Genetic Nature or Genetic Nurture?
Quantifying Bias in Analyses Using Polygenic Scores

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Abstract

Summary statistics from a genome-wide association study (GWAS) can be used to generate a polygenic score (PGS). For complex, behavioral traits, the correlation between individual PGS and phenotype may contain bias alongside the causal effect of the individual's genes (due to geographic, ancestral, and/or socioeconomic confounding). We formalize the recent introduction of a different source of bias in regression models using PGSs: the effects of parental genes on offspring outcomes (i.e. genetic nurture). GWAS do not discriminate between the various pathways through which genes influence outcomes, meaning existing PGSs capture both direct genetic effects and genetic nurture effects. We construct a structural model for genetic effects and show that, unlike other sources of bias in PGSs, the presence of genetic nurture biases PGS coefficients from both naïve OLS (between-family) and family fixed effects (within-family) regressions. This bias is in opposite directions; while naïve OLS estimates are biased upwards, family fixed effects estimates are biased downwards. We quantify this bias for a given trait using two novel parameters that we identify and discuss: (1) the genetic correlation between the direct and nurture effects and (2) the ratio of the SNP heritabilities for the direct and nurture effects.

1. Introduction

1a. Genomics & the Social Sciences

Spurred by the plummeting cost of DNA sequencing and technological developments in processing large amounts of genetic data, researchers have made great strides in connecting genes to biological and social outcomes in a replicable manner. The key tool is the genome-wide association study (GWAS); a GWAS uses genotype and phenotype data from many individuals to probe the relationship between a given trait and thousands of regions of the genome (Pearson and Manolio 2008). GWAS are conducted on a wide variety of outcomes, ranging from proximal, biological phenotypes, such as blood pressure (Giri et al. 2019) and height (Yengo et al. 2018), to distal, behavioral phenotypes, such as depression (Hyde et al. 2016; Okbay et al. 2016) and educational attainment (Lee et al. 2018).

Findings from GWAS are often used to generate a predictor—a polygenic score (PGS)—meant to summarize an individual's genetic predisposition for a given trait. PGSs offer great promise to social scientists interested in incorporating genes into biosocial models of human behavior (Belsky and Israel 2014). In the short term, PGSs may be used as control variables in studies of environmental effects (Rietveld et al. 2013), used in gene-environment interaction studies to probe whether genetic effects are environmentally contingent (Trejo et al. 2018; Barcellos, Carvalho, and Turley 2018), and used to better understand how genetic factors influence developmental processes (Belsky et al. 2016; Belsky et al. 2013). In the long run, PGSs might be used to identify those who would benefit most from early medical or educational interventions (say, for a developmental disorder like dyslexia (Martschenko, Trejo, and Domingue 2019)).

1b. The Problem of Confounding

We emphasize the fact that the same technique, GWAS, is being used to map the genetic architecture of a diverse set of phenotypes. It is not clear that the methodology used to identify the underlying genetics of proximal, biological phenotypes can be used without side effect to interrogate the genetics of complex, socially contextualized phenotypes. Especially in the case of traits like depression and educational attainment, it is critical that GWAS results be interpreted cautiously (Martschenko, Trejo, and Domingue 2019). While PGSs have been shown to predict complex phenotypes, the relationship between an individual's PGS captures a broad range of information and associations with downstream outcomes and therefore cannot be readily interpreted as the causal effect of genes. An individual's genome contains fine-grain information about their place in the intricate structure of a population (Hamer and Sirota 2000; Novembre et al. 2008), meaning that GWASs for complex traits may simply identify genes related to confounding environmental variables such as ancestry, geography, or socioeconomic status.

Recent work in human studies has begun to elucidate a novel source of confounding: social genetic effects (Domingue and Belsky 2017). Social genetic effects, also known as indirect genetic effects, are defined as the influence of one organism's genotype on a different organism's phenotype. The idea of social genetic effects originated in evolutionary theory (Moore, Brodie, and Wolf 1997; Wolf et al. 1998), and social genetic effects have been observed in animal

populations (Petfield et al. 2005; Bergsma et al. 2008; Canario, Lundeheim, and Bijma 2017; Baud et al. 2018). Social science is now beginning to study such effects in human populations; examples include among social peers (Sotoudeh, Conley, and Harris 2017; Domingue et al. 2018), sibling pairs (Cawley et al. 2017; Kong et al. 2018), and parents and their children (Bates et al. 2018; Kong et al. 2018; Wertz et al. 2018). The existence of within-family social genetic effects complicates attempts to derive causal estimates from GWAS.

For recent breakthroughs in the genetic architecture of complex traits to provide novel value to researchers in the biomedical and social sciences, the relationships discovered in a GWAS must mostly reflect causal relationships between an individual's genes and their phenotype. If, for example, the genes identified for a complex trait predict it only through spurious correlation, PGSs will provide little use towards broadening our understanding of genetic and environmental influences. Thus, validating PGSs within-families is vitally important for sifting out causation from correlation among the genetics identified in GWASs of complex traits (Rietveld et al. 2014; Domingue et al. 2015; Lee et al. 2018; Belsky et al. 2018). Environmental differences are muted between siblings and, conditional on parental genotype, child genotype is randomly assigned through a process known as genetic recombination (Conley and Fletcher 2017). This makes family fixed effect regression models that compare genetic difference in siblings to phenotypic differences in siblings the gold standard for understanding the causal effects of genetic differences on downstream outcomes. Within-family research designs, however, are not without their own complications. Genetic nurture may lead to bias in estimates derived from within-family studies, though the extent of this bias has not yet been explored.

