

Your Genes Unzipped: How your Genetic Inheritance Shapes your Life

By Tim Spector

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Intended for the non-academic reader, this book sets out to demonstrate the broad influence our genetic makeup has on our everyday lives. The book is divided into 90 short sections (each one two to three pages in length) dealing with various traits. Perhaps not surprisingly, given Spector's position as the Director of the Twin Research Unit and a Professor of Genetic Epidemiology at the University of London, much of the research discussed uses twin or family study methodology. One of the book's achievements may be to highlight the truly amazing breadth of the field and the contribution genetic epidemiology has made to our understanding of human behavior and disease.

The first chapter provides clear explanations of the key concepts required in order to understand the chapters that follow. Spector gives "A (very) short history of evolution" and a brief introduction

to behavioral genetics, before outlining the nature versus nurture debate and ways in which twin and family studies can shed some light on these issues. In the chapters that follow, Spector proceeds to describe some of the many ways in which our genetic inheritance can influence our actions and suggest evolutionary explanations for the development of these behaviors.

Written for the popular science audience, Spector has managed to avoid the use of jargon, choosing to give a bibliography rather than use footnotes, and beginning each section with a short vignette to guide the reader. While these approaches ensure the text is accessible it does leave some of the research seeming a little anonymous.

Spector reviews research on topics such as aging, religiosity and criminality, as well as the more commonly discussed intelligence, personality, stature, and substance use and abuse. By focusing on complex traits rather than

Mendelian diseases and stressing the importance of gene-environment interactions, Spector presents interesting overviews of the current research from a non-deterministic point of view.

In conclusion, Spector has managed to summarize a vast body of research, presenting it in an appealing manner that is designed to involve non-scientific readers and engage them in thinking about their own genetic inheritance. Throughout the book he advises readers to learn about their own family histories suggesting that, "to ignore your genes is like playing poker without looking at your hand", and urging us to "have a peek and enjoy playing the game". Although, depending on what we have been dealt, this may not always be easy.

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