



NEWS RELEASE [2000-III-07]

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GENOME MAP: ONE-THIRD MISSED THE ENTIRE STORY

Hopes For Medical Breakthroughs Tempered By
Concerns About Possible Abuses

PHOENIX, Ariz. (July 25, 2000) – During the last week in June, the print and electronic media were flooded with headline stories about scientists drawing a complete map of human DNA, known as the genome. Prime Ministers and Presidents rushed to “photo ops” with beaming scientists, while offering quotable statements such as, “Today we are learning the language in which God created life” (President Clinton), or proclaiming the achievement to be “The first great technological triumph of the 21st century.” (British Prime Minister Blair). But the story disappeared from the media as a lead item within a week. This provides an interesting opportunity to gauge the proportion of the public that follows the news of the day and those who have interests focused elsewhere than on the top new stories.

Surprisingly, according to a Rocky Mountain Poll, fully a third of Arizona adults missed the story. Results of the survey reveal very distinct patterns in the characteristics of individuals who tune out headline news in favor of sports, fashion, or crossword puzzles, or who find other interests such as “soaps,” gardening or a cool frosty one with friends far more engaging than what the media determine to be the day’s “top news stories.” The proportion completely unaware of the genome news coverage, rises appreciably among younger adults (46%), people not registered to vote (55%), those with no exposure to a college education (56%) and minorities (58%).

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The findings outlined in this report are based on a survey of 707 adults throughout Arizona conducted on June 30 and July 1, by the Behavior Research Center of Arizona as part of the center's independent and non-partisan Rocky Mountain Poll series begun in 1969. For more information you may visit www.brcpolls.com.

After determining whether respondents were aware of the genome research achievement, all respondents were read a basic description of the genome story and then asked whether they thought the research would lead to each of five outcomes, ranging from advances in medicine to employer discrimination based on genetic information or the desire of some to create "designer babies" through eugenics.

A great majority of Arizonans (85%) anticipate that mankind will benefit from genome research through major advances in medicine and the treatment of genetically-based diseases. Six in ten also expect that genetic engineering may be able to eliminate some forms of insect or other life forms that plague mankind.

On a darker side of the issue, however:

- Six in ten anticipate that employers and insurance companies will try to discriminate against people with identifiable genetic problems; and
- four in ten expect to see efforts to justify racial and ethnic prejudices based on genetic differences between people; and
- the survey also finds that 57 percent foresee wide-spread efforts by people to create "designer babies," that is, to manipulate genes and thereby control the characteristics of babies.

The public already perceives that the expected rush by scientists, business and industry to utilize the data for their own purposes may catapult mankind into major areas of controversy in public law and personal and business ethics. Doubtless the controversy will also expand into a

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strange new world of the unintended consequences of genetic tinkering. Darwin's theory of the evolution of species envisaged a glacially slow process of natural selection, whereas the genome achievement holds forth the telescoping of this process from tens of thousands of years to fractions of that time. The question arises: When the potential consequences of this achievement become more apparent to mankind, how intense and determined will be pressure to place public policy controls on the activities of scientists and industry working in this field.?

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This Rocky Mountain Poll - Arizona (2000-III-07), is based on 707 interviews throughout Arizona between June 30 and July 1, 2000. Where necessary, figures for age, sex, race and political party were weighted to bring them into line with their actual proportion in the population. In a sample of this size, one can say with a 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus 3.7 percent of what they would have been had the entire population been surveyed. The Rocky Mountain Poll is conducted by the Behavior Research Center of Arizona and is an independent and non-partisan research program sponsored by the Center.

This statement conforms to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

ENCLOSED: Statistical tables.

STATISTICAL DATA

Behavior Research Center
Rocky Mountain Poll - Arizona
RMP 2000-III-07

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“Scientists recently reported they have deciphered the human genetic code, called the genome. Were you aware of this before I mentioned it to you just now?”

	<u>PERCENT</u>	
	<u>Aware</u>	<u>Unaware</u>
College graduates	84%	16%
Internet users	80	20
Registered voters	75	25
Age: 55+	73	27
Attended college – no degree	72	28
Men	71	29
Age: 35 to 54	70	30
STATEWIDE AVERAGE	66	34
Women	61	39
Non-users of the Internet	57	43
Age: Under 35	54	46
Hispanic	45	55
Not registered to vote	45	55
Never attended college	44	56
Non-Hispanic minorities	36	64

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**STATISTICAL DATA**

Behavior Research Center  
Rocky Mountain Poll - Arizona  
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“This discovery means that scientists will soon know the genetic code that defines the characteristics of human beings. With that knowledge they may be able to develop new medicines, identify exact genetic differences between people and races, and identify genes that may make individuals prone to certain kinds of genetic health problems. Do you think this discovery will or will not lead to the following:”  
*(Sequence randomly rotated)*

|                                                                                                                                      | WILL | WILL NOT | UNSURE |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------|--------|
| Major advances in medicine and in the treatment of genetically-based diseases                                                        | 85%  | 7%       | 8%     |
| Genetic engineering to eliminate some forms of insect or biological life that have plagued mankind for generations                   | 62   | 24       | 14     |
| Efforts by employers and insurance companies to discriminate against people with identifiable genetic problems                       | 61   | 29       | 10     |
| Wide-scale efforts by people to have “designed babies,” that is to control the characteristics of babies by manipulating their genes | 57   | 33       | 10     |
| Efforts to justify racial and ethnic prejudices based on genetic differences between people                                          | 41   | 46       | 13     |

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