

The Developing Genome: An Introduction to Behavioral Epigenetics

By David S. Moore

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Why do we grow up to look, act, and feel as we do? Through most of the twentieth century, scientists and laypeople answered this question by referring to two factors alone: our experiences and our genes. But recent discoveries about how genes work have revealed a new way to understand the developmental origins of our characteristics. These discoveries have emerged from the new science of behavioral epigenetics--and just as the whole world has now heard of DNA, "epigenetics" will be a household word in the near future.

Behavioral epigenetics is important because it explains how our experiences get under our skin and influence the activity of our genes. Because of breakthroughs in this field, we now know that the genes we're born with don't determine if we'll end up easily stressed, likely to fall ill with cancer, or possessed of a powerful intellect. Instead, what matters is what our genes *do*. And because research in behavioral epigenetics has shown that our experiences influence how our genes function, this work has changed how scientists think about nature, nurture, and human development. Diets, environmental toxins, parenting styles, and other environmental factors all influence genetic activity through epigenetic mechanisms; this discovery has the potential to alter how doctors treat diseases, and to change how mental health professionals treat conditions from schizophrenia to post-traumatic stress disorder. These advances could also force a reworking of the theory of evolution that dominated twentieth-century biology, and even change how we think about human nature itself.

In spite of the importance of this research, behavioral epigenetics is still relatively unknown to non-biologists. *The Developing Genome* is an introduction to this exciting new discipline; it will allow readers without a background in biology to learn about this work and its revolutionary implications.

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Editorial Review

Review

Winner of the 2016 William James Book Award

Winner of the 2016 Eleanor Maccoby Book Award

"David Moore's description of the complex discoveries in epigenetics is a tour de force-it allows all readers to appreciate the significance of these unexpected phenomena. The Developing Genome is required reading for all who wonder about the power of genes."
--Jerome Kagan, PhD, Daniel and Amy Starch Professor of Psychology, Emeritus, Harvard University

"Epigenetics is one of the hottest topics in biology these days, and that certainly makes sense-it helps explain on a nuts-and-bolts level precisely how experience, especially early in life, leaves long-lasting effects on our bodies and our behaviors. Not surprisingly, it's also a complex subject to understand, and is vulnerable to hype and inflated promises. There's no one better than David Moore to write a book like this-he knows the field inside out and writes about it in a way that is insightful, appropriately skeptical at points, and utterly clear and accessible to the interested non-scientist. This is a terrific book."
--Robert M. Sapolsky, PhD, John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn Professor of Biological Sciences, and Professor of Neurology and Neurological Sciences, Stanford University

"Every dogma has its day, and the once-vaunted central dogma of molecular biology has seen better ones. A steady stream of surprising findings emerging from the rapidly growing field of behavioral epigenetics is showing us how our DNA does not legislate from above, but is rather a participant in a highly interactive developmental system. It is from this system that our behavior and psychology emerge. In his wonderfully informative and accessible new book, David Moore proves himself a skillful guide to this very complicated and vast new field. For readers hoping to understand what all the excitement is about without drowning in a sea of jargon, they need look no further."
--Mark Blumberg, PhD, F. Wendell Miller Distinguished Professor in the Departments of Biology and Psychology, University of Iowa

"Reading David Moore's explanation of epigenetics is relevant for anyone who is interested in health and behavior as an aid in making appropriate life decisions, or from an academic perspective. This authoritative, intriguing, practical, and wise book helps steer us away from the tradition of assuming that genes are deterministic, and towards a better understanding of how life experiences can alter the genomic heritage that all parents share with their children."

--J. Steven Reznick, Professor of Developmental Psychology, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

"[*The Developing Genome*] show the limitation of the blueprint metaphor of genomes for something so intricate, complex, multilayered and dynamic. [It] underscore[s] the risks of taking metaphors too literally, not just in undermining popular understanding of science, but also in trammelling scientific enquiry. They are for anyone interested in how new discoveries and controversies will transform our understanding of biology and of ourselves. Behavioural epigenetics is a controversial field, with critics arguing that many of its findings are little more than correlation and conjecture. Moore is suitably sceptical without shying away from the more contentious areas." -Claire Ainsworth, *New Scientist*

"Moore's book joins Jablonka and Lamb's text as a new standard in epigenetics literature. It is a compulsively readable account of one of the most vibrant areas in science that is well-researched, well-written, and thought-provoking from beginning to end. For both general readers and interdisciplinary scholars, *The Developing Genome* can be considered the logical starting point to acquaint themselves with a field that is quickly becoming impossible to ignore."
--Derek Lee, Pennsylvania State University, Project MUSE

About the Author

David S. Moore is a professor of psychology at Pitzer College and Claremont Graduate University in southern California. He received his PhD in developmental and biological psychology from Harvard University. A developmental cognitive neuroscientist with expertise in infant cognition, Moore explores the contributions of genetic, environmental, and epigenetic factors to human development. His book *The Dependent Gene* was widely adopted for use in undergraduate education and was nominated for the Cognitive Development Society's Best Authored Volume award.

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Sandy Gonsalves:

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