1c. Accounting for Genetic Nurture

In this paper, we describe how genetic nurture influences PGS construction and bias within-family and between-family regression analyses using PGSs. We construct a structural model for additive genetic effects and show that, unlike other sources of bias in PGSs, the presence of genetic nurture can bias PGS coefficients from <u>both</u> naïve OLS (between-family) regressions and family fixed effects (within-family) regressions. We quantify the magnitude of this bias for a given trait using two novel parameters: (1) the genetic correlation between the direct and nurture effects and (2) the ratio of the SNP heritabilities for the direct and nurture effects. Bias is in opposite directions; whereas naïve OLS estimates are biased upwards, family fixed effects estimates are biased downwards. These findings highlight a shortcoming of existing PGSs and have important implications for the use and interpretation of research designs using such scores for traits where genetic nurture is a relevant causal pathway.

The paper will proceed as follows. In section 2, we motivate our structural model using empirical data. We introduce our structural mode in Section 3 and then demonstrate its implications for GWAS and regression models using PGSs in Section 4. In section 5, we discuss the insights gleaned from our structural model.

<u>2. Empirical Motivation</u>

2a. Empirical Model

We motivate our structural framework by first considering the empirical specifications used in recent work (Domingue et al. 2015; Belsky et al. 2018; Lee et al. 2018). Consider the following two models relating an individual's PGS constructed from recent GWAS results ($\widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}$) to their outcome ($Y_{ij}$):

Model 1: $Y_{ij} = \hat{\psi}_0 + \hat{\psi}_1 \widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij} + \overrightarrow{X_{ij}}\overrightarrow{\hat{\Theta}} + +\epsilon_{ij}$

Model 2: $Y_{ij} = \hat{\pi}_0 + \hat{\pi}_1 \widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij} + \Gamma_j + \overrightarrow{X_{ij}}\overrightarrow{\hat{\Theta}} + \epsilon_{ij}$

(2a.i)

$\widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}$: Normalized PGS constructed from the observed linear relationship between genotype and outcome

Y_{ij}: Outcome for individual i in family j

Γ_j: Family j fixed effect

$\overrightarrow{X_{ij}}$: Vector of individual covariates comprised of sex, age, and the first 10 principle components of genotype

Model 1 above considers only unrelated individuals whereas Model 2 compares sibling pairs using a family fixed effect. Thus, Model 1 leverages covariation in Y_{ij} and $\widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}$ between individuals from different families while Model 2 leverages only covariation in Y_{ij} and $\widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}$ between individuals in the same family (i.e. sibling pairs).

2b. Unresolved Questions

Table 1 displays results from Model 1 and Model 2 using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Harris 2013) for five phenotypes: educational attainment (Lee et al. 2018), cognitive ability (Lee et al. 2018), depressive symptoms (Turley et al. 2018), body mass index (Locke et al. 2015), and height (Wood et al. 2014). We discuss the Add Health survey and PGS construction in more detail in the appendix (see Sections A1 and A2).

[Insert Table 1 Here]

In Table 1, a one standard deviation increase in the educational attainment PGS is associated with over an additional $\frac{3}{4}$ year of schooling between-families ($\hat{\psi}_1$) but less than half of that within-families ($\hat{\pi}_1$). Thus, in the case of educational attainment, the effect of a one standard deviation increase in $\widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}$ varies substantially between Model 1 and Model 2 (i.e. $\hat{\psi}_1 \neq \hat{\pi}_1$). If we compare the five phenotypes, the relative size of $\hat{\psi}_1$ and $\hat{\pi}_1$ (captured by $\frac{\hat{\pi}_1}{\hat{\psi}_1}$) varies dramatically.

Why might this be the case? One possibility is that the between-family models are confounded while the within-family models capture the true causal effects. Alternatively, it may be that some of the processes captured by GWAS function differently within-families versus between-families (for example, genetic nurturance). Answering this question requires a more

formal treatment in order to better understand what underlying features may drive differences between $\hat{\psi}_1$ and $\hat{\pi}_1$across phenotypes. Our structural model, which we develop below, suggests that, in addition to possible environmental confounding, bias in $\hat{\psi}_1$ and $\hat{\pi}_1$ can depend on two previously unidentified parameters: (1) the underlying genetic correlation of direct and nurture effects and (2) the ratio of the SNP heritabilities for direct effects and nurture effects.

3. Structural Model

3a. Direct Genetic Effects and Genetic Nurture Effects

Historically, biosocial analyses have modeled complex traits as a function of both direct genetic effects and environment influences on an individual. Motivated by recent work highlighting the relevance of genetic nurture effects (Bates et al. 2018; Kong et al. 2018; Belsky et al. 2018; Wertz et al. 2018), we extend this model to include the genes of an individual's parent. Thus, we assume outcome Y_{ij} is a function of individual i's genotype, the genotypes of the parents in family j, and distinct individual-level and family-level environments. We choose to have a common effect of parental genetics at a given loci, instead of separate maternal and paternal effects, given the lack of strong empirical evidence of differences across parents (Kong et al. 2018).

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + f(G_{ij}) + f(G_j) + f(E_{ij}) + f(E_j) + \epsilon_{ij}$$

(3a.i)

$f(G_{ij})$: Effect of i's genome on Y_{ij}
$f(G_j)$: Effect of family j's genome on Y_{ij}
$f(E_{ij})$: Effect of i's environment on Y_{ij}
$f(E_j)$: Effect of family j's environment on Y_{ij}

Note that here the environmental components E_{ij} and E_j are defined as the strictly non-genetic sources of variation in Y_i. In other words, an environment influences a child's educational attainment irrespective of their or their parents' genetic composition. Environmental features of a child's environment, such as their family's socioeconomic status, are captured in $f(G_j)$ if those environmental features were caused by their parents' genes. We make three important assumptions to simplify the exposition of this model: no gene-environment interaction, no gene-environment correlation, and no assortative mating (see additional detail in Section A3 of the appendix). While some of these assumptions are unlikely to hold true in the real world, we emphasize that goal of our structural model is not to create a model that best describes reality but instead formalize the ways in which genetic effects influence GWASs, PGSs, and inevitably the interpretation of findings in the field of social science genomics.

