

New Yorker epigenetic piece draws ire from scientists

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

I recently gave readers an assignment: read the new *New Yorker* piece by [Siddhartha Mukherjee](#) about epigenetics. The piece, called “[Same but different](#)” (subtitle: “How epigenetics can blur the line between nature and nurture”) was brought to my attention by two readers, both of whom praised it.

When I read it at the behest of the two readers, I found his analysis of gene regulation incomplete and superficial. The speculations at the end of the piece about “Lamarckian evolution” via environmentally induced epigenetic changes in the genome were also unfounded, for we have no evidence for that kind of adaptive evolution. Mukherjee does, however, mention that lack of evidence, though I wish he’d done so more strongly given that environmental modification of DNA bases is constantly touted as an important and neglected factor in evolution.

Unbeknownst to me, there was a bit of a kerfuffle going on in the community of scientists who study gene regulation, with many of them finding serious mistakes and omissions in Mukherjee’s piece. There appears to have been some back-and-forth emailing among them, and several wrote letters to the *New Yorker*, urging them to correct the misconceptions, omissions, and scientific errors in “Same but different.” As I understand it, both Mukherjee and the *New Yorker* simply batted these criticisms away, and, as far as I know, will not publish any corrections. So I’ll present the criticisms here, just so they’ll be on the record.

Read full, original post: [The New Yorker screws up big time with science: researchers criticize the Mukherjee piece on epigenetics](#)