

Who are your friends?

by Olivia Petter

- 1 When it comes to friendships, it's important to have some things in common. However, while enjoying the same films and having similar taste in restaurants might seem important, the real test of a strong friendship could lie in your genetics. This is because friends are more genetically similar than strangers, claims a new study published in the National Academy of Sciences.



- 2 After carrying out a series of genetic comparisons between pairs of friends, the researchers found a lot of genetic similarities between them, far more than between pairs who didn't know each other. They also found that friends were on average around two-thirds as genetically similar as married couples. This might be because people are drawn to those with whom they have shared characteristics such as similar backgrounds, levels of education or being of a similar height and/or weight.
- 3 Another explanation they suggest is that people tend to form friendships within shared social environments. 11, they may attend the same school or live in the same community. This is known as social structuring, the authors write. The two explanations might also complement one another. However, lead author Stanford professor Benjamin Domingue concluded that the latter, which might be more subconscious, could be more influential in forming friendships.
- 4 "Are individuals actively selecting to be around people who are like them, or is it due to impersonal forces, such as social structures, that we all are affected by?" he asked. "Our evidence, with respect to friends, suggest that it's largely the effect of shared social environments."

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