

Genes influence academic achievement, but they're not the most important factor

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The largest study of its kind has found 74 genetic variants that influence how many years of school people finish, scientists [reported](#), but their effect is relatively minor, underlining how a complex behavior like going to college is not written in our DNA.

Although such behavioral genetics studies might once have been trumpeted as “genes for going to college,” the international consortium of 253 researchers reached a more modest conclusion: Altogether, the 74 genes explain slightly less than one-half of 1 percent of the differences between people’s education levels.

Behavioral genetics has long been notorious for producing [spurious findings](#). It has also been controversial, with critics calling it pointless (because environmental factors exert stronger effects on behavior) and even dangerous, misleading the public into thinking that complex behaviors such as getting divorced or committing crimes or being a political liberal are the inevitable product of inherited genes.

Experts who have raised cautions about some behavioral genetics studies, however, praised this one.

“The authors are pretty careful to explain that the effect size is small [and] that these are not ‘genes for educational attainment,’” said Nita Farahany of Duke University School of Law, an expert on the ethical, legal, and social implications of behavioral genetics and a member of President Obama’s bioethics commission.

**Read full, original post:** [Is academic achievement written in your DNA? It's complicated](#)