Gene Edited CRISPR Twins May Have Higher IQ and Silicon Valley Wants to Exploit the Technology

Chinese scientist, He Jiankui, led a controversial experiment, ‘editing’ the genes of embryos from seven couples using the CRISPR tool that swaps or removes a gene at a precise spot. He removed the CCR5 gene in an effort to immunize against HIV. New research shows that twins Lulu and Nana may have improved memory and enhanced cognition. People who naturally lack CCR5 recover more quickly from strokes and people missing at least one copy of the gene seem to go further in school, suggesting a possible role in everyday intelligence. Critics worry that CRISPR technology could one day be used to create super-intelligent humans, perhaps as part of a biotechnology race between the US and China. Silicon Valley has a keen interest in designer babies with higher intelligence.

A pair of Chinese twins who were gene-edited for resistance to HIV may also have ‘supercharged’ brains, along with possible resistance to age-related cognitive diseases such as Alzheimer’s.

In a controversial experiment led by Chinese scientist He

Jiankui,
the embroys of seven couples had their genes “edited” using a tool known
as CRISPR. By removing a gene called CCR5, He sought to create a
natural immunity to HIV – which requires CCR5 to enter blood cells.

Based on new research, however, twins Lulu and Nana may have also been left with improved memory and enhanced cognition, according to *MIT Technology Review*. They may also enjoy some degree of protection from Alzheimer’s Disease and other maladies which are rapidly being linked to chronic inflammation,
as some groups of mice without CCR5 – or who have been given CCR5
inhibitors, experience less severe dementia or Alzheimer’s symptoms.

“The answer is
likely yes, it did affect their brains,” says UCLA neurobiologist Alcino
J. Silva, whose lap discovered a link between CCR5 and the brain’s
ability to form new connections.

“The simplest interpretation is that those mutations will probably
have an impact on cognitive function in the twins,” says Silva, adding
that the exact effect on the girls’ cognition cannot be predicted, which is “why it should not be done.”

Jiankui’s human experiments drew harsh rebuke after news of Lulu and
Nana’s birth in late October or early November, and has reportedly been
fired from his position at the Southern University of Science and
Technology (SUSTech) in Shenzhen, China. Jiankui says there are more
gene-edited babies on the way.

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