3b. True Polygenic Scores

Complex, behavioral traits are associated with many genes across the genome that simultaneously produce very small effects (Chabris et al. 2015; Visscher et al. 2017). To increase statistical power and simplify computation, researchers often summarize the relevant genetics of

individual i into a single linear predictor called a PGS (Dudbridge 2013). This has become a widely utilized technique (Duncan et al. 2018) and relies on the assumptions that genetic effects are linear and additive. Recent meta-analyses of twin studies suggest support the linear, additive model for genetic effects (Polderman et al. 2015). For the remainder of the paper, we approximate $f(G_{ij})$ and $f(G_j)$ in our structural model using PGSs.

$$f(G_{ij}) \approx \sum_{z=1}^{n} \alpha^z g_{ij}^z = PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}}$$

$$f(G_j) \approx \sum_{z=1}^{n} \delta^z \, g_j^z = PGS_j^{\mathrm{N}}$$

(3b.i)

α^z: True causal effect of a one allele change at i's genetic loci z on Y_{ij}
δ^z: True causal effect of a one allele change at either parent in family j's genetic loci z on Y_{ij}
g_{ij}^z: Total number of major alleles at i's genetic loci z $(0, 1, \text{or } 2)$
g_j^z: Total number of major alleles at the parents in family j's genetic loci z $(0, 1, 2, 3 \text{ or } 4)$
PGS_{ij}^{D}: PGS constructed from the true causal linear effect of i's genes on Y_{ij}
PGS_j^{N}: PGS constructed from the true causal linear effect of the parents in family j's genes on i's child's Y_{ij}

Notice that $\vec{\alpha}$ is the vector of causal allelic weights used to construct the true, underlying PGS for direct genetic effects. In the same vein, $\vec{\delta}$ is the vector of causal allelic weights used to construct the true, underlying PGS for genetic nurture effects.

In Equation 3b.ii, we rewrite our structural model using PGSs.

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}} + \beta_2 PGS_j^{\mathrm{N}} + f(E_{ij}) + f(E_j)$$

(3b.ii)

Notice that, because PGS_{ij}^{D} and PGS_j^{N} are not standardized, an individual's value for PGS_{ij}^{D} and PGS_j^{N} represents the true effect of their genes and their parents' genes, respectively, on Y_{ij} *in the units of* Y_{ij}. Thus, β_1 and β_2 are both equal to 1 by construction and Equation 3b.ii can equivalently be written without the β_1 and β_2 terms.

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}} + PGS_j^{\mathrm{N}} + f(E_{ij}) + f(E_j)$$

(3b.iii)

3c. Transmitted Genetic Nurture Alleles

The presence of social genetic effects, such as genetic nurture effects, will only bias GWAS estimates of direct genetic effects when a social or biological process induces a correlation between

the genetics of an individual and the genetics of his or her relevant social relationships. In the case of genetic nurture effects, biological recombination acts as such a process; children randomly inherit a portion of each parent's genome, leading to a mechanical correlation between parental genetics and child genetics. To capture the portion of the genetic nurture PGS that was transmitted to individual i from the parents in family j, we introduce a third PGS parameter, PGS_{ij}^{N}.

$$\sum_{z=1}^{n} \delta^{z}\, g_{ij}^{z} = PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{N}}$$

(3c.i)

PGS_{ij}^{N}: PGS constructed from the true causal linear effect of i's genes on i's child's Y

PGS_{ij}^{N} bears some similarity with both PGS_{ij}^{D} and PGS_{j}^{N}, the two PGSs corresponding to the two causal sources of genetic effects present in our structural model. Like PGS_{ij}^{D}, PGS_{ij}^{N} is constructed using g_{ij} (as opposed to g_j) and therefore varies within-families. However, like PGS_{j}^{N}, PGS_{ij}^{N} is constructed using the allelic weights $\vec{\delta}$, which correspond to genetic nurture effects (as opposed to direct genetic effects).

Notice that the relationship PGS_{ij}^{N} and PGS_{j}^{N} hinges on the relationship between g_{ij} and g_j. Because the alleles transmitted from parent (g_j) to child (g_{ij}) are determined stochastically through genetic recombination, the expected value of the correlation between g_{ij} and g_j is known. In Section A4 of the appendix, we derive the expected value of the association between PGS_{ij}^{N} and PGS_{j}^{N} and show that it does not vary between traits.

$$\mathrm{E}\left[\rho_{PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{N}},PGS_{j}^{\mathrm{N}}}\right] = \frac{\sqrt{2}}{2}$$

(3c.ii)

3d. The Relationship Between Direct Genetic Effects and Genetic Nurture Effects

While PGS_{ij}^{N} is absent from our underlying structural model, it provides the link between PGS_{ij}^{D} and PGS_{j}^{N} that allows for the presence of genetic nurture effects to distort GWAS results and subsequent PGSs. Thus, the most important components of our structural model are relationships between PGS_{ij}^{D} and PGS_{ij}^{N} and between PGS_{ij}^{N} and PGS_{j}^{N}. As we have seen above, PGS_{ij}^{N} and PGS_{j}^{N} have a mechanical correlation that does not vary between traits as it depends only on genotype (and not allelic weights). However, any differences between PGS_{ij}^{D} and PGS_{ij}^{N} are a result of differences between allelic weights used to construct each PGS ($\vec{\alpha}$ and $\vec{\delta}$, respectively). Because $\vec{\alpha}$ and $\vec{\delta}$ vary across traits, the extent to which PGS_{ij}^{D} and PGS_{ij}^{N} are correlated also varies

between traits. We term the correlation between PGS_{ij}^{D} and PGS_{ij}^{N} for a given trait the *direct-nurture genetic correlation*.

$$\rho_g = \frac{cov\left(PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}}, PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{N}}\right)}{var\left(PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}} var\left(PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{N}}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}}}$$

(3d.i)

ρ_g: Correlation between genetic nurture effects and direct genetic effects

In general, we expect the direct-nurture genetic correlation to be between 0 and 1. Consider, for example, the case of educational attainment. There may exist some genetic pathways that contribute to a parent's ability to create a positive educational environment for their children that do not influence the amount of educational attainment that the parent receives themselves. If so, direct genetic effects and genetic nurture effects will have a correlation of less than 1. This value could in fact be negative, but, given the existing evidence suggests that ρ_g is positive (Kong et al. 2018; Bates et al. 2018; Belsky et al. 2018; Wertz et al. 2018), we focus on the case where the direct-nurture genetic correlation is bounded by 0 and 1.

