatantly put forward by in Chapter seven by Miss Emily. “We took away your art because we thought it would reveal your souls. Or to put it more finely, we did it to prove you had souls at all.”(Ishiguro,2005)

The struggle for identity holds the centrality of theme throughout the novel, the clones grapple with their sense of self and individuality. Their predicament prompts readers to examine the nature of identity and question whether it is solely determined by one's origin or circumstances.

The novel raises important ethical dilemmas surrounding the treatment and exploitation of clones. It prompts readers to consider the boundaries of scientific progress and the consequences society must face when disregarding the inherent rights of a specific group. *Never Let Me Go* depicts a society divided into distinct social classes, where clones are perceived as subhuman and are systematically marginalized. This commentary compels readers to reflect on the impact of discrimination and prejudice on marginalized groups in our own world. As Tommy says in the chapter 22,

"I keep thinking about this river somewhere, with the water moving really fast. And these two people in the water, trying to hold onto each other, holding on as hard as they can, but in the end, it's just too much. The current's too strong. They've got to let go and drift apart. That's how it is with us. It's a shame, Kath, because we've loved each other all our lives. But in the end, we can't stay together forever." (Ishiguro, 2005)

Conclusion: Exploring the Theme of Loss and Acceptance in Cloned Characters

Loss and acceptance are recurring themes in *NLMG* by Kazuo Ishiguro, which delves into the potential identity crises cloned characters face. Through the exploration of these themes, Ishiguro provides a deep and thought-provoking examination of the human experience within a dystopian context. The Clones in *NLMG*, are stripped of their individuality as they are created solely for organ donation, resulting in the loss of their identities. They are only referred to by their clone status, such as "donor" or "carer," denying them the opportunity to establish a sense of self. By denying a sense of belonging, they are isolated from the outside world, growing up in secluded institutions where they interact primarily with other clones. This lack of connection to a larger society denies them the chance to form meaningful relationships and find a sense of belonging. So, it can be concluded that an identity crisis is a definite possibility if the cloning of humans is done (which is not legal at present).

As Si Xiao comments, "The questions about the human relations in post-humans, as well as the timely return to the old philosophical proposition of who I am, should be the ethical basis for contemporary human beings to predict and reflect on the crisis of cloning technology." Their struggle for acceptance extends toward internal battles with self-worth. Cloned characters grapple with their purpose and worth in a society that perceives them as expendable. They struggle to accept their predetermined fate, questioning their humanity and wondering if they have the right to fight against their designated roles. Seeking validation and understanding: Despite the circumstances they face, the clones yearn for acceptance and recognition. They search for validation that they are more than just organ donors, seeking understanding from both their fellow clones and society at large.

Their Coping Mechanism is through Bonding with friendship. In their shared plight, clones forge deep friendships as coping mechanisms. These connections provide a sense of support, empathy, and understanding that helps them navigate the challenges and uncertainties they face. They embrace the beauty of fleeting moments, given their limited lifespan, the clones find solace in appreciating the fleeting moments of joy, love, and connection that punctuate their lives. This acceptance of impermanence allows them to find meaning and purpose in their existence.

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