After decades of advising international law firms, major financial service institutions, and other multinational conglomerates on organizational development and diversity issues, I’ve developed keenly astute antennae for detecting the kind of subtle issues that aren’t addressed by typical diversity protocols. The uniformity of these offices and the senior managers in them were disturbing. Each one felt exactly the same as the next: impressionist style artwork on the walls, deep mahogany furniture arranged in identical fashion, and one family photo placed at the upper-right corner of the desk. By the time I was introduced to the last executive I was convinced that this company had a complex, systemic problem, but it was not the problem the firm had called me to address.

— Klein 1

This excerpt from Freada Kapor Klein’s ground-breaking study Giving Notice succinctly typifies the kind problem addressed in this chapter. It is about preference for likeness, in particular in view of maintaining (imagined) homogeneity in high status positions. By preference for likeness, I mean constructed or claimed homogeneity while identifying individuals as like-minded, like-looking, like family, like “us,” like clones of the appreciated “types.” As Klein comments about the upper echelons of corporate USA: “they perceive talent only if it comes in familiar packaging—that is, looking and acting exactly as they do” (18). “Cloning,” in a cultural sense, is a well-established practice for securing privilege. Among top managers, the wish to clone super managers like themselves does not even seem to raise any eyebrows. One anecdotic example can be found in the words of Mr. Henny de Ruiter, president-commissioner of Ahold 2 and the most powerful corporate hot shot in the Netherlands. In an interview for a business magazine, in late September 2003, de Ruiter proclaims
his admiration for two other hot shots, much like him heavy with commissioners’ posts, saying: “They should be cloned, but regretfully that is not possible” (Dinther 33). Within weeks after this interview, one of the “should be cloned” candidates would become de Ruiter’s successor as Ahold president-commissioner. Interesting detail: Journalists quoted sources qualifying the Ruiter as a “yes-man”—“he never says no” (Dinther 30, 32) and his successor Karel Vuursteen as a man who “just does not know how to say no” (Boogaarts 8).

Preference for more of the same type points to cultural cloning. This seems an apt concept to refer to gate keeping in top positions where (combinations of) racial, gender, ethnic, age and other systemic discrimination against particular groups is also indicative of normative preferences for combinations of (perceived) masculinity, whiteness, European-ness, able-bodied-ness and related markers (Essed, “Cloning Cultural Homogeneity”). In this context, cultural cloning is a process of control, of preservation, of (constructed) likeness in view of maintaining privilege and status.

Let me give an example by way of introducing the notion of cloning in a cultural sense analytically. In his book Diploma of Whiteness: Race and Social Policy in Brazil, 1917–1945, author Jerry Dávila recounts an anecdote about the Minister of Education and Health who served during the late 1930s. He had called upon a group of anthropologists and national intellectuals to advise him about the physiognomy of the body of the “future Brazilian man”: “Not the vulgar type, but the best example of the race” (21). His concern about the Brazilian “race” had been aroused by the artist whom he had commissioned to sculpt the statue of “the future Brazilian man.” The statue, meant to be placed at the entrance of the Ministry of Education and Health building, did not match the sensibility of this new and modern design. The artist had come up with a representation that “looked racially degenerate rather than virile and Aryan” (21) as the minister had imagined Brazilians would evolve. The minister’s dismay was a function of his belief that the modernization of Brazilian society implied that Brazilians would come to look more like clones of the hegemonic model of perfection: white, blond haired, blue eyed. Yet, the “future Brazilian man” could not be seen only in terms of “race.” This idealized body represented a racialized perception of progress—Europeanization and “genetically” uplifting (whitening)—as much as it represented a gendered perception of modernization—the triumph of masculinity. At the same time, this perfectly healthy body was to project progress in terms of physical and mental capacity—as ultimate control over the disabling imperfections of nature—and as eternally “young”—progress as the defeat of the disabling signs of aging. Indeed, the epitome of progress was a male body beaming with Aryan masculinity.

Because body images gain meaning in a cultural context, it seems fair to suggest that the desire for Brazilian clones of this perfectly white European male body meant also for Brazilian education. It involves emulating the modernization package the