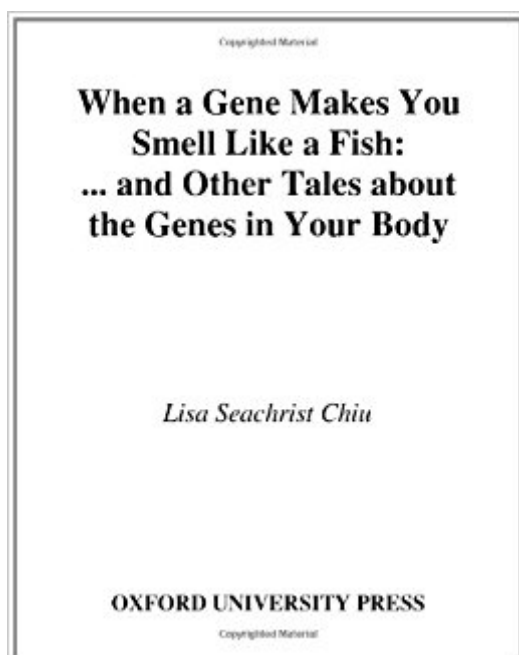


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When A Gene Makes You Smell Like A Fish: ...and Other Amazing Tales About The Genes In Your Body



Synopsis

From the gene that causes people to age prematurely to the "bitter gene" that may spawn broccoli haters, this book explores a few of the more exotic locales on the human genome, highlighting some of the tragic and bizarre ways our bodies go wrong when genes fall prey to mutation and the curious ways in which genes have evolved for our survival. Lisa Seachrist Chiu has a smorgasbord of stories to tell about rare and not so rare genetic quirks. We read about the Dracula Gene, a mutation in zebra fish that causes blood cells to explode on contact with light, and suites of genes that also influence behavior and physical characteristics; the Tangier Island Gene, first discovered after physicians discovered a boy with orange tonsils (scientists now realize that the child's odd condition comes from an inability to process cholesterol); and Wilson's Disease, a gene defect that fails to clear copper from the body, which can trigger schizophrenia and other neurological symptoms, and can be fatal if left untreated. Friendlier mutations include the Myostatin gene, which allows muscles to become much larger than usual and enhances strength and the much-envied Cheeseburger Gene, which allows a lucky few to eat virtually anything they want and remain razor thin. While fascinating us with stories of genetic peculiarities, Chiu also manages to effortlessly explain much of the cutting-edge research in modern genetics, resulting in a book that is both informative and entertaining. It is a must read for everyone who loves popular science or is curious about the human body.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Although Chiu uses a catchy title, cute jokes and soft watercolor illustrations by her mother to disguise this book as popular science, she has produced a rigorous and detailed survey of the most recent developments in human genetics; a "Genetics Primer" is appended, and many readers will no doubt need it. The first chapter, on a woman who smelled so badly of fish she had to take a three-month leave of absence from work, seems at first the usual, chatty fare of much popular science writing. Within a few paragraphs, however, Chiu has launched into a complex discussion of gene mutation and enzymes. Chiu writes best in her detailed accounts of these genetic oddities, but the names Chiu and others have given the genes responsible ("The Cheeseburger Gene," "The Werewolf Gene," "The Calico Cat Gene") often belie their seriousness, a problem echoed in Chiu's personal anecdotes, which seem to serve less as relevant commentary than as deliberate bids for a larger readership. Chiu's greater contribution is in her willingness to trust her audience with explanations of genetics research that are long, dense, complicated and surprisingly accessible. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"This book can be strongly recommended to anyone, of any age, who is looking for an authoritative yet entertaining account of modern genetics. Lisa Seachrist Chiu is also the perfect guide to help readers make greater sense of the onrush of discoveries which they encounter day after day through the media." -- Bernard Dixon, Biologist

"In telling these stories, the author explains how genetic information controls human traits."--Science News

"One of the joys of Chiu's catalog of genetic oddities is that you can flip through it and imagine yourself endowed with abilities conferred by one of these tiny molecules: the ACE gene, which increases endurance, and the Schwarzenegger gene, which boosts muscle mass, would make you into a heck of an athlete, for example. Another joy is that, in reading, you learn that these are not really oddities at all, but changes in common cellular machinery shared by us all.... Chiu tells these tales not as a genetic Ripley's Believe It or Not, but as cleverly drawn illustrations of how the body works, highlighting ways in which our greater understanding of things that at first seem just weird lead to paths to the greater good, including roads that may lead to the better treatment of disease."--Josh Fischman, Senior Writer, US News & World Report