3e. Underlying Allelic Weights

We will show that ρ_g, a trait's direct-nurture genetic correlation, is a critical underlying parameter of our structural model. Because ρ_g hinges entirely on how $\vec{\alpha}$ relates to $\vec{\delta}$, it is important to define this relationship. Allelic weights α^n from 1 to n form a distribution with variance σ. Without loss of generality, we define "major" and "minor" allele at each genetic loci z such that this distribution has mean 0. We then assume that $\vec{\delta}$ are drawn from an identical distribution as $\vec{\alpha}$, except with variance $\frac{\lambda^2}{4}\sigma$ (this allows for the average effects sizes to differ between direct genetic effects and genetic nurture effects). Finally, we assume that genetic nurture effects and genetic nature effects have a similar genetic architecture, meaning that $\vec{\alpha}$ are $\vec{\delta}$ distributed in a similar way across genetic loci with respect to the allele frequency mean and variance. Specifically, we assume:

$$\rho_{\vec{\alpha},\overrightarrow{\bar{g}_{ij}^{z}}} = \rho_{\vec{\delta},\overrightarrow{\bar{g}_{ij}^{z}}}$$

$$\rho_{\vec{\alpha}^2,\overrightarrow{var}(g_{ij}^{z})} = \rho_{\vec{\delta}^2,\overrightarrow{var}(g_{ij}^{z})}$$

(3e.i)

$\bar{g}_{ij}^{z}$: Population mean major allele frequency count at genetic loci z

$\overrightarrow{var}\left(g_{ij}^{z}\right)$: Population variance of major allele count frequency at genetic loci z

$\rho_{\vec{\alpha},\overrightarrow{\bar{g}_{ij}^{z}}}$: Correlation between vectors comporised of α^z and $\bar{g}_{ij}^{z}$ for $z = 1$ to $z = n$

$\rho_{\vec{\delta},\overrightarrow{\bar{g}_{ij}^{z}}}$: Correlation between vectors comporised of δ^z and $\bar{g}_{ij}^{z}$ for z = 1 to z = n

$\rho_{\vec{\alpha}^2,\overrightarrow{var}(g_{ij}^{z})}$: Correlation between vectors comporised of $(\alpha^z)^2$ and $var\left(g_{ij}^{z}\right)$ for z = 1 to z = n

$\rho_{\vec{\delta}^2,\overrightarrow{var}(g_{ij}^{z})}$: Correlation between vectors comporised of $(\delta^z)^2$ and $var\left(g_{ij}^{z}\right)$ for z = 1 to z = n

The assumptions of our structural model entail that λ represents the ratio of the SNP heritabilities of genetic nurture effect and direct genetic effects (see Section A6 of the appendix). We call this value the *direct-nurture heritability ratio*.

$$\lambda = \mathrm{E}\left[\frac{2\sum_{z=1}^{n}(\delta^z\overline{g_{ij}^{z}})}{\sum_{z=1}^{n}(\alpha^z\overline{g_{ij}^{z}})}\right] = \frac{h_N^2}{h_D^2}$$

(3e.ii)

λ: Ratio of the SNP heritabilities of genetic nurture effects and direct genetic effects

h_D^2: SNP heritability for direct genetic effects of Y_{ij}

h_N^2: SNP heritability for genetic nurture effects of Y_{ij}

Without loss of generality, we normalize all variables such that the variance of PGS_{ij}^{D} is equal to one.

$$var\left(PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}}\right) = 1$$

(3e.iii)

We can now use our structural model to derive the expectation of the variance of the remaining PGSs as a function of the direct-nurture heritability ratio (see Sections A7 and A8 of the appendix).

$$\mathrm{E}\left[var\left(PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{N}}\right)\right] = \frac{\lambda^2}{4}$$

$$\mathrm{E}\left[var\left(PGS_{j}^{\mathrm{N}}\right)\right] = \frac{\lambda^2}{2}$$

(3e.iiii)

Now that we have fully defined our structural model, we can use it to gain insights into the implications of genetic nurture effects for GWAS and PGSs.

4. Analytic Results

4a. Observed PGS

Up until this point, all our work has been structural; we have defined the functional form of a set of causal relationships between underlying parameters of interest which are difficult to observe directly. We now transport our structural model into the messy real world and analytically consider its implications for GWAS and subsequent PGSs. In reality, we observe not $\vec{\alpha}$ but $\hat{\vec{\alpha}}$. We then use this observed $\hat{\vec{\alpha}}$ to construct not PGS_{ij}^{D} but $\widehat{PGS}_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}}$, which as we will see contains information from both PGS_{ij}^{D} and PGS_{ij}^{N}.

We obtain $\hat{\vec{\alpha}}$ by fitting the following regression for n SNPs via GWAS.

$$Y_{ij} = \hat{\beta}_0^z + \hat{\alpha}^z g_{ij}^z + \overrightarrow{X_{ij}}\overrightarrow{\hat{\Theta}} + \epsilon_{ij}$$

(4a.i)

$\hat{\alpha}^z$: Allelic weight from the observed linear relationship of a one allele change at i's z^{th} gene and Y_{ij}

We can now plug in from our structural model.

$$\mathrm{E}[\hat{\alpha}^z] = \frac{var\left(g_{ij}^z\right)\alpha^z + cov\left(g_{ij}^z, g_j^z\right)\delta^z}{var\left(g_{ij}^z\right)}$$

(4a.ii)

We can separate g_j^z into the sum of alleles that were transmitted to i and the alleles that were not transmitted.

