Researchers find genetic signs of human migrations and marriage practices

Your genome is a window onto your heritage – or, more precisely, several windows. There are the marks left by human evolution, the traces of ancient human migrations out of Africa and, scattered throughout, clues to your immediate ancestors' marriage habits.

This last detail is particularly interesting to medical geneticists. They're looking for the genes underlying rare, recessive diseases that mainly crop up in populations with a high number of marriages among close relatives, known as consanguineous marriages. But this can be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Teasing out the stretches of genome that are shared among affected individuals due to a recent common ancestor, rather than from vestiges of deep population history, would significantly reduce the amount of hay. A group of researchers, led by Stanford biology research associate Trevor Pemberton and biology Associate Professor Noah Rosenberg, has developed a way to attempt to do just that, laying bare worldwide genome patterns in the process.

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