



## Not in Your Genes: The Real Reasons Children Are Like Their Parents

*Oliver James*

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Professor Robert Plomin, the world's leading geneticist, said in 2014 of his search for genes that explain differences in our psychology: 'I have been looking for these genes for fifteen years. I don't have any'.

Using a mixture of famous and ordinary people, Oliver James drills deep down into the childhood causes of our individuality, revealing why our upbringing, not our genes, plays such an important role in our wellbeing and success. The implications are huge: as adults we can change, we can clutch our fates from predetermined destiny, as parents we can radically alter the trajectory of our childrens' lives, and as a society we could largely eradicate criminality and poverty.

*Not in Your Genes* will not only change the way you think about yourself and the people around you, but give you the fuel to change your personality and your life for the better.

## Not in Your Genes: The Real Reasons Children Are Like Their Parents Details

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# From Reader Review Not in Your Genes: The Real Reasons Children Are Like Their Parents for online ebook

## Susanna says

I don't know enough of the science behind this, but as someone who suffers, and knows others who suffer, from mental illness, I take offense. It was "damned if you do, damned if you don't" and I'm not surprised that the ladies in my bookclub who are mothers were also up in arms about this!

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## Sebastian Schmidt says

Decided to stop reading because it tells stories about prominent drug-addicts I don't know and don't care about, and feels overly negative. I would appreciate a more neutral approach, also talking about positive traits that are passed after birth.

I would have expected more abstract descriptions on how the personality of a person is built, to get a general understanding. I must admit that I didn't check if that exists later in the book though.

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## Gay Harding says

Interesting concept. But, I'm not entirely convinced. Where are the primary sources?  
Wasn't a fan of the stories of celebrities...why not stick to ordinary people

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## Book says

“Not In Your Genes” written by psychologist Oliver James is a book packed with case histories. Some are based on clients author has worked with and in these cases, while others are based on emails and subsequent phone or Skype conversations he has had with people who contacted him and who have also given permission for their use.

James also uses famous people to exemplify points he is making. You will find story of Paula Yates and her daughter Peaches Geldof and some other famous examples, mostly based on biographies and autobiographies. The author emphasizes that as in his previous books, these psychobiographical examples are based on reliable sources, like the famous people’s own accounts of their lives, and in some cases, his own personal experience from working with them, or interviews he did with them. In using psychobiography, he is following the tradition developed by Sigmund Freud and Lytton Strachey, hoping to engage the reader through famous people with whom they may feel they already have some kind of relationship, through the media, or their artistic or scientific creations.

Human beings have the longest period of dependence on their parents for survival of any species. Whereas most mammals are independent after a few weeks or months, humans require five years. For that reason, humans start off highly attuned to our main carers, hoping to attract their loving and material resources. We may die, emotionally as well as literally, if we do not.

The latest evidence from the Human Genome Project is proving that it is not genes which make psychological traits run in families. There are physical traits that pass down genetically, like height, looks and eye color, but it now seems very much as if variations in things like mental illness, smartness or shyness, have little or nothing to do with the sequences of DNA which pass from parent to child.

Rather, it is proven that patterns of nurture make us like our parents and grandparents: what travels down the generations are precise kinds of bickering, humor, snide asides, delicious food preparation, beatings, hugging, short-temperedness.

You are like you are because you were related to by both your parents in very particular ways, good and bad. When you have children, you are liable to do exactly the same, or something similar, in many respects, or else react against it.

How you were cared for, especially in early life, was critical. This, in turn, was caused by the way your parents were cared for, all the way back to your grandparents and beyond. The best evidence suggests that nine out of ten maltreated children develop a mental illness as adults. Seventy per cent of maltreated children become maltreating parents themselves.

Much nurture is positive, the love and sensitivity, the teaching of skills, the intimacy. But in almost all families, there are toxic patterns. The implication is that we do not have to go on repeating the past.

Genes enable almost all of us to acquire language. But which one we speak is wholly dependent on the one we are taught by our parents and society. The same way, nearly all of us have the potential for psychological characteristics like liveliness, intelligence or depression, but the extent to which we develop them and in precisely what way depends largely, or completely, on nurture.

Though I finished it an hour ago and my impressions are still fresh, "Not In Your Genes" written by Oliver James is book you must read if you are interested in psychology, especially children's.

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### **Schopflin says**

I enjoyed reading this and thought some of the insights into childhood maltreatment were moving and sympathetic to both child and parent. It does become a little polemical and it's worth noting that the jury is still out as to genetic predisposition to either mental illness or to characteristics like ASD.