$$g_j^z = g_{ij}^z + f_{ij}^z$$

(4a.iii)

f_{ij}^z: Total number of major alleles at the parents in family j's genetic loci z that were **not** transmitted to i (0, 1, or 2)

$$\mathrm{E}[\hat{\alpha}^z] = \frac{var\left(g_{ij}^z\right)\alpha^z + cov\left(g_{ij}^z, g_{ij}^z + f_{ij}^z\right)\delta^z}{var\left(g_{ij}^z\right)}$$

$$\mathrm{E}[\hat{\alpha}^z] = \frac{var\left(g_{ij}^z\right)\alpha^z + cov\left(g_{ij}^z, g_{ij}^z\right)\delta^z + cov\left(g_{ij}^z, f_{ij}^z\right)\delta^z}{var\left(g_{ij}^z\right)}$$

(4a.iv)

In the absence of assortative mating, transmitted alleles are uncorrelated with non-transmitted allele, meaning that $cov\left(g_{ij}^z, f_{ij}^z\right) = 0$.

$$\mathrm{E}[\hat{\alpha}^z] = \frac{var\left(g_{ij}^z\right)\alpha^z + cov\left(g_{ij}^z, g_{ij}^z\right)\delta^z}{var\left(g_{ij}^z\right)}$$

$$\hat{\alpha}^z = \alpha^z + \delta^z$$

(4a.v)

We can then use our observed vector of allelic weights for genetic nurture, $\vec{\hat{\alpha}}$, to construct our observed genetic nurture PGS, $\widehat{PGS}_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}}$.

$$\widehat{PGS}_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}} = \sum_{z=1}^{n} \hat{\alpha}^z \, g_{ij}^z$$

$$\widehat{PGS}_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}} = \sum_{z=1}^{n} (\alpha^z + \delta^z) \, g_{ij}^z$$

$$\widehat{PGS}_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}} = PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}} + PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{N}}$$

(4a.vi)

Finally, constructed PGSs are typically normalized within sample, so we convert $\widehat{PGS}_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}}$ to $\widehat{PGS'}_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}}$.

$$\widehat{PGS'}_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}} = \frac{\widehat{PGS}_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}} - \overline{\widehat{PGS}}_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}}}{var\left(\widehat{PGS}_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}}}$$

$$\widehat{PGS'}_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}} = \frac{\left(PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}} + PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{N}}\right) - \left(\overline{PGS}_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}} + \overline{PGS}_{ij}^{\mathrm{N}}\right)}{var\left(PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}} + PGS_{ij}^{\mathrm{N}}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}}}$$

(4a.vii)

Thus, we have shown that the PGS derived from GWAS has information from both an individual's PGS for direct genetic effects and genetic nurture effects.

4b. Between-Family Analyses

Our structural model has previously demonstrated that PGSs constructed from GWAS capture both the direct genetic effects and the genetic nurture effects of a given allele. We now explore the implications of this result for analyses using such PGSs, beginning with the between-family analysis (Model 1). We will see that the inclusion of genetic nurture effects biases direct genetic effect coefficients upward.

$$\text{Model 1: } Y_i = \hat{\psi}_0 + \hat{\psi}_1 \widehat{PGS'}_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}} + \overrightarrow{X_{ij}}\vec{\hat{\Theta}} + \hat{\epsilon}_{ij}$$

(4b.i)

Now that we have derived $\widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}$, we can calculate the expected bias in $\hat{\psi}_1$.

$$\mathrm{E}[\hat{\psi}_1] = \frac{cov\left(\widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}, Y_{ij}\right)}{var\left(\widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}\right)}$$

(4b.ii)

$cov\left(\widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}, Y_{ij}\right)$ is given by true causal relationships from our structural model.

$$\mathrm{E}[\hat{\psi}_1] = \frac{cov\left(\widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}, \widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}\right)\beta_1 + cov\left(\widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}, \widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}\right)\beta_2}{var\left(\widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}\right)}$$

(4b.iii)

β_1 and β_2 from our structural model are equal to 1 by construction and therefore fall away.

$$\mathrm{E}[\hat{\psi}_1] = \frac{cov\left(\widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}, \widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}\right) + cov\left(\widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}, \widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}\right)}{var\left(\widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}\right)}$$

(4b.iv)

We solve (see Section A9 of the appendix for details) to obtain the magnitude of the bias in $\hat{\psi}_1$.

$$\mathrm{E}[\hat{\psi}_1] = \sqrt{1 + \lambda\rho_g + \frac{\lambda^2}{4}}$$

(4b.v)

So we have shown that our observed estimates for $\hat{\psi}_1$ will be biased upwards by a factor of $\sqrt{1 + \lambda\rho_g + \frac{\lambda^2}{4}}$. We will unpack this quantity further in the discussion but note that it depends on unobserved parameters.

4c. Within-Family Analyses

Let's now turn to our within-family analysis (Model 2). We will see that the inclusion of genetic nurture effects biases direct genetic effect coefficients downward.

$$\text{Model 2: } Y_{ij} = \hat{\pi}_0 + \hat{\pi}_1 \widehat{PGS'}^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij} + \Gamma_{\mathrm{j}} + \overrightarrow{X_{ij}}\overrightarrow{\widehat{\Theta}} + \hat{\epsilon}_{ij}$$

Or, equivalently:

$$\left(Y_{1j} - Y_{0j}\right) = \hat{\pi}_1\left(\widehat{PGS}'^{\mathrm{D}}_{1j} - \widehat{PGS}'^{\mathrm{D}}_{0j}\right) + \hat{\epsilon}_{ij}$$
$$\Delta_0^1 Y_{ij} = \hat{\pi}_1 \Delta_0^1 \widehat{PGS}'^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij} + \hat{\epsilon}_{ij}$$

(4c.i)

PGS^{N}_{0j}: PGS^{N}_{ij} of sibling 0 in family j

PGS^{N}_{1j}: PGS^{N}_{ij} of sibling 1 in family j

We can then derive the expected value of $\hat{\pi}_1$.

