

Monoamine oxidase (warrior gene) and maori behaviour



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Monoamine Oxidase (Warrior Gene) and Its Relation to Maori Behaviour

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Abstract

This essay tackled primarily on the significant link between Monoamine Oxidase (Warrior Gene) and Maori behaviour. Specifically, this may determine the possible causes of the aggressiveness of the Maori population group as observed by other researchers and scientists as explained on their arguments. The study discussed the census of the population and conviction rate of Maori population with other population group. This study also correlates the specific behaviour of an individual to other factors such as parenting and environmental factors, not solely to the warrior gene.

Irregularities in Monoamine Oxidase's level in the body have negative effects that were also discussed on this paper. Domestic violence during childhood was also explained briefly and its negative effects to behaviour of an adult person. Negative behaviours that developed may be controlled and managed especially here in New Zealand with the help of the legislation.

Introduction

Maori population is 682, 200 out of the total New Zealand population of 4, 433, 000 as of 30 June 2012 according to New Zealand's latest statistics.

Maori make up 15. 4 percent of the total population here in New Zealand.

Despite a few number of Maori people lives in New Zealand, they commit more crimes and are punished in prison than any other population group.

Reasons for this apparent fact have not yet been fully discovered or defended (Statistics New Zealand, 2012).

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8, 618 is the total count of prisoners in New Zealand, 51 percent (4, 391) of which are Maori, 33 percent (2, 835) are Europeans and 12 percent (1, 006) are Pacific people (Statistics New Zealand, 2012). Some studies may blame domestic violence or poverty as the cause of Maoris committing crime.

Others may also blame it way back on their ethnicity and culture. David Rankin, a Ngapuhi elder once said that they have come from a warrior race but because of colonization, they have no more battles to fight and they have too much time on hand so that their inner violent energy is not used up (Dinsdale, 2012). But what is the real cause of this? If nature, culture or ethnic origins are the not the cause of this Maori behaviour, what else?

Just this decade, a new controversial idea was offered that became an issue both on scientific and political commentators. Dr. Rod Lea, a researcher from New Zealand and his contemporaries proposed that Maoris carry a “warrior gene” (Monoamine Oxidase) that makes them more prone to aggressive behaviour that may lead to violence, risky behaviours and criminal acts. He also said that it obviously means that they will be violent or may do risky behaviours but that doesn’t mean that once you are a carrier of this gene, it won’t automatically make you a criminal (Lea, R., & Chambers, G. 2007). There may be some other factors at play that may affect their behaviours such as lifestyle, upbringing-related exposures and others. This specific gene was also associated to high rates of alcoholism, smoking and gambling in the said population group (Once were warriors: gene linked to Maori violence, 2006).

Monoamine oxidase as the warrior gene

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Monoamine oxidase aka the warrior gene was coined by a scientific anthropologist Ann Gibson on an Annual Meeting of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists. (Gibbons, 2004). These enzymes are involved in the breakdown and synthesis of neurotransmitters. Examples of which are serotonin and dopamine which controls emotions and moods. Being part of the breakdown, Monoamine oxidase (MAO) is capable of manipulating and influencing the person's mood, emotion, feelings and behavior. Levels of monoamine oxidase (MAO) in the brain conclude how fast metabolism of these neurotransmitters occurs. Variations in level of MAO's in the brain can affect the individual from panic attacks and anxiety disorders to violence and aggression (Anonymous, 2004).

The Argument

As stated on the introduction Dr. Rod Lea is a researcher from New Zealand. He and his contemporaries proposed that Maoris carry a "warrior gene" (monoamine oxidase) that makes them more prone to aggressive behaviour. The "warrior gene" has been linked to criminal acts and associated with risk taking, plus gambling, drug dependence and aggressiveness. Though this gene has been linked to different aggressive and risk taking behaviours, there is no concrete proof that this is the cause of such behaviours.

