What can researchers learn from GM monkey with autism-like symptoms?

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.

It's no carbon copy. Macaque monkeys in Shanghai have been genetically engineered to display autism-like behaviour. Compared with other macaques, they spend less time interacting with other monkeys and are more anxious when people come into their cages.

These monkeys have extra copies of a gene called *MECP2*, which has been linked to autism. It produces the MECP2 protein, which is essential in nervous systems, but people who have extra copies of this gene are sometimes diagnosed as autistic and also have severe intellectual disabilities.

By replicating this extra dose of MECP2 in macaques, researchers at the Chinese Academy of Sciences's Institute of Neuroscience in Shanghai say they have created monkeys that will help us learn about this poorly understood condition. But other researchers are divided on whether such a diverse condition that is tied to human behaviour can be meaningfully reproduced in monkeys.

Social communication problems are the hallmark of autism, says David Skuse at University College London. "The question is: if you create an animal model based on a human genetic anomaly, what does that tell you about autism in general? I don't think it necessarily tells you anything about autism."

Read full, original post: Will creating monkeys with autism-like symptoms be any use?