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### **Kara Gabbett says**

While the book was a page turner, I came out of it feeling very guilty as a parent - apparently everything about the personality of a child, good and bad, is down to their parenting (and the parents parenting, and their parents parenting, and so on).

James alienated me as a reader early on with unsubstantiated and sweeping statements like "Indeed, given how lamentably organised British education is, I am inclined to agree with them that one of its main purposes is merely to warehouse children so that parents can work." As a teacher, I completely disagree. I did, however, keep reading, and while strangely compelled by the armchair analysis of the lives and of

Tiger Woods and Peaches Geldoff, I still have great doubts about the main premise - that genes have no effect on our personality, that mental illness is due to maltreatment in childhood, and that a child's success (and failure) is down to their birth order, the mental health of their mother, sibling rivalry, favouritism and the relationship of their parents.

All a bit too much of a parental guilt trip to be enjoyable.

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### **Ferdawss says**

This was a very interesting and informing read, regarding the role of parenting and multiple non-genetic factors in a child behavior and mental development.

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### **Steve Angelkov says**

4 stars.

What an intriguing read outlining that raising children is not DNA or Gene based, but transgenerational behaviour based.

The book gives great constructive advice on positive parenting styles and techniques.

Although the book may appear aimed at parents, I think this also has benefits for siblings and wider family members.

Of note is the authors regular referencing of other books in the series, but that actually is a benefit.

Nature vs Nuture great stuff.

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### **Yelena says**

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### **Mariana says**

The good: Oliver James writes well, weaving anecdotes, research and opinion into a very entertaining read. He seems to have done his homework regarding research and listening to differing opinions.

The bad: I constantly got the impression that he took one or two facts and stretched them to the extreme in order to support his opinion. It felt dishonest. The stretching felt particularly fake when talking about intelligence. Seriously, Mr. James, you haven't met any child who is simply a faster learner and hungry for knowledge, despite having normal parents and no pressure or conditional love at home?

The ugly: how willing the author is to put the blame for everything (hell, even autism!) on bad parenting. No, Mr. James, parents are not omnipotent.

I'm still glad to have read the book, as it gave me several good ideas and inspiration for better parenting as well as self-improvement. Only time will tell where the truth regarding nature vs nurture defining psychological traits is, but I suspect it's somewhere in the middle, or as Matt Ridley would say, in nature via nurture.

"Assuming there's a fixed difficultness in a baby, toddler and child has been shown to greatly increase the risk of becoming authoritarian to the point of abusive. Greater harshness results, with higher rates of depression in the parent, because they fell helpless in the face of an intransigent, unchangeable 'demon'. Lack of empathy with the child is fueled by assuming they are willfully being bad."

"Lack of parental warmth at all ages makes the child more liable to be aggressive, so does parental hostility and aggression. The studies prove that difficult children are likely to have had parents who try to control them through 'coercive' parenting. Instead of staying calm and using gentle persuasion, the parents try to force their children to obey them."

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### **Emma says**

At times a very difficult book to read - inasmuch as the underlying message is that we as parents are responsible for our childrens' mental health, and that to understand where we might be making errors we need to analyse our own childhoods. Whilst I didn't find myself agreeing with every single point made, it was very much food for thought and certainly made some excellent points on the media's influence on our views on genetics and mental health, as well as broader points about parenting. The evidence given is very clear and James writes incredibly well. It is not intended as a guilt trip for parents, I don't think, although it certainly feels that way at times!

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### **Karen says**

The data is presented in an easygoing way, and the argument against genes for personality is clear and convincing. On the negative side James is very dismissive of the physical attributes which are genetically determined and do have an impact on who you are (physical beauty, athleticism, health conditions) and how others respond to you. Also on the negative side I dislike all the name dropping - they are not just famous people, they are famous people James knows - and the insistence that somehow just talking things over with a therapist such as James (with whom you cannot help yourself falling in love, yuck) will solve all the problems. An interesting read, but the author's ego grates.

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### **Mark Pedlar says**

All educational psychologists should read this, and stop colluding with the psychiatrists.

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**Zaphia says****Pretty Interesting and thought provoking read**

This book make me rethink a lot of ideas previously held on mental illness and also substantiated my own views and our role as parents in our children's lives.

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**Laura Kolli says**

Whilst this was really interesting I'm left wondering where it should sit on the spectrum of non-fiction: social commentary? Opinion? Psychology? The author presents his viewpoint clearly and cites several scholarly sources but includes no primary research. I personally felt that the space devoted to celebrity stories was just included to boost readership with no real evidentiary benefit. That said, the book has encouraged me to rethink my style of parenting and read further around the subject. The tabloid lover in me also enjoyed his take on Tiger Woods etc

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