

Popular media needs to get the science right on epigenetics

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

Epigenetics is everywhere. Nary a day goes by without some news story or press release telling us something it explains.

Biologists now invoke epigenetics to explain all manner of observations that lie outside their current ken. But epigenetics has achieved buzzword status far faster and to a far larger extent than current science justifies, earning the disdain of scientists (like me) who study how information is encoded, transferred and read out across cellular and organismal generations.

This simmering conflict came to a head last week around an article in *The New Yorker*, "[Same but Different](#)" by Siddhartha Mukherjee that juxtaposed a meditation on the differences between his mother and her identical twin with a discussion of the research of Rockefeller University's David Allis on the biochemistry of DNA and the proteins that encapsulate it in cells, that he and others believe provides a second mechanism for the encoding and transmission of genetic information.

Although Mukherjee hedges throughout his piece, the clear implication of the story is that Allis's work provides an explanation for differences that arise between genetically identical individuals, and even suggests that they open the door to legitimizing the long-discredited ideas of the 19th century naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck who thought that organisms could pass beneficial traits acquired during their lifetimes on to their offspring.

The piece earned [a sharp rebuke from many scientists](#), most notably Mark Ptashne who has long led the anti-epigenetics camp, who published [a lengthy take-down of Mukherjee's piece](#) on the blog of evolutionary biologist Jerry Coyne.

Read full, original post: [The Imprinter of All Maladies](#)