$$\mathrm{E}[\hat{\pi}_1] = \frac{cov\left(\Delta_0^1 \widehat{PGS}'^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}, \Delta_0^1 Y_{ij}\right)}{var\left(\Delta_0^1 \widehat{PGS}'^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}\right)}$$

(4c.ii)

$cov\left(\Delta_0^1 \widehat{PGS}'^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}, \Delta_0^1 Y_{ij}\right)$ is given by true causal relationships from our structural model.

$$\mathrm{E}[\hat{\pi}_1] = \frac{cov\left(\Delta_0^1 \widehat{PGS}'^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}, \Delta_0^1 PGS^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}\right)\beta_1 + cov\left(\Delta_0^1 \widehat{PGS}'^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}, \Delta_0^1 PGS^{\mathrm{N}}_{j}\right)\beta_2}{var\left(\Delta_0^1 \widehat{PGS}'^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}\right)}$$

(4c.iii)

Again, β_1 and β_2 from our structural model are equal to 1 by construction and therefor fall away.

$$\mathrm{E}[\hat{\pi}_1] = \frac{cov\left(\Delta_0^1 \widehat{PGS}'^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}, \Delta_0^1 PGS^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}\right) + cov\left(\Delta_0^1 \widehat{PGS}'^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}, \Delta_0^1 PGS^{\mathrm{N}}_{j}\right)}{var\left(\Delta_0^1 \widehat{PGS}'^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}\right)}$$

(4c.iv)

Notice that between siblings there is no variation in family genetic nurturing environment, meaning that $\Delta_0^1 PGS^{\mathrm{N}}_{j} = 0$.

$$\mathrm{E}[\hat{\pi}_1] = \frac{cov\left(\Delta_0^1 \widehat{PGS}'^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}, \Delta_0^1 PGS^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}\right)}{var\left(\Delta_0^1 \widehat{PGS}'^{\mathrm{D}}_{ij}\right)}$$

(4c.v)

Now we just solve (see Section A10 of the appendix for details) to obtain the magnitude of the bias in $\hat{\pi}_1$.

$$\mathrm{E}[\hat{\pi}_1] = \frac{1 + \frac{\lambda\rho_g}{2}}{\sqrt{1 + \lambda\rho_g + \frac{\lambda^2}{4}}}$$

(4c.vi)

Thus, we have shown that our observed estimates for $\hat{\psi}_1$ will be biased downwards by a factor of $\frac{1+\frac{\lambda\rho_g}{2}}{\sqrt{1+\lambda\rho_g+\frac{\lambda^2}{4}}}$. We discuss this quantity further in the discussion.

5. Discussion

5a. Bias

Our structural model illustrates that in the presence of genetic nurture (i.e. $h_N^2 \neq 0$), regression analyses using PGSs to estimate the effects of an individual's genetics on their outcomes will suffer from bias. Between-family OLS models will be biased upwards by a factor of $\sqrt{1 + \lambda\rho_g + \frac{\lambda^2}{4}}$ while within-family fixed effect models will be biased downwards by a factor of $\frac{1+\frac{\lambda\rho_g}{2}}{\sqrt{1+\lambda\rho_g+\frac{\lambda^2}{4}}}$. Figure 1 plots the bias in both OLS and family fixed effect regressions using PGSs as a function of various direct-nurture genetic correlations and direct-nurture heritability ratios.

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

The absence of bias is represented in Figure 1 by the horizontal line at y=1. For any given trait, bias is always larger in the between-family models. The magnitude of bias is a function of two parameters: ρ_g, the trait's direct-nurture genetic correlation, and λ, the trait's direct-nurture heritability ratio. As λ increases, so does the magnitude of the bias. However, ρ_g has opposite effects on the bias within and between-families. Thus, taken together, $\hat{\psi}_1$ and $\hat{\pi}_1$ can provide a useful set of upper and lower bounds of the true causal effects. When ρ_g is close to 1, the bias in between-family models is the largest, whereas when ρ_g is close to 0 the bias in between-family models is the largest.

There is an intuitive understanding of the trends presented in Figure 1. In the between-family estimates, the inclusion of genetic nurture effects in $\widehat{PGS}_{ij}^{\mathrm{D}}$ leads to an upward bias by picking up on both differences in genetic composition between individuals *and* differences in the family environments between individuals that result from differences in their parents' genetic composition. The larger that ρ_g is, the greater extent to which an individual with a beneficial allele for educational attainment reaps the reward from the same genes twice; first when their parents

provide a more nurturing environment, and second when they themselves inherit the beneficial allele.

On the other hand, in family fixed effects models (within-family), the inclusion of genetic nurture in the observed PGS leads to downward bias when ρ_g is less than 1. This is because there are no differences in genetic nurture systematically driving differences in educational outcomes between siblings. Regardless of their own PGS_{ij}^{D}, siblings have identical PGS_j^{N} because they are in the same family j. Thus, any extent that genetic nurture effects causes $\vec{\hat{\alpha}}$ to diverge from $\vec{\alpha}$ amounts to measurement error in the allelic weights and causes downward attenuation bias.

The insights from our structural model offer a partial explanation of the large variation in the difference between differences empirically observed in $\frac{\hat{\pi}_1}{\hat{\psi}_1}$ across the various phenotypes considered in Table 1. For traits like educational attainment, cognitive ability, and depression, where indirect genetic effects likely play an important role (i.e. large λ) , we see large differences between $\hat{\psi}_1$ and $\hat{\pi}_1$ (i.e. $\frac{\hat{\pi}_1}{\hat{\psi}_1} < 1$). On the other side of the coin, for traits like body mass index and height, where most of the genetic contribution is likely to be direct (i.e. small λ) , we see almost no difference between $\hat{\psi}_1$ and $\hat{\pi}_1$ (i.e. $\frac{\hat{\pi}_1}{\hat{\psi}_1} \approx 1$). Turning back to Figure 1, you can see this coincides with what our structural model would have predicted. Further, our model suggests that the differences between observed in $\frac{\hat{\pi}_1}{\hat{\psi}_1}$ between educational attainment, cognitive ability, and depression may be a function of differences in ρ_g between the traits.

