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The role of behavioral inhibition and excitation systems in risky sexual behavior

Abstract:

Two core systems provide a basis for human behavior. Fundamentally, human actions are based on seeking positive rewards (activation) or avoiding punishment (inhibition). In order to better understand what leads individuals to engage in or avoid risky sexual behavior, my research evaluated the relationship between general sensitivity to reward and punishment, and risky sexual choices. My hypothesis is that individuals with lower sensitivity to punishment, or lower inhibition, would be more likely to participate in more risky sexual behavior than those with greater sensitivity to punishment.

Over 500 sexually experienced young adults were recruited to complete a series of online surveys to examine the relationships between personality characteristics, motivation for sexual behavior, sexual history, sexual behavior, and other relevant covariates. The Behavioral Inhibition Systems/Behavioral Activation Systems Scale (BIS/BAS) was used to measure participants' sensitivities to activation (reward-seeking) or inhibition (punishment-avoiding) behaviors. The Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI) was used to measure sexual permissiveness. Understanding the relationship between differences in individual behavior motivation and choices during risky sexual situations could potentially contribute to the development of a system to more effectively prevent risky sex and its consequences, such as HIV/STI's, unwanted pregnancy, and sexual abuse.

Statistical analyses will be completed to examine relationships between BIS/BAS scores of inhibition and activation sensitivity levels and the SOI evaluating sexual behavior and choices. Associations with relevant covariates will also be examined with statistical analyses.