

It's All Relative

Adventures Up and Down
the World's Family Tree



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Here are some fun facts from *It's All Relative*:

We are in the midst of a family history craze. According to *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, “genealogy” is the second most searched topic on the Internet. The first, of course, is porn. Americans spend \$3 billion a year on this hobby. (Genealogy is the second most popular hobby after gardening.)

The idea of “family” has changed more in the last 25 years than in the previous five centuries combined. We are living in an era of gay marriage, open adoption, surrogate mothers, polyamorous families, eggs fertilized by three parents, distant DNA cousins, mega-family trees with millions of relatives, people who consider the peers their true family (“the logical, not biological, family”). This has implications for every part of our lives: emotional, legal, identification, financial. It comes with huge potential benefits and enormous challenges.

Thousands of scientists and researchers are currently building a family tree linking every single member of the human race from all seven continents. The biggest of these mega-trees is currently at 260 million people.

In about 10 years, it's likely all 7 billion (or more) people on planet earth will be linked on a single tree.

This could have a massive impact. Maybe it could even help heal our increasingly divided and tribal world. According to a recent Harvard study, Israelis and Palestinians treat each other with more kindness when they are informed of their genetic similarities. Several other studies back up the idea that we treat distant relatives better than random people.

The World Family Tree is the biggest database of humans ever, and is already yielding invaluable information about health that will save countless lives

DNA testing for ancestry is a paradigm shift that comes with great benefits and dangers.

Among the benefits:

- Proof that we are all a mix of races, hopefully increasing tolerance.
- Millions will find long-lost parents, siblings and cousins.
- Crucial medical info about ancestors.

Among the dangers:

- Your most private data being hacked.

- Unpleasant surprises. An estimated 2 percent of all people have a different father than they thought.
- Increasing controversy over what constitutes race and ethnicity.
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There's a movement to abolish the notion of family because it's inherently unfair and tribal.

There's also a movement to make first cousin marriage legal in every state (currently it's only legal in 19). Proponents see this as the sequel to the Gay Marriage Equality fight.

According to a Rutgers anthropologist, 80 percent of all marriages throughout human history were between second cousins or closer.

Mormons are the Golden State Warriors of genealogy. They have billions of family records stored in a vault in a mountain in Utah from every country in the world. Each year, more data is added to this vault than is contained in the entire Library of Congress.

Iceland's population interbred so much, they have an iPhone app that allows potential dates to see if they are cousins. Actual tagline: Bump in the app before you bump in bed.

You are the center of the world. Think of the astounding number of couples that had to successfully mate to produce you: Two parents, four grandparents, eight great grandparents, 16, 32, 64, 128. By the tenth generation, you've got thousands, then millions.

You are an insignificant drop in the ocean. Think of all the thousands of offspring your tenth great grandmother had. If you met her, she'd barely have time to pinch your cheek.

We should all get down on our knees and thank the grandparent of all grandparents: LUCA—the Last Universal Common Ancestor. This one-celled gender-fluid little guy that lived near underwater magma jets is your 1.1 billionth-great-grandparent. It is the ancestor of every living being: you, me, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, giraffes, cockroaches and strep bacteria.

The revolution in family structure requires a new vocabulary. Examples:
Diblings (aka donor siblings): Half-siblings who share a sperm donor father.

Metamour: In polyamorous families, the partner of your partner.

There really was an Adam and Eve. Scientists call them Y-chromosomal Adam and mitochondrial Eve. They lived in Africa about 200,000 years ago, and we all contain a bit of their DNA. Sadly, they probably didn't know each other, but their lines are the ones that survive in you, me and the guy in front of you at Chipotle's.

You think racial purity is real? It's not. Species purity isn't even real. Almost all humans are the result of interbreeding between two or more species, such as the Neanderthals or Denisovans. Yes, your fifteen-thousand-or-so grandparent was likely a Neanderthal.