

## NY Times article sparks call for greater ethical awareness in science journalism

Major media, *New York Times* included, have a history of hyping up what turned out to be erroneous claims linking complex traits and disorders—from homosexuality and high intelligence to schizophrenia and bipolar disorder—to specific genes.

I thought those days were over, and that scientists and the media have learned to doubt extremely reductionist genetic accounts of complex traits and behaviors. I was wrong. On March 8, the “Opinion” section of the *Times* published an essay, [“The Feel-Good Gene,”](#) which states:

“For the first time, scientists have demonstrated that a genetic variation in the brain makes some people inherently less anxious, and more able to forget fearful and unpleasant experiences. This lucky genetic mutation produces higher levels of anandamide—the so-called bliss molecule and our natural marijuana—in our brains. In short, some people are prone to be less anxious simply because they won the genetic sweepstakes and randomly got a genetic mutation that has nothing at all to do with strength of character.”

This article was written by a physician, Richard Friedman, professor of psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medical College. I emphasize this fact because scientific hype is often blamed on supposedly ignorant journalists like me rather than on physicians and other so-called experts.

Friedman’s article is, in effect, an extremely dumbed down, sensationalized press release for a highly technical article in *Nature Communications* by 16 researchers, including two of Friedman’s colleagues at Weill Cornell Medical College, Iva Dincheva and Francis Lee.

**Read full, original article:** [N.Y. Times Hype of “Feel-Good Gene” Makes Me Feel Bad](#)