"This is an enjoyable and fascinating tour through modern genetics. Tucked among the interesting anecdotes about the settlement of early America and the madness of King George are easy to follow explanations of single-gene disorders, the recently identified phenomenon of imprinting, and new research into how genes are born and evolve over time. Readers will come away not only with a better understanding of biology but some curious tales

to tell their friends." --Carol Ezzell Webb, Freelance writer and editor" This is a layman's guide to human genetics. It provides a fascinating and thoroughly delightful way to learn about the field all the way from classic Mendelian genetics to epigenetics to transposons and genomics. This is a remarkable collection of stories about the discovery and elucidation of some rare or not so rare genetic disorders." --Victor A. McKusick, University Professor of Medical Genetics at The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, author of *Mendelian Inheritance in Man*, and recipient of the National Medal of Science

I found this book to be fascinating as I am always wondering why things are so. The science can get a bit heavy at times but the overall premises unraveled are very interesting and had me hooked.

This is such a cool book! I offer "bonus books" to my high school students each year; basically a list of science-related books that they can read each quarter to earn bonus points for their class. This has become an instant favorite for its use of shock value to draw kids in ("There's a gene that will make your urine black?? What?!") and then its use of humor to keep them hooked.

A nice, easy book to read with many examples of where the science of genomics is now shedding light on hitherto mysterious diseases. Anyone who is interested in genetics, the human genome or rare diseases will find this an informative study from a capable science writer, and it may point to how medicine will change in the years and decades to come as this increased understanding allows more precise targeting of disease pathways by the next generation of (personalized or precision) medicines.

This book is a good read if you're into understanding genetics and all the weird quirks that make people the way they are. If you have no background in science, there will be parts that go over your head. Even if you do enjoy science, there are sections that do bore but are necessary to its purpose. Overall, it was fun and enlightening. I am a biology major so I am somewhat biased.

The editor is correct. This is a meatier book than the title implies. It does contain much well researched and presented information. I bought this book for my son, the father of my first grand-child. He's been very interested in genetics and how each trait was passed to Adeline. However, when I asked him if the hospital had performed a PKU test, he had no idea. There is an excellent overview on why this common test is a necessary event for every newborn (beginning on page 21). I would

suggest that every prospective parent needs to understand the importance of this test as a positive safeguard for his or her child's early development. Risk is slight, but early knowledge is imperative.

So why didn't I award five stars if it was all of the above? Page after page of jaw-breaking scientific terminology, words with endless numbers of letters, arcane and almost unpronounceable terms, etc. made the task difficult. Any science writer must occasionally use the language of their profession. Cosmology, physics, geology, mathematics - all use technical terms that are difficult for outsiders to comprehend. Biology is at a disadvantage due to its taxonomy and its use of Latin as a universal tongue. Yet Gould proves that one can speak to both the layman and the professional with his essays (layman) and large detailed technical works (professional). How much easier (and enjoyable) this work would have been if the Appendix had become a preface! There are incredible tales here - the story of how genes affect us in all our myriad ways from the way we smell to what we can eat or taste. The heartbreaking stories of those with rare but now identifiable genetic ailments again demonstrate the incredible workings of the human body. The way proteins, DNA, chromosomes and genes interact is nothing short of a miracle. One can almost understand the belief in Intelligent Design until one realizes that the "design" aspect in these cases is not only faulty but also malevolent. Perhaps the most interesting aspect was not the weird afflictions but the workings of the body - how genes work together, turning on and off chemical reactions in an astounding, continuous series of billions of simultaneous reactions. The good thing is that for the first time in history we are at the point of correcting nature's mistakes and ending much misery. Ms Chiu makes a good case for natal scanning of a wide range of diseases and hopefully we will soon have the tools to fix the defective ones we find.

The book starts off promising enough with the case of Sandy who smelled, as the title of the book proclaims, like a fish. The author takes the reader through the biology behind trimethylaminuria (TMAU) also known as the fish-odor syndrome. I had hoped that the rest of the book would be case studies of unusual genetic diseases; instead, the author takes a highly technical approach of biological genetics. As most of you know, I'm majorily fond of medical history especially genetic disease and while I enjoyed the book on the first read, I didn't quite enjoy it as much on the second read, hence my downgrading the rating from 5 to 4 stars. This isn't a book for the casual reader as it is much too technical. But for those who are seriously into genetics and gene consequences, this is definitely the book for you!

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