

Functional Impulsivity as a psychometric manifestation of the Behaviour Activation System: a contribution to the solution of the 'impulsivity problem'.

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The Reinforcement Sensitivity Theory (RST) view of personality has for many years related impulsivity to the Behaviour Activation System (BAS), a neurobiological network mediating appetitively motivated approach of reward. The wider literature however suggests that there are many varied manifestations of impulsivity, and it is not clear how these traits are to be reconciled with - or distinguished from - RST. Dickman (1990) has suggested that there are two principle forms of impulsivity; 1) dysfunctional impulsivity, which captures the traditionally negative view of this trait as failing to 'look before you leap', which seems unrelated to the RST view; and 2) functional impulsivity, which reflects the potential benefits of acting quickly, and which we argue is theoretically consistent with proposed manifestations of the BAS. In our first study, we investigate the relationship that Dickman's impulsivity scales have with measures of both RST and personality in general. We concluded that functional impulsivity may provide a useful psychometric measure of BAS, whereas dysfunctional impulsivity seems unrelated to RST. In our second study we use a go/no-go paradigm to confirm our conclusions empirically. Results indicated that functional impulsivity, along with two purpose-built BAS measures from the literature, was a significant predictor of increased responding to reward. In comparison, dysfunctional impulsivity predicted increased responding irrespective of whether responses were rewarded or punished. We discuss the significance of our findings to RST specifically, and personality research overall, concluding that this research compliments but theoretically refines Dickman's (1990) dichotomization of impulsivity.