

## Can you inherit a laugh? Book explores this and other genetics questions

Why are people today often taller than their ancestors? If you have [blue eyes](#) or [red hair](#), does that mean your children will too? Is there an [intelligence gene](#), or a gene that produces [mass murderers](#)? Or is it the family environment one grows up in? These are some of the questions [Carl Zimmer](#) explores in his new book, [She Has Her Mother's Laugh](#).

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National Geographic caught up with Zimmer at Yale University.

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[Simon Worrall:] When I told my wife the title of your book, and that it was about heredity, she said: "I got my mother's laugh and voice from being around her." So, Carl, is it genes or the environment—[nature or nurture](#)—that make us who we are?

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[Zimmer:] I would be surprised if laughter had even 10 percent heritability. Genes you inherit may play a role in your laugh being somewhat similar to your parents', but you're also growing up with them and listening to them laughing, and we're a very imitative species. There's no way you could drill down and say we have identified that 10 percent of your laugh came from your DNA.

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Certainly our genes are enormously important, but they're not the only things that are passed down from our parents. I would argue that you should think beyond genes when trying to understand the full scope of heredity.

**Read full, original post:** [Can a Laugh Be Inherited? How Genes Define Who We Are](#)