5b. Parameters of Interest

Numerous GWAS have been conducted in the last decade (Mills and Rahal 2019). Nonetheless, to our knowledge, no GWAS has been conducted in human populations that independently identifies the direct genetic effects and the genetic nurture effects for a complex trait.[i] Thus, for virtually all complex traits, little is known about the parameters of interest identified in our models: the direct-nurture genetic correlation and the direct-nurture heritability ratio (ρ_g and λ respectively). Critically, the two parameters are readily estimable with existing data and methods (which we discuss further in 5d).

A better understanding ρ_g and λ would offer value beyond aiding in the comparison of results from within-family and between-family regressions. The genetic pathways discovered in GWASs and summarized in PGSs offer researchers a puzzle to unpack (Freese 2018). Understanding why some phenotypes have strong versus weak social genetic effects, or why the link between direct genetic and social genetic influence are more versus less linked, could help researchers glean insight into the underlying mechanisms at play.

Moreover, it would be interesting to understand how ρ_g and λ are influenced by the social environment. For example, while gene-environment interaction studies have been the conventional way to understand how the environment moderates the influence of genetics, recent work has

proposed a genetic correlation-environment interaction study (Wedow et al. 2018). In a genetic correlation-environment interaction study framework, the social environment can transform the genetic link between two traits. Exploring how the environment shapes ρ_g would be a be a special case of a genetic correlation-environment interaction study where the two traits influence the same phenotype (directly and socially). In the future, social policymakers might prefer a low ρ_g for valued life outcomes like educational attainment to reduce the accumulation of inequality across generations.

5c. Implications for the Use of Polygenic Scores

While within-family analyses have demonstrated that many PGSs do have significant casual signal for direct genetic effects, comparing the results from within-family analyses to results from between-family analyses is complicated by the presence of genetic nurture effects. To what extent do existing PGSs capture direct genetic effects, genetic nurture effects, and socioeconomic or geographic confounding? Until we better understand ρ_g and λ for a wide variety of traits, our ability to use within-family analyses to sift through this question is quite limited. Analyses using PGSs should be interpreted accordingly.

Even in the absence of confounding due to population stratification, the observation that existing PGSs likely have genetic nurture components complicates their use and interpretation. Say, for instance, a researcher wonders whether there exists moderation of the association between an individual's PGS and their educational attainment as a function of school-level socioeconomic status (Trejo et al. 2018). Because a piece of the PGS captures the benefits of having a parent with higher educational attainment and (in turn a higher socioeconomic status), even if a gene-environment interaction is statistically detected, it is unclear how to interpret it. It might be the case that household socioeconomic status interacts with school-level socioeconomic status in shaping educational attainment, or alternatively it could be that an individual's genetic composition interacts with school-level socioeconomic status in shaping educational attainment. These two different results have very different theoretical and practical implications but are indistinguishable in analyses using existing PGSs, which contain both direct genetic effects and genetic nurture effects.

5d. Future Research

The models constructed in this paper highlight key areas for future research in the field of social science genomics. Across a range of complex phenotypes, there is much work to be done towards separating out the genetics nurture effects from direct genetic effects. Utilizing random cage-mate assignment in mice, a recent study in mice conducted a social genetic effects GWAS and direct genetic effects GWAS in parallel and identified statistically significant genome wide social genetic effect loci for 16 phenotypes (Baud et al. 2018). For these 16 phenotypes, the mean social-direct genetic correlation was 0.53 and the mean social-direct heritability ratio was 1.29. Crucially, social genetic effects arise from partially different loci as direct genetic effects and can have effect sizes at the same loci.

Unfortunately, social relationships are often not randomly assigned in human populations. Nonetheless, existing GWAS methods could be modified humans to use dyads of parents and their children. For example, a social genetic effects GWAS could be conducted by controlling for child's genetics in a GWAS of parental genetics on child phenotype. Alternatively, a GWAS conducted using variation only amongst sibling pairs would provide information on direct genetic pathways untainted by confounding or genetic nurture effects. Results from such a sibling GWAS might then be used to back out information about the genetic nurture effects from existing GWAS results of unrelated individuals. Nonetheless, obtaining large samples of parent-child or sibling pairs might prove challenging for many complex phenotypes. If statistical power is a problem, methods such as LD score regression (Bulik-Sullivan et al. 2015) could be used with smaller samples to identify estimates of ρ_g and λ. Indeed, simply having estimates of ρ_g and λ for a trait would allow researchers to correct for bias in within and between-family analyses that use a PGS.

It is also possible that the direct effects and social genetic effects are not independent. Imagine, for example, that parents with a higher educational attainment PGSs tend to invest more heavily in their children with higher polygenic scores than child than parents with lower polygenic scores. In such a case, the effects of parental genetics on a child would vary as a function as their child's genetics. Research designs that investigate the existence of interaction between direct genetic effects and genetic nurture effects may prove a fruitful avenue for future research.

Finally, work should be done to extend our framework to other social genetic effects within-families, such as between sibling pairs. We chose to start with genetic nurture effects because, unlike sibling effects, genetic nurture effects are likely to be unidirectional, with the causal effect pointing from parent to child, making them more straightforward to model (effects between siblings are likely reciprocal) (Kong et al. 2018) and because regarding parental effects generalize to all families, not just those with multiple children. Nonetheless, social genetic effects between siblings may also complicate the interpretation of GWAS results and warrant attention.

