It has been said that the only constant in life is change. As we age, our interests, goals, relationships and even our physical makeup undergo change. Some of these changes occur in response to the environment in which we live. If we move somewhere new, we are bound to meet new people who will impact our lives. Some changes are more biologically driven, for example the changes that happen in our bodies during puberty. Some changes are subtle and some are much more obvious, some are gradual and others happen extremely quickly. In order to understand the reasons for and the effects of change, researchers at IBG are conducting 5 and 10 year follow-up interviews with you. If the questions we ask seem familiar, that is because many of them are the same questions we asked you years ago. We are finding that many people’s answers shift over time, and we are asking these questions again to understand the reasons for and the effects of change, researchers at IBG are conducting 5 and 10 year follow-up interviews with you.

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For centuries explorers have mapped the world around us in order to gain knowledge and understanding of the complex place we inhabit. With advances in technology, scientists have been increasingly able to map our inner surroundings as well. In 2000, the first complete map of the human genome was created. This map charts the location of all the genes that make up a human being, around 35,000 in all. Variations in these genes contribute to differences in our physical attributes and behavior. However, researchers are just beginning to find out what many of these genes do. The field of behavioral genetics is at the forefront of this search, and the results from your tests are helping us discover many exciting new aspects of human development and behavior.

Behavioral genetics is the study of genetic and environmental factors that create behavioral differences among individuals. This is the classic nature (genetics) vs. nurture (environment) debate. Researchers are finding that instead of “vs.” however, it would be more appropriate to say “nature and nurture”, as different combinations of genetics and environment make us who we are, it is not strictly one or the other.

Currently, researchers in behavioral genetics are focused on 1) finding behaviors and traits that are associated with specific genes and groups of genes, and 2) discovering how genes interact with the environment to make us each unique individuals. In order to find these connections, projects such as this one are being conducted around the world. Data about emotional, mental, and physical traits are collected through questionnaires and interviews, and DNA is collected through blood or saliva in order to match certain behaviors with certain genes. Researchers have begun pinpointing the functions of many genes, including those involved with reading disabilities, addictive behaviors, sleep, and memory.

This is an exciting time in the field of behavioral genetics, and your contribution to our understanding of the human experience is invaluable. Thank you again for your continued participation as we fill in the map of our inner surroundings.