

Inheritance of Traits



Everyone has traits: characteristics and qualities that make us who we are. We have physical traits, like brown hair, blue eyes, long legs, freckles and funny-looking toes. We also have personality, or character traits. Those include things like being great at telling jokes, compassion, intelligence, warmth, creativity.

Where do traits come from? It's easy to spot certain physical traits that were passed down genetically from parents to offspring. Traits like red hair and knobby knees are inherited. What's more complex, and, many would argue, more interesting, is to find the source of traits that could have formed from individual reactions to a certain environment. Many traits exist in a gray area between these two extremes—inheritance and development.

One example is body type. This might seem like an easy one. People are genetically predisposed to their body type. But once diet becomes a factor, environment begins to play a major role in how the body develops. So body type is one example of a trait that is a combination of inheritance and interaction with an individual's environment.

So many of our most defining traits have been learned, rather than inherited. For instance, if you're really great at video games, it's not because one or both of your parents passed down skills in some video game mastery gene. It's because you practiced, played a lot of video games, and developed those skills yourself. If you have kids who turn out to be great at video

games, it will be because they put in the hours, learned the skills, and memorized the moves necessary to master the video game.

Of course, there are ways our brains can form that are more advantageous to advanced video game playing. Say you were born with an extra-large, extra-powerful section of your brain that commands hand-eye coordination. That's inherited. What you do with it, how you choose to develop that advantage, is up to you.

You can pierce your nose, get a tattoo, dye your hair, shave your head, get your kidneys removed, put on a silly hat—it doesn't matter how much you alter your body during your lifetime. None of those things will translate into genetic material to be passed down to the next generation. Of course, if your children grow up in an environment with role models who are pierced, funny-hatted and covered in tattoos, that is very likely to affect how likely they are to get piercings, tattoos, and funny hats!