

Which comes first for genetics: Science, or culture?

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.

The last few decades have seen what some describe as a “genetic revolution”. Advances in genetic science have seen genes become all-encompassing in political and scientific discussion.

Do a quick survey of recent stories, for example, and you will find research that claims [“intelligence, creativity and bipolar disorder may share underlying genetics”](#) and a much-reported story that found that Holocaust survivors may have [passed on trauma to their children through their genes](#). Genetics has come to explain almost everything about our identities, whether it is [our weight](#), [our sexuality](#), or even if we are [likely to become a criminal](#).

But is this based on sound science, or is it instead a cultural phenomenon using science to back it up? That is among the questions Professor Deborah Lynn Steinberg asks in her new book *Genes and the Bioimaginary*.

In *Genes and the Bioimaginary*, Steinberg investigates the crossover between genetic research and our society. Steinberg argues that “culture — including science — forms the context, locus and foundation of the search for genes.” In other words, genetic science both shapes and is shaped by culture, or as Steinberg explained to me “the popular has infused the scientific even as the scientific has infused the popular”.

Most scientists will tell you that science is “objective”: science presents the facts and it is up to society to interpret these facts and decide how to use them. Steinberg argues, however, that culture doesn’t just define how we interpret the science, but influences the production of the science itself.

Read full, original post: [Is our desire for genetic answers cultural rather than scientific?](#)