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When Does Genetics Play a Role in Understanding Human Behavior?

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**Tora Holmberg**  
Uppsala universitet  
Sociologiska institutionen  
Box 821, 75108 Uppsala

## **“Survival of the fittest?” Or have behavioural genetics ended the debate?**

The aim of this paper is to explore some effects of the so called nature-nurture debate on current behavioural genetic practice, using a sociology of science perspective. Qualitative data from a number of interviews conducted with behavioural geneticists, as well as media material such as newspaper articles, constitute the empirical basis of the analysis. When scientists tell their story of how the debate has (negatively) influenced their scientific practice, and how the climate (both in a lay and scientific context) is much more accepting today, they implicate that the debate is more or less over. Still, an analysis of morning papers tells a slightly different story, and scientists also relate in interviews to an ongoing controversy, putting themselves in an opposite position to e.g. sociologists. Even more interesting, the way informants construct the history of the debate, reflects how they present their own scientific practice and values. When the opposition is constructed as weak or non-existing, informants tend to take a more reflexive scientific stance, while on the other hand those who hold on to the debate also present themselves as “defending the truth”. When analysing the stories told and dealing with cultural, intellectual, economical, and institutional contexts, the paper ends up with the theoretical emphasis on hegemony, rather than total dominance. Instead of viewing the behavioural genetic approach as “the winner” of the debate as a result of the “fittest” theory, the possibility of a hegemonic position due to a variety of factors, is pointed out.