

Study links gene variation to a darker view of life

October 15, 2013

The Washington Post:

Some people just see the world more darkly than others.

A group of scientists says that what people observe in everyday life may depend on their genetic blueprint. A particular gene, known to play a part in emotional memories, could also influence where people tend to focus their eyes and attention.

“People think there’s a world, and our brain just tells us about it,” said study author and Cornell University psychologist Adam Anderson. “What our brain tells us is filtered, and emotions really have a powerful influence on how we see the world.”

Subjects who had a specific form of a gene in which certain amino acids are missing, found in about half of Caucasians, had a heightened awareness of negative stimuli. For instance, these people might look down a busy city street and catch the shady character hanging out by the ATM rather than the jubilant children playing in the park. Or during a nature hike, they would focus on the slippery rocks instead of the breathtaking scenery.

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Individuals with the missing amino acids in the ADRA2B gene have more norepinephrine in their brains, and as a result, “experience the flash of the flashbulb memory more intensely,” said lead author and University of British Columbia psychologist Rebecca M. Todd.

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