Dr. Nicola Poo a research fellow at Christchurch School of Medicine negated Dr. Rod Lea's idea. She said it is unheard or unlikely to link a behavior to its said host. Dr. Nicola also said there is a huge ethical behavior behind every action of Maori people. She also stated that it would be a big leap to conclude and connect that this gene would affect the behavior of an

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individual. She suggested that psychologists and psychiatrists should be involved in this kind of study. Genes are just the basic building blocks of a human being (Stokes, J., 2006).

On the other hand, Dr Sam Hancox, a doctor in Otago University's at Dunedin Multidisciplinary Area, proposed that the connection between genes and human behavior should also take into consideration environmental factors. He said that a single gene can't explain everything. It will always be a mixture of different factors (putting emphasis on environmental influences). I quote Dr. Sam Hancox:

" There is no specific gene for making a great rugby participant, but then if you have the wrong player or participant, no amount of coaching and teaching is going to guarantee he will be an All Black team player. You have to have the perfect set of genes and the perfect set of coaching and teaching." (Stokes, J., 2006).

Another research was conducted in 2002. The Otago-based unit researched the results of changes and variation of the Monoamine Oxidase on maltreated and abused children. This research proved that one of the greatest factors of human behavior is his environment and experience. Researchers found some of the population group that they conducted their research on developed antisocial behaviors with high levels of Monoamine Oxidase, despite being maltreated. However 85 per cent of those who are severely maltreated and abused with low levels of the " warrior gene" also developed antisocial behaviors (Stokes, J., 2006).

Another scientist emerged and contradicted Dr. Lea's research and hypothesis. Dr. Gary Hook's point of view challenges the idea and concept that Maori's are genetically wired to be aggressive, wild and commit acts of violence. Dr. Hook said there was an obvious flaw on Dr. Lea's hypothesis especially in their scientific reasoning. Not only was the science criticized, but the ethics of claiming that genes are to blame in Maoris behavior is also questioned. He agreed that conviction rates for domestic violence of Maoris are more compared to other population groups in New Zealand but there is no indication that this is because of Monoamine Oxidase gene that are present in their bodies. This gene has nothing to do with their behavior. Maori nature was not the reason for high criminality rates, he said. Maybe the cause of such behaviors is due to the fact that Maoris are colonized for 160 years by a "Eurocentric" justice system. (Chapman, K., 2009)

Dr. Rod Lea's argument has been usually weak and unsupported because other factors may affect the behaviour of an individual such as the way they are brought up, social status, economic status and other lifestyle factors. (Stokes, J., 2006).

Behavioural effects of MAO irregularities

Accepting the argument that the "warrior gene" is related to Maori's behaviour and traits is weak. There is no proof of exact evidence that this gene underlies a behavioural variation in man. Was the hypothesis made by the scientists and researches are way too impossible? Or was it a reasonable explanation for violent behaviours?

MAOs are extremely vital for proper functioning of the brain as they inactivate or activate neurotransmitters. When this genes are in great quantity, there will also be great inactivation of these neurotransmitters. Depression, criminal deeds, phobias, dependence, addiction and other Neurological disorders can occur. (Batts, S., 2006).

Abnormal Monoaminase Oxidase levels may manifest negative behaviors such as the following but not limited to Anxiety, personality disorders, antisocial behaviors, violence and risk taking, aggressive behavior, impulsive aggression, mental disorders, obesity, impulsivity, depression and suicidality impaired impulse control, mental retardation (such as autism, seizures, sleep disturbances) and panic disorders (Raumati Hook G. 2009). This might be the reason why scientists are associating this gene to Maori Behaviors. It seems like these scientists are placing the Maori culture under the category of mental health that being a Maori is a disease. They should also put into consideration that behavioural abnormalities cannot and should not only be isolated as to genetics. Environmental conditions should also be in the picture.