5d. Conclusion

In summary, we formalize a structural model for additive direct genetic effects and genetic nurture effects and show that, unlike bias from other confounders, the presence of genetic nurture can bias coefficients from between-family and within-family regressions using PGSs. While within-family analyses that compare siblings using family fixed effects are considered the gold-standard, they are not without their own complications. Even if we were able to run a GWAS on an infinitely large sample using the methods in practice today, the presence of confounding social genetic effects would mean that it would be impossible to obtain precise estimates of the causal effect of an individual's genes on their life outcomes. Until it is possible to run a GWAS controlling for parental genotype, models using PGSs may be biased by genetic nurture effects. Obtaining estimates of a trait's direct-nurture genetic correlation and direct-nurture heritability ratio may allow researchers to correct for such a bias.

[i] A notable exception from the maternal influences on child birthweight (Beaumont et al. 2018). However, though this is an indirect genetic effect, it does not appear to operate through a social pathway

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Tables

Table 1. The association between polygenic score and observed trait for five phenotypes, within-families and between-families.

	$\hat{\psi}_1$	$\hat{\pi}_1$	$\frac{\hat{\pi}_1}{\hat{\psi}_1}$
Years of Schooling	0.812**	0.357**	0.44
Cognitive Ability	3.204**	1.699**	0.53
CESD Depression Index	0.293**	0.00983	0.034
Body Mass Index	1.919**	1.872**	0.976
Height	3.116**	3.291**	1.056

* 0.05 ** 0.01 . All models control for sex, age, and the first 10 principle components of individual genotype. All model uses only individuals of European ancestry. Models without individual-fixed effects use a sample of unrelated individuals, whereas the family-fixed effect models use a sample of sibling pairs. All polygenic scores are both standardized to be mean 0 and standard deviation 1. Cognitive ability is measured through the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test during Wave 1 of Add Health, when respondents were approximately 16 years old. Years of Schooling, CESD Depression Index, BMI, and Height are measured during Wave 4 of Add Health, when respondents were approximately 28 years old. A traditional regression table is available in Section A11 of the appendix.

Figure Legends

Figure 1

Title: Bias Due to Genetic Nurture in Within and Between Family Regressions using Polygenic Scores

Caption: Grey line at y=1 represents no bias. ρ_g is the direct-nurture genetic correlation and λ is the direct-nurture heritability ratio. Results are derived analytically from a structural model.

Figures
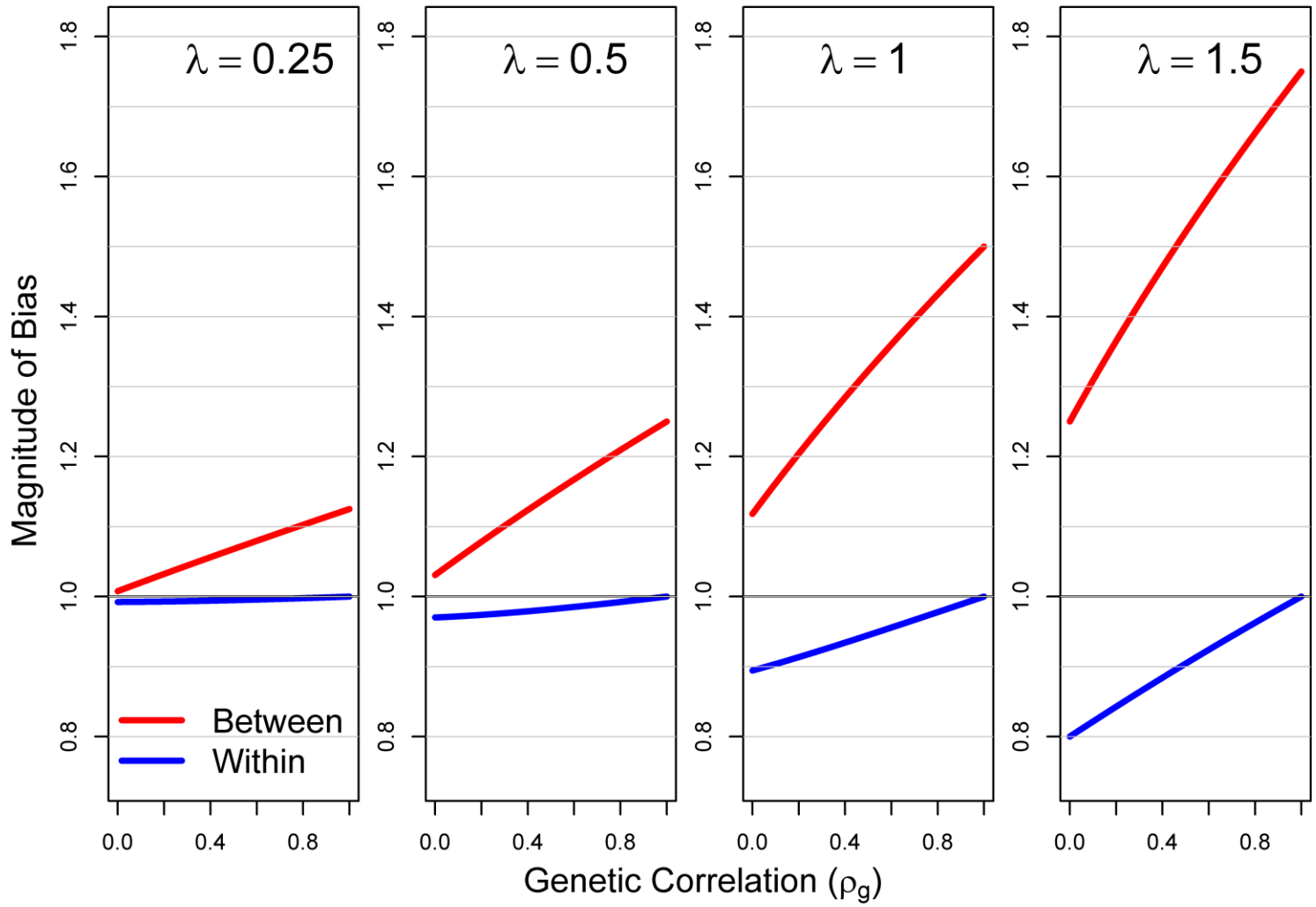
Figure 1