GENETIC IMAGERIES
Between gender and genes in the visual cultures of popular/science

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates how representations of genes and genetics have given rise to new kinds of cultural imageries created and reflected in popular science media. The concept of popular/science is used here in order to circumvent the traditional diffusion model of science communication, and to focus instead on how popular science media taps into scientific discourse just as scientific representations draw on popular imagery. The study thus shows how the new genetics is not created in a cultural vacuum, but thrives in the intersection of popular culture and science culture. The main argument is that together with the changing genetic imageries in popular/science both conventional and unconventional ways of enacting gender, sexuality and race emerge. Thus the illustrations and stories assembled and analysed here can be regarded as contested sites of social change.

This exploration of contemporary representations of genes and genetics is performed with analytical tools from the overlapping fields of feminist cultural studies, visual studies, and science and literature studies. As the ways of representing genes and genetics in the visual field of popular science media are mapped out, the thesis gives a partial and local account of the mosaic of the genetic imaginary – a discursive fantasy landscape which is used as a resource for collective subject formations, and in which cultural communities mirror and articulate themselves.

Key words: popular science, visual culture, edutainment, the new genetics, genes, genres, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, the genetic imaginary, feminist cultural studies, science as culture, performativity, science and literature studies.

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