

Feelings of empathy shaped in part by our genetics

Parents are used to getting the blame for their children's emotional defects. When it comes to empathy, it turns out they are partly responsible. Scientists studied the empathy of 46,861 people who analyzed their DNA through the personalized genetics company 23andMe and found that genetics explains a significant chunk of differences in abilities to understand others' emotions.

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Researchers from the University of Cambridge, the Institut Pasteur, Paris Diderot University in Paris, and genetics company 23andMe evaluated empathy based on participants' Empathy Quotient (EQ) scores. EQ uses self-reporting to evaluate both cognitive empathy (the ability to understand others' thoughts and feelings) and affective empathy (responding to others' emotions with an appropriate emotion.)

In the study, published in *Translational Psychiatry* on March 12, the researchers ran a statistical analysis known as genome-wide association studies to show that variations in genetics are linked with changes in empathy.

They looked at 10 million genetic variants, explains Varun Warriar, co-author of the paper and postdoctoral researcher at University of Cambridge's Autism Research Centre, and found that these tiny variants collectively contribute to around 10% of differences in empathy.

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The influence of genes doesn't mean that empathy is beyond our control. It might simply mean that those with a certain genetic predisposition find it harder to adjust their levels of empathy.

Editor's note: Read [full study](#)

Read full, original post: [The ability to feel empathy—or not—is shaped by your genes](#)