

We need genetics to understand psychology

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Are we shaped more by our genes or our environment – the age-old question of nature and nurture? This is really a false dichotomy; few, if any, scientists working in the area of human behaviour would adhere to either an extreme nature or extreme nurture position. But what do we mean when we say that our behaviours are influenced by genetic factors? And how do we know?

We are all very similar but also quite unique. The fact that people are genetically related to each other (parents and siblings, non-identical and identical twins) has been crucial in our efforts to estimate the relative contribution of genetic and environmental factors to variation in outcomes such as our physical and mental health. Let's take the case of schizophrenia – a particularly challenging area given that the term itself is hotly contested. Many agree that it doesn't describe a single disorder but a number of different symptom clusters. Some go as far as to argue that the term is meaningless. Despite this, there is clear evidence that schizophrenia risk in a population depends in part on genetic factors.

It's important to realize what the heritability statistic doesn't mean – it certainly doesn't mean the same thing as "inherited". First, it doesn't tell us anything about an individual – it tells us about variation in a population. Second, it's not a fixed value – if the environment changes then the heritability will change because all of these values have to add up to 100%.

Read full, original post: [Genetic denialism is unhelpful – genes play a role in who we are](#)