The warrior gene versus Childhood experiences versus Maori self determination

Concluding or proposing that the gene is to blame on Maori behaviour is the same as categorizing Maori behaviour as psychopath, with borderline psychosis or with psychological problem. Yes there are a huge number of diseases and ailments that may be associated with Monoamine Oxidase deficiency, but for the majority of people it functions quite well and

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consistently. Though conviction counts for domestic violence of this population group exceed those of other group, there is still no definite indication that the genes carried by Maoris functions differently from other ethnic groups and certainly has no evidence that it has something to do with having an aggressive or negative behaviour. (Stokes, 2006)

Unpleasant childhood experiences negatively influence adulthood and how a man sees life, as seen on a recent study. The study was conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). According to the study, one out of four young adults was relentlessly maltreated during their childhood days and approximately half of adults in England have suffered an unpleasant childhood experience. Approximately one out of ten adults has experienced four or more undesirable experience during their childhood. There are different kinds and forms of childhood adversity; it may range from physical abuse to emotional neglect and stress. Examples of these forms of experiences are sexual abuse, emotional abuse, emotional neglect, physical abuse, physical neglect, substance abuse in home, mental illness in home, incarceration of family member, parenteral separation or divorce and witnessing against mother (McDonald, K. 2014).

Tino Rangatiratanga or Principle of Self-determination is the sovereignty, independence, self-control and self-determination of the Maori people. The idea of Tino Rangatiratanga reinforces and allowing Māori to take control of their own culture, fate, destiny and fortune (Smith, G., 1990). This may also be a factor in Maori behavior wherein they believe that they are the man for themselves. They control what they can. And Maori parents may or may not carry this behavior during their parenting that may affect the upbringing

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of their child. This may lead to negative behaviors as supported by the previous arguments.

Despite of all the criticisms to Maori population group, they still have good traits in their hearts and culture. Manaakitanga is defined as being hospitable. They take a great pride in entertaining and hosting visitors to their land. Manuhiri on the other hand means the highest honour and respect are given by these people to visitors. Kaitiakitanga means guardianship (New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, n. d.). In relation to our study, Maori people are stewards and guardians of their own land. They are keeping it sacred and healthy for their “ children” and “ grandchildren” to inherit.

Conclusion

As a conclusion of this paper, Genes are not to blame on how people would behave in a society. Genes may be a factor, but it is still not concrete enough to prove everything. Environmental factors should also be taken into consideration especially on Maori’s parenting preference. Parenting has always been an issue not only in Maori’s population group but in every culture on how children would grow up. As I have learned on Values Education during my grade school days, a child’s mind is a clean paper wherein parents are the authors of what the content would be. I also believe that unpleasant childhood experiences will negatively influence adulthood that may lead to aggressiveness and negative behaviours.

Every culture and population group have their own positive and negative characteristics that other culture may notice. Being aggressive and observed as being violent does not and should not only pertain to Maori’s <https://assignbuster.com/monoamine-oxidase-warrior-gene-and-maori-behaviour/>

population group. Putting the spotlight on this population group regarding aggressiveness is quite biased, to think that other population groups are way more aggressive to the point that they are killing and mutilating body parts of their own people.

So for me, choice is the biggest factor of what you would become; a choice of who you want to be and what you want to be, combined with environmental and other factors. And if ever negative behaviour arises, it can be managed with the help of good support systems such as our family, friends, government or private institutions and others.

Management of Domestic Violence

As we discuss this research, domestic violence became a highlight. New Zealand has a law regarding rehabilitation and management of this matter. Domestic violence can never be prevented because it is a choice, but we can manage the outcome it has done with the person involved. Managing the outcome may prevent negative effects that domestic violence has done to an individual.

The Domestic Violence Act of 1995 provides rehabilitation programme for those who are victims of domestic violence with protection orders. The Court contracts with other approved organizations and specialized individuals to offer programmes and rehabilitation. These said programmes contribute to the law's principal goal of providing better protection for the victims of domestic violence. When the court decides that there should be a Protection Order, the person involved may request a programme that may provide information, support (whether psychological, emotional, physical etc.) and <https://assignbuster.com/monoamine-oxidase-warrior-gene-and-maori-behaviour/>

education that is related to domestic violence. This request can be made until the third year of the release of the Protection order. (Cram, F., Pihama, L., Jenkins, K., Karehana, M., 2002).

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