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Metaphors in Behavioral Genetics

Behavioral geneticists often use metaphors to describe the role of genes in human behavior. In this paper, five sample texts are analyzed: a popular book, a textbook, a scientific review article, and two original scientific articles representing different approaches in behavioral genetics. It is concluded:

- that metaphors are found in all the different kinds of sample texts, not only in the popular book and the textbook,
- that this indicates that metaphors are used not only for rhetorical or pedagogical purposes but play a more fundamental role in scientific understanding,
- that the metaphors are antideterministic, i.e., they do not imply genetic determinism but stress the interaction of multiple genes and environmental factors,
- that certain historically important metaphors that imply genetic determinism are qualified, avoided, or even explicitly rejected,
- that there are tensions between some of the metaphors making them difficult to combine, and
- that all the metaphors that are used appear scientifically adequate, at least with certain qualifications.