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# Genetics and Human Behavior

IV annual Swedish Symposium on Biomedicine, Ethics and Society

When Does Genetics Play a Role in Understanding Human Behavior?

Sandhamn Hotell & Konferens, May 27-28, 2002

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## **Gene technology – waves of controversy**

This paper sets out to analyse the controversies in the public debate on gene technology between the years 1973-1996. The scientific controversies approach allows investigation of how technology works in society, revealing the inner logic and norms that are exposed in the heat of conflict. In this way, controversies can be seen as a microcosm in which the interactions between science and technology and the rest of society can conveniently be observed and studied. The study is based on the total body of articles with gene technology as main theme, published in Dagens Nyheter during the period (n=659). To identify potential controversies, all articles were searched for disputes. Three major controversies, one in the end of the 1970s and two from the 1980s, were identified and selected for an in-depth analysis (n=50). The results show that each of the three controversies has its own specific theme; risk in the end of the 1970s, ethics in the beginning of the 1980s and regulation in the end of the 1980s. However, on a higher level the similarities outnumber the differences, and it might be possible to speak about one controversy that appear in different shapes over the years rather than three different ones. It is a controversy rooted between the scientific and humanistic paradigms. At times when the controversy comes up to the surface the manifest characteristics may differ but beneath the surface, it is a matter of deep disagreements.



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