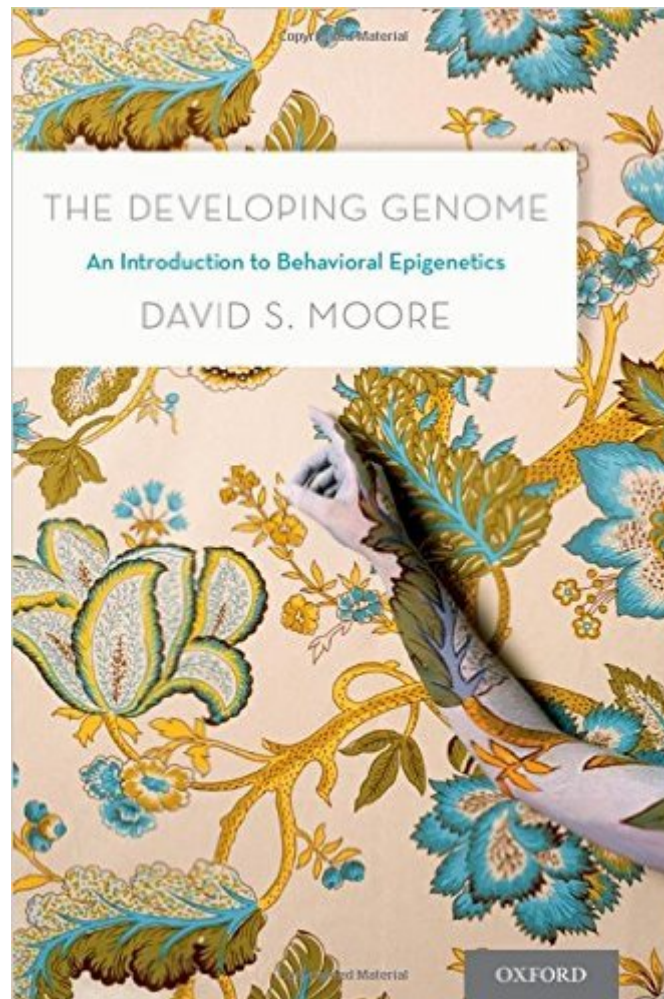


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The Developing Genome: An Introduction To Behavioral Epigenetics



Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

The Developing Genome is a timely and excellent offering for those interested in psychology, child development, and science studies, but little background in college-level biology. It is a skillfully written book that should be required reading for psychologists (researchers, practitioners, and arm-chair), anthropologists, sociologists, etc. The biological sciences have advanced by leaps and bounds since the 1980s, and the social sciences, as taught from high school through graduate school, have frankly not kept up with this revolution. Those fields are in serious need of continuing education. No subfield of psychology is in greater need than developmental psychology, where some recent books by eminent scholars present studies in ways that suggest blissful ignorance of the tectonic upheavals in genetics and epigenetics, and their implications for brain development and behavior. Like it or not, psychology as a field, developmental psychology in particular, and the social sciences more broadly need to catch up. Moore's book can make inroads against this anachronistic state of affairs. The content is accurate and up to date. Yet Moore, a developmental psychologist by training, has taken the field of epigenetics, which is extraordinarily complex in ways that no one could have imagined 20 years ago, and made its fundamentals digestible. The writing is clever and engaging: Moore simplifies processes that are weird or even unimaginable from the perspective of 1980-1990s biology, and builds up to them step by step, making their fundamental facts comprehensible. For those who have heard about epigenetics and wonder what all the fuss is, the book will be a revelation. A strength of the book is that "pros" working scientists outside biology "will enjoy and learn from it.

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